

EXPRESSION AND INTERPRETATION IN LANGUAGE



Susan Petrilli

with a foreword by Vincent Colapietro

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This book is dedicated to my nieces and nephews Renée, Aaron, Nicole, Andrea, Carly, Michael and Daniel, Louise and Luke, and to my children, Kalif Louis and Assetou Madeleine—each in different ways a real miracle of life. Together they stage what a global world might really be, an open space of love and interconnectivity.

It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, or trade journals. [. . .] We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against.

—Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*

It is of no particular interest that one man is quite happy to lie in behalf of a cause which he knows to be unjust; but it is significant that such events provoke so little response in the intellectual community.

—Noam Chomsky

Forgiveness liberates the soul. It removes fear. That is why it is such a powerful weapon.

—Nelson Mandela

Love is not at all a “private” phenomenon, a simple story between two “hearts” that love each other, but rather it embodies a “principle of cohesion” precious to the collectivity.

—Aleksandra Mikhaylovna Kollontaj

Contents

Foreword	
<i>by Vincent Colapietro</i>	xi
Preface	xv
Acknowledgments	xix
1. Communication, Intercorporeity, and Responsibility: For a New Approach to Humanism	1
1.1. Global Communication, Global Semiotics, and Globalization	1
1.2. Dialogism, Intercorporeity, and Modeling	7
1.3. The Semiotic Animal, Semioethics, and Responsibility	10
1.4. Global Semiotics, Cognitive Semiotics, and Semioethics	15
2. Toward a Critique of Identity: On Signs, Bodies, and Values	17
2.1. Dialogism and Otherness: The Critical Task of Semioethics	17
2.2. Global Communication and Its Risks	19
2.3. Is There a Way Out?	23
2.4. Signs of Difference: From Identity to Unindifferent Difference	26
2.5. Migration, Unemployment, and Globalization	29
2.6. The Extracommunitarian Other	33
2.7. Transcultural Communication, Ideology, and Social Planning	36
3. From Reason to Reasonableness: A Semioethic Approach to Subjectivity	43
3.1. Listening, Hospitality, Restitution	43
3.2. Redefining the Subject	47
3.3. Otherness and Intercorporeity	51

3.4.	Mother-Sense: An A Priori for Subjectivity, Signification, and Critique	52
3.5.	Semioethics and Humanism of the Other, a Way Out	55
3.6.	From Reason to Reasonableness	60
3.7.	Sense and Expression	66
3.8.	The Open Society of Open Selves	68
4.	Communication, Language, and Speech from a Global Perspective	71
4.1.	Moving Toward Global Semiotics	71
4.2.	Remembering . . .	76
4.3.	Nothing that Is a Sign Is Alien to Me	78
4.4.	On Biosemiotics and Its Recent History	85
4.5.	Signs and Life: The Gaia Hypothesis	92
4.6.	Signs and Nonsigns	100
4.7.	Icon, Index, and Symbol	105
4.8.	Communication and Speech	113
4.9.	Communication among Others	115
4.10.	Homologies and Analogies in Zoosemiosis	116
4.11.	Totality and Otherness	118
4.12.	Otherness and Nomination	120
4.13.	Semiosis with Language and Semiosis without Language	121
5.	Otherness, Dialogism, and Interpretation	127
5.1.	On Sign and Communication Models	127
5.2.	The Dialogic Nature of Signs and Understanding	131
5.3.	Subjectivity and Interpretation	135
5.4.	More Contributions to Symbolicity, Indexicality, and Iconicity	137
5.5.	Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness	140
5.6.	Signs, Inference, and Evolutionary Forces in the Universe	144
5.7.	Signs to Talk about Signs	146
5.8.	Speech, Language, and Modeling	150
5.9.	Semiotic Materiality, Sign Typologies, and Inference	152
6.	Linguistic Production, Ideology, and Otherness: Contributions from Philosophy of Language	157
6.1.	Philosophy of Language: Scope, Method, and Itineraries	157
6.2.	Linguistic Production, Ideology, and Creativity	161

6.3.	“The End of Ideology!”	165
6.4.	From Decodification to Interpretation	167
6.5.	For a Dialogic Approach to Sign and Subjectivity	170
6.6.	Philosophizing about Language from the Viewpoint of Literature	173
6.7.	Binarism, Triadism, and Dialogism	178
6.8.	To Lie, To Deceive, and To Simulate	179
6.9.	Ideology, Logic, and Dialogue	183
7.	Meaning, Metaphor, Interpretation: Modeling New Worlds	191
7.1.	Otherness and Metaphor	191
7.2.	Metaphor, Modeling, and Linguistic Creativity	196
7.3.	Meaning and Truth	202
7.4.	“Man Is a Word”	205
7.5.	Imagery, Meaning, and Interpretation	212
7.6.	For a Critique of Similarity	217
7.7.	Metaphor, Iconicity, and Semioethics	224
8.	Translation, Interpretation, and Communication	231
8.1.	Signs in Translation	231
8.2.	Translator Discourse and Discourse of the Other	235
8.3.	The Question of Translatability as the Question of Expressibility	243
8.4.	Translatability and the Semiotic Order of Meaning	247
8.5.	Translating between Repeatability and Uniqueness	250
8.6.	Communication and its Conditions of Possibility: To Speak Is to Respond	252
	Bibliography	259
	Index	287

Foreword

This book brings together some of the most important writings of Susan Petrilli on signs, language, communication, and much else. Since the selection is so representative of her thought, we have that thought available here in its full scope and remarkable depth. An Anglophone audience is not likely to be familiar with some of the figures on whom she draws (e.g., Giovanni Vailati, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Adam Schaff, or Augusto Ponzio), but is almost certainly conversant with the main themes on which she focuses (otherness, interpretation, identity, ecological crisis, and ethical responsibility for nothing less than the entire biosphere). This familiarity might mislead readers into supposing that this terrain has already been traversed by other theorists. In a sense, this terrain has been tread by others, but not along these newly forged paths. For Petrilli takes up these intensely debated topics from a novel perspective, exhibiting in her treatment of them what she extols—creativity and imagination.

A number of questions are considered in relationship to each other, a number of thinkers are put into conversation with one another, and various positions are juxtaposed in variable ways. Yet, there is no facile eclecticism here; rather there is a careful integration of seemingly divergent thinkers and truly heterogeneous perspectives. In abandoning hope of ever attaining a final synthesis or an unqualifiedly comprehensive outlook, there is here a drive for maximal coherence and detailed integration. It is as though the theory of identity being advocated in these pages—a theory presented as an alternative to “oppositional, conflictual identity”—provides us with an aid to appreciating the identity of the theorizing undertaken by Petrilli in her confrontation with an array of topics. Her theory differentiates itself from other offerings and, at the same time, is envisioned as a process (an interminable process) of self-differentiation. Whether the referent is a self or a theory, the being in question is inevitably in the process of becoming other than it has been. In affirming the sign’s vocation as otherness, Petrilli is asserting that the

function of signs is to inaugurate, sustain, intensify, and multiply just this form of process.

There is nothing esoteric or recondite about the topics with which this author is preoccupied. They are among the most immediately recognizable. Indeed, questions revolving around the topics of meaning, interpretation, and understanding—especially ones bearing on the possibility of, and obstacles to, mutual understanding—are at the intersection of the dominant intellectual traditions today. They are also at the center of Petrilli's concern. What we encounter in these pages is nothing less than a far-reaching, deep-cutting theory of meaning and interpretation, moreover, a theory in which the thorniest theoretical questions are squarely confronted and the most important human stakes are decisively underscored. Intimately related to this, her critique of the dominant model of human communication (that wherein communication is explained in terms of complementary processes of encoding and decoding) is devastating and liberating. Anyone who attends carefully to her argument against this model cannot help but feel the critical force and emancipatory power of the argument.

Petrilli's contribution is at once historical and theoretical. It is historical (at least) in its recovery of unduly neglected figures such as Victoria Welby and (to some extent) Charles S. Peirce, while it is theoretical in its articulation of a truly comprehensive framework. Her contribution also combines analytic precision and moral passion, theoretical imagination and political commitment. She offers painstaking analyses of theoretically difficult matters, but forthrightly addresses practically urgent issues. She imagines previously unexplored theoretical possibilities, while defending a definite political orientation. Her expansive sense of theoretical possibilities is matched by her unblinking attention to historical actualities.

The issue of coexistence with others, in the context of limited resources and rapacious practices, human finitude, and infinite yearning, the fate of being bound up with processes ineluctably driving toward otherness and the human (all too human) disposition to remain stuck in ineffectuality—to repeat, the issue of coexistence in such a context—is the one with which Susan Petrilli is principally preoccupied. But this issue is, in truth, a cluster of questions or, at least, the only responsible way of addressing this issue entails confronting a host of other questions (one's bearing on our capacity to model the world no less than our ability to imagine alternatives, our habitual modes of mutual misunderstanding

no less than our willingness not only to address others but also to be translated by them in their radical, irreducible otherness—to be translated in unfamiliar and thus disorienting ways).

Based simply on the table of contents, those who are familiar with, and indeed sympathetic to, such advocates of difference as Jacques Derrida and Emmanuel Levinas are perhaps likely—though quite mistakenly—to take this book to be a rehearsal of what these advocates have already achieved. Those who tend to be hostile to such a discourse, often on the basis of hearsay more than engagement, are almost certainly—but, again, erroneously—going to miss the originality of the position being defended in these pages. But if the reader can suspend such prejudices and allow Petrilli's words their own distinctive meaning and force, what that person will encounter is difference with a difference, an approach to otherness truly other than anything with which the reader is familiar. In other words, here is an original philosophical voice, also an arresting and important one. While Susan Petrilli is manifestly attuned to contemporary currents of intellectual debate and the dominant emphases of central figures in these ongoing controversies—while she is moreover self-consciously carrying forward the work of Charles Peirce, Victoria Welby, Mikhail Bakhtin, Charles Morris, Thomas Sebeok, and others—she is doing so in her own way. She is, in the same breath, addressing urgent practical questions and thorny theoretical ones. She does so not only in her own way but also in a nuanced, probing, insightful, and illuminating manner.

The fate of signs is one with their function: they carry us where we have never been before. Their vocation is ineluctably the transformation of how we understand ourselves and our world. When this transformation is facilitated for the sake of inhabiting that world more responsibly and engaging with others less violently than we have historically done, the moral and political stakes could not be clearer—or higher. While these stakes include a growing array of ecological crises and the increasingly violent confrontations of different cultures, they also encompass the subtle forms of violence structuring the most intimate spheres of our lives.

—Vincent Colapietro

Preface

The sign is made of difference, deferral, *renvoi*. This has been demonstrated unequivocally by the great master of signs, Charles Sanders Peirce. For there to be a sign, there must be another sign that interprets it, expresses and develops its meaning. In the last analysis, the sign's difference is its otherness. But the sign's difference, its otherness, is also its identity.

However, once the sign is at the service of the dominant order, it mostly closes in on itself and persists in asserting itself in terms of the logic of closed identity, to the very point of obsession. In this case, signs of identity exclude difference and otherness: even worse, in the name of identity, they may even repress difference and otherness.

But otherness is an irrevocable vocation of the sign. The logic of otherness is no less than structural to the sign. Otherness cannot be repressed by any form of power, dominion, or coercion; it simply cannot be evaded.

Nevertheless the truth is that the general tendency is to conceive identity in oppositional terms with respect to otherness: I versus the other, we versus others. Identity thus described, that is to say, identity opposed to otherness, identity that eliminates otherness, is conflictual identity. It arises with a vision of the world that is oppositional, even destructive: in particular, reference can be made here to the logic of identity as it finds expression in terms of sex, social group, community, ethnic group, nation, race, class, status, culture, and religion.

Oppositional, conflictual identity does not have a future: in other words, the material of humanity framed in oppositional logic does not have a future; even more extensively, set in such logic, life generally on the planet Earth does not have a future. The future is in the logic of otherness. Consequently, we must necessarily evidence the real nature of the sign—the sign material of life in its different manifestations, human and nonhuman—that is, its otherness: the sign's irrevocable vocation for opening to the other sign, to the other (the “absolute other” and not just the “relative other”), the sign's vocation for extraneity, difference, for

that which cannot be aggregated, assembled, or homologated. But all this contradicts dominant tendencies in human verbal and nonverbal cultural communication as it presents itself today in the global communication network worldwide.

Life, human and nonhuman, is in signs, or, better, in the relation among signs, in sign processes; thought, consciousness, and language, signifying processes and communication, are in signs. Different models and trends in the sign sciences analyze signs from different angles, from varying perspectives, according to diverse orientations: some approaches are adequate, others less so—indeed, may even be oversimplifying and tend toward mystification.

Signs can be described as grounded in the logic of closed identity, that is, egocentric identity. This approach is reductive, fallacious, and yet has tended to dominate in the sign sciences. Instead, another approach is to consider signs as grounded in the logic of otherness, absolute otherness. This perspective is developed by a series of extraordinary nineteenth–twentieth-century international researchers who have focused their attention on different aspects of language, expression, and understanding: Charles S. Peirce, Victoria Welby, Charles Morris, Mikhail Bakhtin, Emmanuel Levinas, Thomas A. Sebeok, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, and Augusto Ponzio. Each of these scholars is present in this volume and has somehow contributed to shaping the problems thematized, method of analysis, and theoretical orientation.

To continue research along the same lines does not only mean to contribute to a broader vision of the sign sciences with respect to dominant trends. Beyond the future of the sign sciences, the issue at stake is the future of humanity, of life; how to work in the present for a possible future, indeed for future possibility. No other phenomenon more than the sign, no other discipline more than semiotics understood as the general science of signs can show in such manifest terms, so glaringly, that the destiny of each one of us is inextricably connected to the destiny of each and every other, where reference is to all living beings on the planet Earth, and not just to the human.

Subjectivity and human behavior (which is sign behavior) grounded in the logic of closed identity generate egocentricity and shortsightedness. In the present day and age, the age of globalization in its postcapitalist phase, identity logic converges with dominant ideology. This means to say that identity logic regulates social planning, culture, and communication with effects on human society at large as much as on the environment which to say the very least are catastrophic.

In the face of impending disaster in the world—conflict in its various forms, to the point of sponsoring and participating in devastating wars worldwide, exploitation in all its ugly faces, environmental pollution, etc.—the only way out, the only possibility for the happy continuation of sign activity on earth, for the proliferation of life, human and nonhuman, the only possibility for communication and sign activity to flourish in their diversity and joyous relativity, to say it with Mikhail M. Bakhtin, is for the signs of human behavior to open to the logic of otherness, unconditionally.

Given the determining effects and consequences of human behavior for life generally, the logic of otherness (as so clearly demonstrated by such twentieth-century philosophers as Emmanuel Levinas, Charles Morris, and the same Bakhtin), presents a possibility—the only one?—for humanity, that is, for the health of humanity and of sign processes at large, human and nonhuman. This means to say that the logic of otherness (in effect structural to signs) signifies a way out from the destructive effects of the self-centered logic of closed identity.

To follow the logic of otherness means to establish relationships transculturally, translanguistically, dialogically, that is, across boundaries, national and cultural, instead of basing them on closed identity. To establish relationships oriented by the logic of otherness means to ground these relations in such values as listening to the other, hospitality, the welcome, dialogism, care for the other, desire of the other.

“Semioethics” is an expression which I have introduced with Augusto Ponzio to name a method and approach to signs, necessary now more than ever before in the current socioeconomic context of globalization. Semioethics is not intended as a discipline in its own right, but as a global perspective, an orientation, an approach to the study of signs. It involves the propensity to recover the ancient vocation of semiotics understood as “*semeiotics*” (or *sympptomatology*) in the medical sense with its concern for life. As averred by Thomas A. Sebeok, *semiosis* and *life* converge. But negative interference in communication between the historical-social and biological spheres, the cultural and natural spheres, the *semiosphere* and the *biosphere* is increasing on a planetary scale, so that awareness of the condition of global interconnectedness and its implications for the great multiplicity of different life forms, human and nonhuman, is ever more urgent.

If the future of humanity and of life generally is a concern, the human capacity for critique, social awareness, and responsible behavior are central issues for approaches to sign and language studies ready to

interrogate not only the sense of science, but far more radically, the sense of life. As emerges from its focus on the relation between signs, values, and behavior, semioethics works toward a new form of humanism, “humanism of the other,” given that the question of humanism simply cannot be separated from the logic of otherness.

Semioethics implies the exquisitely human capacity for critique and otherness. Its special vocation is to evidence sign networks and interconnections by contrast to the dominant perception of separations and boundaries with their relative alibis. This means to appreciate existing interconnections, relations of reciprocal implication and involvement, to recognize the common condition of interdependency which, in fact, cannot be evaded or repressed. The sign sciences today must look beyond closed identities, closed totalities, egocentric and egotistic alibis, and cultivate the capacity for detotalization and otherness, which means to say for unconditional opening toward the other.

Consequently, far from fostering a neutral, purely descriptive approach to signs and signifying processes, the sign sciences today are called to commit to critical thinking, conscious awareness, creativity, responsibility—the vocation for otherness, which is structural to the sign and not just a question of present contingency, demands nothing less.

The concept of “otherness” is not a vague and abstract category, the expression of some alien philosophical fantasy, but rather designates a concrete value and condition for the development of human consciousness, behavior, and communication, verbal and nonverbal, a prelogical category and a priori for human modeling devices. Relations are generated in the logic of otherness whether among the parts forming the sign, the different selves forming subjectivity, different identities in communication, different spheres of semiosis—animal, vegetable, or mycotic. The logic of otherness is best described as a dia-logic, that is, logic that foresees dialogism and intercorporeity. Otherness foresees relations regulated by dialogue, listening, and hospitality among bodies that are other with respect to each other, specific in their singularity and unique, but not separate from each other. With special reference to human cultural practices, the dia-logic of otherness operates in interpersonal relations, in the concrete expression of all forms of language, communication, and understanding, in the very structure and articulation of signifying, expressive, and interpretive practices, as in the case of translation and metaphor: to render the other and to render through the other.

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I am grateful to Augusto Ponzio for his initial input in the preparation of this book and suggestions for its organization and development. Our work is so intertwined and has been over the years that his influence and schooling is no less than structural to my own thinking. Irving L. Horowitz, Editorial director, has also played a substantial part in the shaping of this book which, I'm sure, is now considerably improved as the result of several reworkings following his comments and observations. Thanks also to those who answered my queries relating in particular to biosemiotics and its history. Their responses have all been included. Maureen Feldman will always be someone special for me. Our meeting in New York in October 2008 was occasioned by a major Transaction author, Thomas Szasz, whose book on Virginia Woolf's madness I was translating at the time for publication in Italian. But another very important result of that meeting was my own Transaction book, *Sign Crossroads in Global Perspective. Semioethics and Responsibility*, which presents my work in English as researcher and author, and precedes the book we are now presenting. I shall always be grateful to Maureen for leading me to new paths and publication opportunities, and even more for her ongoing friendship. Vincent Colapietro, with whom I share a common history of estrangement and rediscovery connecting us to our respective forefathers, generously accepted to write the Foreword to this book, I thank him too. I am also grateful to Jennifer Nippins for her precious editorial care. This book has benefited from the participation of all these people and many more. I thank them all.

1

Communication, Intercorporeity, and Responsibility: For a New Approach to Humanism

. . . with the emergence of mass society, the realm of the social has finally, after several centuries of development, reached the point where it embraces and controls all members of a given community equally and with equal strength. But society equalizes under all circumstances, and the victory of equality in the modern world is only the political and legal recognition of the fact that society has conquered the public realm, and that distinction and difference have become private matters of the individual.

—Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958: 41

1.1 Global Communication, Global Semiotics, and Globalization

The capitalist system today in its current phase of development can be characterized in terms of “global communication” and “world communication.” These expressions refer both to the *extension* of communication over the entire planet and to the fact that nowadays more than ever before communication corresponds perfectly to the *real world*, that is, to the *world as it is*. In other words, communication today *realistically accommodates* the *world as it is*. Communication relates to the *world*, contributes to reproducing *this* world, and favors persistence of *this world*, of *being* in this world. The present-day capitalist system may also be characterized in terms of “globalization” with reference to the fact that communication pervades all life-forms over the planet. With

specific reference to human sign activity, communication pervades *the entire production cycle*. This means to say that global communication interferes substantially not only with human life, but with all life-forms on Earth.

In globalization, communication is “communication-production.” In other words, in this advanced phase of development in the capitalist social reproduction system, communication cannot be separated from production. Communication-production is the communication of the world as it is today. It is *global* communication, not only in the sense that it has expanded over the whole planet, but also in the sense that it accommodates the world as it is, responds to the world as it is. Global communication is communication of *this* world, which means to say that communication and reality, communication and being converge; communication is communication of reality as it is, of being as it is. From a global perspective communication is structural to the entire social reproduction cycle—it is involved not only in the exchange phase, at the level of the market (as in the past), but also in the production and consumption phases (we produce and consume communication, not only exchange it). In other words, not only does the exchange phase depend on communication, but so do the production and consumption phases (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 517–523). Moreover, communication channels cross over space and time—think of oil pipelines, the telematic network, and electronic devices. In the present day and age, communication in all forms is ever more extensive and global and, consequently, ever more in a position to favor exploitation of low-cost labor at a worldwide level. For all these reasons, such expressions as “global communication,” “world communication,” and “globalization” appropriately describe late capitalist or “postcapitalist” society in its current phase of development.

That globalization converges with communication-production, that communication is production and consumption also means that the old production system persists with its characteristic mode of exploitation through paid “free labor.” Profits continue to increase for a privileged minority at the expense of an ever-growing pauperized majority: profit at all costs, even at the cost of producing underdevelopment beyond the margins of survival, of resorting to war as a solution to international conflict, and of destroying the environment.

Globalization of communication-production does not only concern extension of the means and channels of communication and expansion of the market at a planetary level. It also involves the incorporation of all

aspects of human life in the global communication-production system: whether in the form of development, well-being, and consumerism, or of underdevelopment, poverty, and impossibility of survival; health or disease; normality or deviance; integration or emargination; employment or unemployment; whether in the form of migration functional to the labor force, typical of controlled emigration/immigration fluxes, or in the form of uncontrolled migration fluxes of the masses with their desperate request for hospitality—most often denied; globalized communication-production also foresees such phenomenon as the traffic of illegal merchandise, whether “nonconventional” weapons, drugs, human organs, or enslaved humanity (indifferently adults and children) destined to exploitation in the different “slave trades” across the world. The fact is that all of life over the entire planet is englobed in the communication-production system, and put at risk.

Reflection from the perspective of semiotics is lacking on the fundamental conditions of feeling and sensibility in today’s world, that is, in global communication society. Here reference is to semiotics understood in terms of “transcendental aesthetics” (transcendental in the sense that it concerns the a priori, the foundations) of the self, of the body in global communication. What is still lacking is a critique of global communication conducted on its own grounds, from a perspective that is just as global as communication itself in today’s world; in other words, what is lacking is critical reflection capable of not limiting itself to consideration of partial and sectorial manifestations of global communication, but of proceeding beyond analyses based on internal perspectives that are functional to the global communication-production system, that are part of that system and do not question it. Such shortsighted analyses remain empirically connected to psychological subjects, subjects reduced to the parameters of the social sciences and measured in terms of statistics. Instead, what is needed is a vision of global communication that is just as global as the phenomenon under analysis, therefore in a position to grasp its logic and proceed to an adequate critique.

Global communication today has modified our perception of space, distance, and time; not only, it has modified our perception of interpersonal relations, of subjectivity and of the affections. This means to say that global communication has modified the human capacity for sense and sensibility. Our sensibility generally develops directly in the relation with the signs forming the surrounding social environment of which we are a part, and indirectly in the signs forming the extended

social environment—extended to varying degrees and under different aspects—synchronically on the level of contemporaneity as well as diachronically in history. Therefore sensibility is always connoted *semiotically and socially*. Present-day global communication with its signs, machines, merchandise, and messages, with its extension and velocity, with its values and criteria for evaluation, has consequences for sensibility on a planetary level. Aesthetics, as envisaged by Augusto Ponzio and myself in our coauthored Italian monograph, published in 2000, *Il sentire della comunicazione globale* (Feeling and sensibility in global communication), proposes a direct and systematic analysis, a *critique* (in the post-Kantian sense) of *present-day sensibility*. Conducted from a semiotic perspective, such critique crosses over the boundaries of specializations and separations forming the various approaches to psychology, sociology, and other human sciences, just as it crosses over the boundaries separating different specializations in the natural sciences.

We can either limit ourselves to cultivating sensibility as wanted by globalized communication; or—as indicated by a “transcendental aesthetics,” which implies a capacity for critique that is not indifferent to the logic of otherness—we can develop this sensibility in the sense of listening, understanding, and responding. To choose according to this “second” sense, in truth the only sense possible for effective sensibility, means to begin reflecting on sensibility in today’s world, against the anesthesia of unthinking and unresponsive sensibility ensuing from the hyperesthesia of worldwide and globalized communication (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2000b: 21–22; Petrilli 2008d). Therefore, an *aesthetic analysis* is not a critique conducted in empirical terms, from a sociological, psychological, or anthropologico-cultural perspective. Instead, it is a *phenomenological analysis from the perspective of a new transcendental aesthetics*—“transcendental” also in the sense that aesthetics is the a priori of subjectivity in global communication, and even constitutes the fundamental condition of subjectivity. A semiotic reflection on sensibility in global communication, oriented in terms of *transcendental aesthetics*, presents itself as a *critique of the reason of global communication*. This approach brings into evidence the limitations and aporias, contradictions and amphibologies, that question global communication and put it into crisis in spite of the tendency that characterizes the global communication world to reproduce itself insistently, in spite of its obstinacy in reasserting and reestablishing itself. Global communication and sensibility call for critique with the conceptual instruments of “dialogic reason.” Among

the tasks for global semiotics thus equipped and oriented in the direction of semioethics (see 1.3), is to proceed to the analysis of the ideo-logic of sensibility in global communication, therefore to a better understanding of sensibility in today's world, of perception in contemporaneity, for example, of *space, distance, time, interpersonal relations, difference, communication, need, desire, the imaginary, wealth, affections, fear, pain, pleasure, health, illness, sex, famine, death, reality, truth, war, work, free-time, beauty, amusement, self, body, others, politics, language, the word of the other, community, sociality*.

If we are to adequately *critique global communication*, we must interpret the signs of the processes of transformation (which is anthropological, cultural, linguistic-semiotic transformation) in the framework of an approach to semiotics (the general science of signs that studies semiosis, that is, sign activity and communication) that is truly global. Communication not only extends over the entire anthroposemiosphere, but englobes all life-forms over the planet, so that dominant characteristics of communication today are effectively its *planetary extension* and tendency to *adjust realistically to the world as it is*. Consequently, as stated, an adequate understanding of signs and communication in late capitalist society, of communication in the era of globalization, an adequate analysis of this phase in the development of capitalism calls for a perspective that is just as global and just as inclusive as the phenomenon under analysis.

While the special sciences taken separately are not in a position to provide such a perspective, a general science of signs or general semiotics is. The complexity of today's communication world requires conceptual instruments that are as precise as possible, and that can be delineated by an appropriate theory of communication; these instruments must also be as rigorous as possible, which only a philosophical founding of such theory can provide. At the same time, a critical-sociological orientation enables the categories and the language in which they are formulated to interrogate the different aspects of the reality of present-day communication and of the language through which they find expression (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2000b: 18–22; Ponzio, 1999). However, all this does not necessarily mean that semiotics as it is practiced today is ready for the task. If anything, the opposite may be true. In any case, it is no longer possible to practice semiotics adequately, particularly when there is a question of communication theories, without accounting for the current situation of worldwide and global communication. Semiotic theory and communication models that do not address these new forms of communication,

that is, the reality of communication today in this new historical phase of development, tend to be anachronistic and shortsighted.

The worldwide spread of communication is a surface phenomenon that calls for an understanding of its foundations. From this point of view, the model that describes communication in terms of message transferal from an emitter (who encodes the message) to a receiver (who decodes the message) on the basis of equal exchange logic is an oversimplification. Italian philosopher and semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921–85) referred to this model ironically as the “postal-package model” and in fact had already thoroughly criticized it as early as the 1950s. His monograph *Comunicazione, significato e parlare comune* (Communication, meaning, and common speech) appeared in 1961, at a time when communication was not yet the pervasive phenomenon it is today, and Italy had not yet been exposed to anything approximating the present level in social reorganization relating to the communication-production system. To interpret human communication in terms of information and message transmission as theorized by this particular communication model (which still influences communication sciences today) means to mystify the communicative process itself. According to the “postal-package model,” virtually all components constituting the communicative event (emitter, receiver, code, message, context, the objects communicated, and the needs propelling communication) preexist to the communicative process itself. In this framework, communication is reduced to the intentional exchange of messages between predefined and separate individuals on the basis of a conventional code, which loses sight of its complexity and articulation.

Instead, in a global semiotic framework communication is described as converging with life. Communication is not only a necessary condition for life to flourish, but it is also the criterion for its identification: a living being is a communicating being. (It inherits a genetic code, responds to environmental stimuli, and so on.) Life converges with semiosis, sign activity; in other words, life converges with processes in which signs can be detected and are active (precisely, “signs of life”). On this description, communication is not simply the externalization of a preconstituted living being, but rather it converges with the living being itself. In the organic world, to communicate is to be and to be is to communicate. To communicate is to persist in one’s own being, to maintain one’s being, and to confirm oneself as being—*conatus essendi* (Cobley, 2010b; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 518–25).

The global semio(bio)sphere or bio(semio)sphere (though semio-sphere should suffice) is the object of study of global semiotics, also designated as “semiotics of life.” Thanks to its broad scope, global semiotics can provide an appropriate context, in terms of quantity (extension across the different spheres of semiosis) and quality (capacity to solve problems), to address issues at the center of its attention relating to semiosis or sign activity.

Moreover, a global approach to the “signs of life” and to the “life of signs” must be oriented by the logic of otherness (or alterity) according to a perspective that is capable of detotalization, that is, of identifying the specificity of smaller totalities which interconnect dialogically as they constitute ever larger and open totalities. Otherness (“absolute otherness” and not just “relative otherness”) indicates the existence of something on its own account, and therefore independently of the I’s initiative, volition, consciousness, or willful recognition. Thus described otherness is a synonym for materiality understood as objectivity (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 559; see 5.9). A global approach to semiosis implies opening to the other both in qualitative and in quantitative terms (global semiotics is omnicomprehensive), a high degree of availability toward the other, readiness to listen to the other, and a capacity for hospitality. Semiotic interpretation cannot prescind from the dialogic relation to the other (see 6.7).

1.2 Dialogism, Intercorporeity, and Modeling

Dialogism and intercorporeity are fundamental conditions for communication as we are describing it and need to be addressed by an approach to semiotics that is oriented globally and is at once open to the local (but without englobing or repressing it). Dialogism (or dialogicality) indicates a situation of involvement with the other, of *passive involvement*. In other words, this is not involvement by choice, the result of initiative taken by a subject who has decided to get involved with someone else. Understood in terms of interconnectedness and involvement, dialogism converges with intercorporeity. Dialogism is structural to semiosis, to the biosphere. Any sign situation is a relational process and as such presents different degrees of dialogism. The relationship between sign and interpretant is dialogic to varying degrees. Referred to discourse, dialogism is not necessarily present in formal dialogue. Better: formal dialogue is easily endowed with only a minor degree of dialogism; instead, discourse, which is not dialogic on a formal level, that is, which

is not modeled in terms of a formal dialogue, may be endowed all the same with high degrees of dialogism. Dialogism is present in exterior and interior discourse, but is not a prerogative of discourse (Ibid.: 560).

Dialogism as thematized by the Russian philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895–1975) provides a methodological paradigm and is closely connected with a biosemiotic conception of sign in light of which he critiques both “subjective individualism” and “objective abstraction.” Self is implied dialogically in otherness, just as the body is implied in the body of the other. Bakhtin uses the metaphor of the “grotesque body” to signify the original condition of interrelatedness among bodies and the need to recognize this condition for healthy interpersonal relationships (Bakhtin, 1965). The body is connected with dialogue. According to Bakhtin, dialogism does not materialize in disembodied minds. For Bakhtin, dialogue is the embodied, intercorporeal expression of the interconnection of one’s own body with the body of the other. Therefore the concept of an individual, separate, and autonomous body is only an illusion. The “grotesque body” as it finds expression in popular culture, in the vulgar language of the public place, in the masks of carnival, thematized by Bakhtin, conveys an adequate image of the body in terms of dialogic interrelatedness and intercorporeity. The grotesque body is the body in its vital and indissoluble relation with the world and with the body of others.

By contrast with oversimplifying and suffocating interpretations of Marxism, Bakhtin works on Karl Marx’s (1818–83) idea that the human being only comes to full realization when “the reign of necessity ends.” It follows that a social system that is effectively alternative to capitalism is one which considers *free time*, *available time*, and not work time, as the *real social wealth* (Marx, 1974 [1857]). In Bakhtin’s language this is the “time of non official festivity,” which is closely connected to the “great time” of literature. Bakhtin thematizes such issues in his 1965 monograph on Rabelais, which carries out a central role in the general architectonics of his thought system.

Global communication in today’s world is dominated by the ideology of production and efficiency, which is in complete contrast with the carnival worldview. The world of global communication is characterized by individualism to an exasperated degree and by the logic of competition. Production, efficiency, individualism, and competition represent dominant values in contemporary society. All the same, the structural presence of the grotesque body, the condition of intercorporeity, and

involvement of the body with the body of others, cannot be ignored. The human being's vocation for the "carnavalesque" has resisted, as testified by literary writing: in George Orwell's *1984* or Ray Bradbury's *Fahrenheit 451*, the ultimate resistance to a social system dominated by the values of production and efficiency is offered by literature. In this sense literature (indeed art in general, writing) is and always will be carnivalized.

With Bakhtinian dialogism, the focus shifts from the logic of identity, whether individual (consciousness and self) or collective (community, historical language, and cultural system), to the logic of otherness, thereby producing a sort of Copernican revolution. Bakhtinian dialogism offers a critique of dominant ideology and cultural trends in Western thought. Dialogism, modeling, and intercorporeity are pivotal concepts in the study of semiosis and communication, indeed are presupposed by the latter. This is particularly obvious if, following Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914) (who reformulated the classic notion of *substitution* in terms of *interpretation*), the sign is considered as an interpretant, that is, a dialogic response foreseen by a specific type of modeling (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2002b: 210–6).

This approach to semiosis and communication privileges detotalization and opening according to the logic of otherness, rather than totalization and englobement in compliance with the logic of identity. General semiotics formally reenvisioned as global semiotics (where biosemiotics is a special branch of semiotics and at once the foundation for general semiotics, see below, chapter 5) should now carry out a detotalizing function: a primary task is to critique all alleged totalities, in the first place the totality global and world communication. In other words, general semiotics can work toward formulating a critique of all claims to the status of totality, including the totality itself identified as "global communication," and evidence the condition of openness and interrelatedness rather than of closure and self-sufficiency. If the critical and detotalizing function is absent, general semiotics appears as another totality, a mere juxtaposition to the special semiotics, no more than a syncretic result of the latter, a transversal language for the encyclopedia of the unified sciences, expression of the arrogance of philosophy and its sense of omniscience in the face of the multiplicity of different disciplines and specialized fields of knowledge.

As a biological organism, the human being flourishes in the great biosphere or biosemiotic network interconnectedly with other biological

organisms. All life-forms are endowed with a capacity for modeling that determines worldview, with the addition that the human modeling system is endowed with a species-specific capacity for “metasemiosis,” also indicated with the terms “semiotics,” “language,” or “writing.” Modeling is a process by which something is performed or reproduced on the basis of a model or schema. In semiotics, models are based on relations of similarity and thus are associated with the iconic sign. The so-called Tartu-Moscow school (A. A. Zaliznjak, V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov, and Ju. M. Lotman) uses the expression “modeling system” to distinguish natural language (“primary modeling system”) from other cultural semiotic systems (“secondary modeling system”). Thomas A. Sebeok also indicates the capacity for primary modeling with the term “language” as distinct from “speech” (Sebeok, 1991b, chapter 5, and 1994, chapter 9; see 5.8). Primary modeling (or language thus described) accounts for the ability to construct a multiplicity of different possible worlds. Linguistic creativity and the plurality of natural languages are both strong indications of the linguistic capacity understood as a primary modeling device specific to *Homo* (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 561). “Writing” is another term for modeling. Writing thus understood is “writing *ante litteram*,” *ante verba*, writing before speech, *a priori*, the syntactic capacity and not simply transcription or translation of oral verbal signs into written verbal signs. The human modeling capacity precedes and is the condition for human communication and dialogism through verbal and nonverbal signs (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003a: 7–11 and *passim*).

On the basis of this species-specific characteristic, the human being can be described as a “semiotic animal,” that is, an animal endowed with a capacity not only for semiosis, but also for “metasemiosis” or “semiotics” (Deely et al., 2005). Note that beyond serving as the name of the general science of signs, the term “semiotics” is used to indicate the capacity for metasemiosis, that is, the exclusively human capacity to reflect on signs. As the capacity for metasemiosis, semiotics is specific to human semiosis or anthroposemiosis (Petrilli, 1998a: 8–10, 145–7).

1.3 The Semiotic Animal, Semioethics, and Responsibility

Semiotics in this second sense qualifies human animals as “semiotic animals” and connects behavior with awareness of human responsibility toward life. These considerations present general semiotics with a plan that is not related to any particular ideological orientation. The semiotic

animal is a properly responsible actor, capable of *signs of signs*, mediation, reflection, awareness, suspending action, and deliberation. As such the semiotic animal is capable of critical, creative, and responsible awareness as regards semiosis over the entire planet; and therefore of taking a standpoint with respect to semiosis in its various aspects.

From a global semiotic perspective, a specific characteristic of life is semiosis—as stated above, life and semiosis converge, whereas metasemiosis is specific to human semiosis. As “semiosic animals,” human beings interpret signs directly without distinguishing between the levels of immediate interpretation and our understanding of interpretation; instead, as “semiotic animals” or “metasemiosic animals” human beings can suspend immediate interpretation of signs and lay the conditions for reflection and deliberation. *Homo* is a rational animal, therefore a unique semiotic animal capable of taking responsibility for the health of semiosis, for life over the whole planet. As semiotic animals, human beings are capable of a global view of life and communication: consequently, the question is “what is our responsibility toward life and the universe in its globality?” The expression “semiotic animal” evidences the capacity for creative and critical reflection on signs and communication as a specific characteristic of human semiosis and is the only animal capable of this type of semiotic, or metasemiosic activity.

As a capacity exclusive to human beings, the concept of metasemiosis contributes to a better understanding of why, in what sense we are responsible for semiosis, for life throughout the “semio(bio)sphere.” The question why, in what sense, is central to what with coauthor Augusto Ponzio we have designated as “semioethics” (Petrilli, 2010; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003b, 2005: 562, and 2010a; see 2.1). The expression “semioethics” reflects the idea of semiotics recovering its ancient vocation as “semeiotics” or “symptomatology,” with its focus on symptoms. Semioethics, like semeiotics, has a focus on the “care for life,” but from a global perspective, that is, where semiosis and life converge. Originally, in fact, with the ancient Greek physicians Hippocrates and Galen, semeiotics was understood as “semeiotics” or “symptomatology,” that is, as a branch of the medical sciences which studies symptoms. A task for global semiotics today is to recover the prime vocation of semeiotics (semeiotics) to “care for life,” and reorganize itself in semioethic terms. Therefore, semioethics is concerned with caring for life from a global perspective, that is, where semiosis and life, communication and life are viewed in their unity.

The expression to “care for life” does not imply any form of therapeutic arrogance, the claim *to cure*, but far more essentially the capacity for involvement with the other, interest in the other, and unindifference toward the other. General semiotics can be related to ancient medical semeiotics or symptomatology in the sense that, as anticipated, it can recover the latter’s ancient vocation for the health of semiosis, for life. Given that semiosis converges with life (at least), the ancient vocation for the health of life practiced by “semeiotics” or “symptomatology” can also be assumed by “semiotics” understood as the general science of signs. In this sense, “semiotics” is already “semioethics.” The semiotician concerned with the health of semiosis, the health of life (human and nonhuman), focuses on symptoms (of illness, malaise, and individual and social disorders), but not as a physician, general practitioner, or some type of specialist. The semiotician does not prescribe drugs or administer therapeutic treatments of any sort. Indeed, the widespread condition of medicalization in present-day society needs challenging (from this point of view how to ignore Thomas Szasz’s critique in the United States, see, for example, Szasz, 1961, 2001, 2007a, b). Nor should the semiotician resort to such paradigms as normal/abnormal, healthy/ill. The semiotician’s interest in symptoms bears a certain resemblance to Freudian analysis given the central role played by interpretation in both cases and the inclination to listen to the other which is decisive for interpretation. Nor is listening as we are describing it a question of auscultation in the medical sense: to listen to the other is not to auscultate. And if semiotic or, better, semioethic analysis of symptoms is similar to Freudian analysis, it shares nothing with the practice of institutionalized and medicalized psychiatry, with medicalized and “psychiatrized” psychoanalysis, with psychiatric patients, psychiatric treatment, administration of drugs, and sundry concoctions, that is, it shares nothing with the medicalization and psychiatrization of life.

Here a connection can also be established with English scholar Victoria Lady Welby (1837–1912) and her original approach to the study of signs, which she designated as “significs.” Significs is a neologism coined by Welby for her special approach to the study of signs in all their forms and relations, above all in their relation to values. This approach transcends pure descriptivism and gnoseological or logico-epistemological boundaries in the direction of axiology and study of the conditions that make meaningful behavior possible. À propos significs, Welby makes the following most interesting observation which

connects her theory of meaning with the critical, ethical, and pragmatic dimension of semiosis:

It is unfortunate that custom decrees the limitation of the term diagnosis to the pathological field. It would be difficult to find a better one for that power of “knowing through,” which a training in Significs would carry. We must be brought up to take for granted that we are diagnosticians, that we are to cultivate to the utmost the power to see real distinctions and to read the signs, however faint, which reveal sense and meaning. Diagnostic may be called the typical process of Significs as Translation is its typical form. (Welby, 1983 [1903]: 51)

Analogically “diagnostic” can be associated with the semioethical orientation in semiotics. In fact, semioethics derives its inspiration from Welby’s significs and its focus on sense, meaning and significance, from Peirce’s interest in ethics, and from Charles Morris’s (1901–79) focus on the relation between signs and values, signification and significance, semiotics and axiology (Morris, 1964), as much as from the focus on otherness and dialogism thematized by Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas (1906–95). By contrast with a strictly cognitive, descriptive, and ideologically neutral approach to signs, language, and behavior as it has traditionally characterized semiotic studies, an important task for semiotics today is to recover the ethical–axiological dimension of human semiosis.

From the point of view of ethics, the question why and in what sense we are responsible for semiosis, for life, does not necessarily require an answer: to be responsible for life on the planet is a moral principle, a categorical imperative. But from the point of view of semioethics, an answer *is* necessary insofar as it involves scientific research, argumentation, interpretation, a dialogic response regulated by the logic of otherness, and questioning. Metasemiosis is a biosemiotic and phylogenetic endowment that, thanks to syntactics, is connected with the unique capacity for creative and critical intervention upon the course of semiosis. This makes human beings capable of accounting for signs and sign behavior, for self, for making critical choices and taking a standpoint. In this sense, we are subject *to* and subject *of* responsibility. Human beings are capable of caring for semiosis, for life in its dialogical multiplicity, in the sense of being concerned with, caring for, without implying the arrogance of the claim to therapy and cure. The “semiotic animal” is also a “semioethical animal.”

In our discussion of responsibility, more than *limited responsibility*, the type of responsibility referred to is *unlimited responsibility*, that is,

responsibility without alibis, absolute responsibility. Human responsibility toward life (which converges with signs and communication) in the late capitalist communication-production phase of development is unbounded, including in the sense that responsibility is not limited to human life, but involves all life-forms in the planetary ecosystem with which human life is inextricably interconnected. As the study of signs, semiotics cannot evade this issue. The task of recovering the semioethical dimension of semiosis is urgent, now more than ever before, considering the destructive nature of interference in communication between the historical–social and biological spheres, the cultural and natural spheres, in semiotic circuits connecting the “anthroposemiosphere” to the “semio(bio)sphere” generally (just to cite a relatively recent example, think of the devastating effects on the environment worldwide, natural and cultural, caused by the petrol platform explosion of 29 April 2010 in the Mexican Gulf).

According to Levinas, the sense of human life, the properly human, is founded on responsibility of the I for the other. Responsibility thus understood is more ancient than the *conatus essendi*, than beginnings and principles; in other words, it is *an-archival*, prior to being and to ontological categories. This type of responsibility is not stated in ontological categories. The shortcoming of modern antihumanism, as Levinas says in the conclusion to his 1968 essay, “Humanism and Anarchy,” is in not finding in man, lost in history and in the totality, the traces of this prehistorical and an-archival responsibility. Responsibility for the other is the original relation with the other and is unlimited, absolute responsibility (in Levinas, 1987a: 138–39). Responsibility thus described, as Levinas says in “Diachrony and Representation,” is the “secret of sociality” (Levinas, 1991, Eng. trans.: 169). Encounter with the other from the very beginning is responsibility for the other, for one’s “neighbor,” whoever that is, the other for whom one is responsible. As Levinas says in *Entre nous*, precisely in the section entitled “Philosophy, Justice, and Love,” love as unindifference, as charity, is original and is original peace (Ibid.: 103–21). Absolute responsibility is responsibility for the other, responsibility understood as answering to the other and for the other. This type of responsibility neither allows for rest nor peace. Peace functional to war, peace intrinsic to war, a truce, is fully revealed in its misery and vanity in the light of absolute responsibility. The relation to the other is asymmetrical, unequal: the other is disproportionate with respect to the power and freedom of the I. Moral consciousness is this very lack of proportion and interrogates the self’s freedom (Ponzio, 2006a).

When developed in the direction of semioethics, global semiotics underlines the human capacity to care for life, which also means the *quality of life*. As anticipated, this approach does not orient semiotics in an ideological sense, but rather focuses on human behavior as sign behavior interrelated with values. Semioethics is the result of two thrusts: one is biosemiotics (the complex of sciences that study living beings as signs), and the other is bioethics. Semioethics can offer a unified and critical point of view on ethical problems connected with progress in the biological and medical sciences—for example, in such areas as genetic engineering, microbiology, neurobiology, and pharmaceutical research. With bioethics, ethical problems become the object of study of a specific discipline. But prior to the introduction of this new discipline, ethical problems were already part of two totalities which together contribute to their characterization: the *semio(bio)sphere* and the *global socio-economic communication-production system*. General semiotics developed in terms of global semiotics and semioethics must keep account of this dual context when addressing problems at the center of its attention. In this sense, it can also contribute to the philosophical vocation of semioethics and to the possibility of critical reformulation, therefore to an approach to the life of signs and method of research that is both foundational and critical.

1.4 Global Semiotics, Cognitive Semiotics, and Semioethics

It is to be hoped for that semiotics (therefore the semioticians) should commit to the health of semiosis and cultivate the capacity for responsible and responsive understanding toward the semiotic universe. Metasemiosis is a condition for global responsibility and implies the capacity for listening, that is, for listening to the other. Semiotics conceived as the general science of signs needs to refine its auditory and critical functions, the capacity for listening and critique, and “semioethics” can contribute to the task. From this perspective, “global semiotics” is not limited to a cognitive approach to semiotic processes, but is also sensitive to the pragmatic-ethical dimension of sign activity. Global semiotics is founded in cognitive semiotics, but must also be open to a third dimension of semiosis beyond the quantitative and the theoretical, that is, the ethical. This third dimension concerns the ends toward which we strive: in fact, other expressions previously introduced with Augusto Ponzio for this particular dimension of semiosis include “ethosemiotics,” “teleosemiotics,” and “telosemiotics,” though we now prefer the expression “semioethics”

to evidence the conjunction between semiotics and ethics (Petrilli, 1998a: 180–6; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2008: 322; see 2.1 and 3.5).

The trichotomy “global semiotics,” “cognitive semiotics,” and “semioethics” is decisive in our understanding of semiosis not only in theoretical terms, but also for ethical-pragmatic reasons. Semiotics must constantly refine its auditory and critical functions, its capacity for listening and critique in order to turn its attention to the semiotic universe in its globality and meet its commitment to the “health of semiosis,” apart from understanding in cognitive and analytical terms. To accomplish this task, therefore, we believe that semiotics must be nothing less than 1) global semiotics, 2) cognitive semiotics, and 3) semioethics.

Global semiotics provides both a *phenomenological* and *ontological* context. However, as discussed earlier, reference to the *socioeconomic* context is also necessary for a proper understanding of communication today, especially when understood in terms of “communication-production” (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005). A semioethical approach must keep account of the fact that global communication-production converges with the socioeconomic context. These three contexts—the phenomenological, ontological, and socioeconomic—are all closely interconnected from the point of view of semioethics. And an important task in the present day and age for general semiotics conceived as global semiotics and semioethics is to denounce any incongruities in the global sign system and, therefore, any threats to life over the planet produced by that system.

2

Toward a Critique of Identity: On Signs, Bodies, and Values

2.1 Dialogism and Otherness: The Critical Task of Semioethics

To understand communication today in its historical-social specificity as a global and worldwide phenomenon and in its relation to life over the whole planet (life and communication, life and semiosis coincide), semiotics must adopt a global perspective in both a spatial and a temporal sense. An approach is required that affords the critical distancing necessary for an interpretation of contemporaneity that is not restricted to the limits of contemporaneity itself.

A global approach to the signs of life and to the life of signs that is open and detotalizing (rather than totalizing and focused on closed systems) is connected with the logic of otherness. It requires a high degree of availability toward the other, a disposition to listen to the other, a capacity for hospitality and for opening to the other in both quantitative and qualitative terms. Semiotic interpretation cannot disregard the dialogic relation with the other. Following Mikhail M. Bakhtin, it is now clear that dialogism understood as intercorporeity is a fundamental condition for life and semiosis. As such it must be addressed by semiotics with the aim of developing an approach that is global and at once open to the local. This approach privileges the tendency to detotalization according to the logic of otherness, rather than totalization and sacrifice of difference (of the other) on the basis of the logic of identity, understood as closed identity.

With the spread of “bio-power” (Michel Foucault) and the controlled insertion of bodies into the production system, global communication

has conceptualized the individual as a separate and self-sufficient, autonomous being. The body is perceived as an isolated biological entity belonging to the individual. This has led to the quasi-total extinction of cultural practices and worldviews based on intercorporeity, interdependency, exposition, and opening to the other. What we are left with are mummified remains studied by folklore analysts, archeological residues preserved in ethnological museums and in national literatures—an expression of the general condition of museumification.

Instead, in his monograph *Rabelais and His World*, Bakhtin analyzes the way the body is perceived in medieval popular culture and describes the different forms of what he calls “grotesque realism” (Bakhtin, 1965). According to his approach the body is not conceived in individualistic terms, separately from other life-forms on earth—indeed from the rest of the world, but rather interrelatedly with other bodies. Signs of the “grotesque body” (of which only weak traces have survived in the present day and age) include masks—for example, those used in rituals, popular festivities, and carnival. Before the development of individualism with the rise of the bourgeoisie, grotesque realism presented the body as undefined, that is, not confined to itself, but, on the contrary, as flourishing in relations of symbiosis with other bodies, in relations of transformation and renewal that transcend the boundaries of individual life. The rise of the bourgeoisie is associated with egotistic individualism, shortsighted self-interest, and a private, static conception of the body. Paradoxically, far from weakening this conception, global communication has contributed to reinforcing it, but here “global communication” is understood in terms of “global communication-production.”

As Michel Foucault (1926–84) in particular has revealed (but Rossi-Landi’s critique of the 1970s also deserves attention), division and separatism among the sciences serve the ideologico-social requirements of the “new cannon of the individualized body” (Bakhtin). This in turn favors control over the body and its insertion into the social reproduction cycle, today’s global communication-production system.

Emmanuel Levinas evidences the creative power of otherness with respect to the totality, illustrating how the logic of otherness obliges the totality to reorganize itself ever anew in a process relating to “infinity.” This process can also be related to the concept of infinite semiosis (or sign activity) as described by Charles Sanders Peirce (*Collected Papers*, 1931–58 [referred to as *CP*, followed by volume and paragraph numbers]). Implying more than a cognitive issue, the relation to infinity transcends

the cognitive order and denotes the original condition of involvement and co-implication with the other, of responsibility toward the other, beyond the established order, the symbolic order, convention and habit, and beyond the alibis they provide for the sake of keeping a clean conscience. The relation to infinity is the relation to *absolute otherness*, therefore a relation to that most refractory to the totality. The relation to infinity implies a relation to the otherness of others, to the otherness of the other person, *autrui*. The other is not understood here in the sense of another self like one's own self, another *alter ego*, another self belonging to the *same community*, but rather as the alien other structural to identity, the other in its extraneousness, strangeness, diversity, difference toward which indifference is impossible in spite of all efforts made by identity to the contrary, by self.

The critical task of semioethics implies recognition of the common condition of *dialogical interrelation* and the capacity for *listening*, where dialogue does not imply a relation we choose to concede, thanks to a sense of generosity toward the other, but on the contrary is no less than structural to life itself, a necessary condition for life to flourish, an inevitable imposition. With specific reference to anthroposemiosis, semioethics focuses on the concrete singularity of the human individual and the inevitability of intercorporeal interconnection with others. The singularity, uniqueness, of each one of us is implicated in otherness and dialogism. Semioethics assumes that whatever the object of study and however specialized the analysis, human individuals in their concrete singularity cannot ignore the inevitable condition of involvement in the destiny of others, that is, involvement without alibis. From this point of view, the symptoms studied from a semioethical perspective are not only specified in their singularity, on the basis of a unique relationship with the other, the world, and self, but are also and above all social symptoms. Any idea, wish, sentiment, value, interest, need, evil, or good examined by semioethics as a symptom is expressed in the word, the unique word, the embodied word, in the voice which arises in the dialectic and dialogical interrelation between singularity and sociality.

2.2 Global Communication and Its Risks

An adequate and comprehensive understanding of global communication today requires a full understanding of the risks that communication involves, including the risk of destroying communication itself, the risk that communication itself may come to an end. The risk alluded to is not

just the relatively trivial phenomenon known as “incommunicability,” amply thematized and represented in film and literary discourse during the 1960s. Instead, this expression alludes to the condition of social and linguistic alienation suffered by the single individual with the transition to the global communication system through to its current phase of development (the “communication-production” phase).

Unlike all other previous phases in social development, today’s communication-production phase is endowed with an unprecedented potential for destruction. In light of today’s enormous potential for destruction (which has never before reached such high degrees in earlier phases of development), the risk of destroying communication, the risk that communication may come to an end, is nothing less than the risk that life on this planet may come to an end. In other words, far from reducing the communication phenomenon to the terms foreseen by the “equal exchange model” (emitter, receiver, message transmission, etc.) described above, the global approach to semiosis equates communication with life itself. As anticipated, in fact, from a biosemiotic and global semiotic perspective semiosis and life, communication and life converge (see chapter 4). In this statement, therefore, the expression “communication” is not reduced to the equal exchange or “postal package” model, but rather is equated to life. And according to this description, that communication (+ modeling = *semiosis*) and life converge implies that the end of communication is the end of life.

To maintain today’s communication-production system is to maintain a communication system that is destructive. To reproduce the reproduction cycle is to reproduce the logic of destruction: machinery is replaced with new machinery not because of wear, but for competition; employment develops into unemployment as a consequence of automation; products circulate on the market and stimulate exasperated forms of consumerism which serve to continue the reproductive cycle; innovation quickly renders products outdated that would otherwise exhaust the demand; commodities and markets that do not meet standards of competitiveness disappear.

Communication-production is communication for the sake of communication, production for the sake of production to the detriment of the capacity for creative invention and reorganization, to the detriment of the right to difference and otherness. The obsessive reproduction of communication-production cycles tends to undermine the human intellectual faculties, the inventive capacity. But human beings are not

only threatened as intelligent beings, they are also threatened simply as living beings. In other words, the health of semiosis, the quality of life, is constantly under threat. To maintain, reinforce, and expand today's socioeconomic system at all costs means to endanger life on the planet: from this point of view, symptoms of dysfunctioning include the ozone hole, ecological disasters caused by standard reproduction cycles, and disasters of the catastrophic order. "Normal" or standard disasters include the communication-production of war and correlated side effects. From a semiotic perspective, even interlingual translation may become a device that favors catastrophe when it puts itself at the service of belligerency and translates the language of war, its ideology and argumentations, its rhetoric and justifications across different languages and cultures worldwide.

The *conatus essendi* of communication-production destroys natural environments and life-forms. It destroys differences among economic systems along with differences among cultural and political systems. Consider the present-day trend to export and globalize so-called democracy, a concept that needs questioning as says the American semiotician Charles Morris in his book of 1948, *The Open Self* (see below, 2.7). Processes of homogenization regulated by capital market logic tend to eliminate difference to the point even of homogenizing desire and the imaginary across cultures and value systems, and not just habits of behavior or "needs" (though the possibility of satisfying such needs is never the same). The *conatus essendi* of communication-production destroys traditions and cultural patrimonies that somehow contradict or obstruct or simply do not respond to the logic of development, productivity, and competition. The communication-production system destroys productive forces that tend to escape the limits of present-day forms of production, that is, the forces of intelligence, inventiveness, and creativity which are otherwise subject to market trends and capital logic.

The destructive character of today's reproduction system is evidenced by the fact that underdevelopment is a product of development, indeed is a condition of development. In the global capitalist system which thrives on the dynamics between center and periphery, the condition of dispossession and pauperization is at once both a direct consequence and a condition for affluence and accumulation. Exploitation, discontent, and misery to the point of nonsurvival are on the increase worldwide. A glaring symptom is the spreading phenomenon of migration which so-called developed countries are no longer able to contain. When national

borders are closed, political and ideological issues are no doubt at play, but objective limits on the availability of space and resources are also a problem—more so these days than in earlier phases in the development of social reproduction systems.

To globalize the market is destructive because it implies the will to commodify anything, including interpersonal relations. The more commodities are illegal, the more they are valuable and produce profit—signs of this phenomenon include illicit traffic in arms, drugs, sex, human organs, women, children, uteruses, and so on. The principle of exploiting other people's labor is destructive. The less labor costs, the more it produces profit: aided by the global communication network, “developed” countries turn even more to low-cost labor in “underdeveloped” countries: “stay where you are, we will bring work to you.” The increase in child labor, exploited even for tasks that are heavy and dangerous, is clear evidence of this infamy, of the disgrace of the communication-production world: much needs to be said and done about children as today's victims of pauperization and misery—children in illness, children exploited on the streets, and children circulating on the global market.

Global communication-production is destructive because it is the communication-production of war. And war is in continuous need of new markets for the consumption and production of weapons, conventional and unconventional. Moreover, real politics is the approach adopted to politics in global communication and is viewed as the only appropriate approach to the being of communication-production. (However, only politics that is realistic counts as politics!) Realism in politics accepts the *extrema ratio* of war as dictated by the strict law of the force of things. Western humanism, ontology, and reason all acknowledge the realism of war, the necessity of war, which is considered as an extreme logical consequence of reality, as an inevitable part of reality. The logic of war is the realistic logic of being, ontology, politics, and history. The face of being that manifests itself in war is the face of Western reason. Reason is based on the logic of identity, and in the name of identity is prepared to sacrifice the other.

Communication-production is connected to politics and social planning, and it projects a vision of the world: a totalizing and functional system regulated by the strategies of productivity, efficiency, competitiveness, and conceived as a space for the satisfaction of needs—of course, those of the affluent. The “communication-production” or “global communication” world guarantees the world as it is, its *conatus*

essendi, ontological being, the subject (whether individual or collective), persistence in *being* at all costs—even at the cost of war, the *extrema ratio* of war, which is considered as an expression of the world, as part of its realistic logic, foreseen by ontology. This description of the world is conditioned by the logic of identity, that is, closed identity. In this framework war is a means for exploiting the other and for maintaining, reinforcing, and reproducing the logic of the same. The world is ready to sacrifice the other. The interconnection between world, reality, identity, history, truth, force, reason, power, productivity, politics, and war is inscribed in Western culture and has always been exploited by capitalism, today more than ever before with communication at the service of social reproduction.

The communication-production of war demands its constant recognition and approval as “just and necessary”—a necessary means of defense from the menacing other, a means of obtaining respect for the rights of individual identity, for individual difference. But the truth is that it is *not* the other that threatens or destroys identity and difference. Paradoxically, today’s social reproduction system itself is destructive. While social policy promotes the logic of identity and difference, these in fact are becoming even more fictitious and phantasmal. This leads to a condition of obsessive attachment to the signs of identity, that is, closed identity, in a cycle that creates further potential for the communication-production of war.

2.3 Is There a Way Out?

To develop the general science of signs in the direction of semioethics means to commit to evidencing the symptoms of social unease and to evidencing mankind’s responsibilities toward semiosis in all its aspects. In an article of 1949 entitled “Why Socialism?,” originally published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Monthly Review* and reproposed in 2009 to celebrate the journal’s sixtieth birthday, Albert Einstein (1879–1955) claims that while science cannot create ends for human beings, it can supply the means by which to attain given ends. The ends themselves are conceived by personalities with high ethical ideals which are carried forward by human beings who, in the main unconsciously, determine the slow evolution of society. The same principle may be applied to semiotics as the general science of science, especially when developed in the direction of semioethics. Einstein underlines the problem of responsibility and the need for co-participation in the common quest for progress and

well-being of humanity. However, when a question of human problems, we must not overestimate science and scientific methods, nor assume that experts alone have a right to express themselves on questions affecting the organization of society. Responsibility is a prerogative of mankind and should be promoted through an educational system that is oriented toward social goals. Rather than promote such values as power, competition, and acquisitive success in preparation for a future career, education should encourage development of the unique individual's abilities together with a sense of responsibility for the other, one's neighbor as Charles S. Peirce says, whether human or nonhuman, distant or less so.

In "Why Socialism?" Einstein prefigures the development of present-day globalization when he describes humanity as already constituting "a planetary community of production and consumption": "the time—which looking back seems so idyllic—is gone forever when individuals or relatively small groups could be completely self-sufficient" (Ibid.: 58). He denounces the evils caused by the "economic anarchy of capitalist society," not least the crippling of individuals, in a system where members of the community strive to deprive each other of the fruits of their collective labor, not by force but in compliance with the law. In fact, the entire productive capacity may legally be the private property of individuals. In a system where production is carried out for profit and not for use, private capital tends to become concentrated in the hands of few. Moreover, with the alliance between legislative bodies, political parties, and private capitalists who provide the necessary financial support, a truly democratic political system cannot be guaranteed, with the consequence that the interests of the exploited and underprivileged sections of the population are not sufficiently protected. Add to this the fact that the capitalist not only owns the means of production, but controls the main sources of information, from the press to the educational system. In the present day and age, the ruling class is the class that controls communication, as Ferruccio Rossi-Landi amply demonstrated as early as the 1960s and 1970s with his acute semiotic analyses of the relation between signs, ideology, and social planning. Nor can we ignore that the globalized world enacts a social system that is based on profit, privilege, and power guaranteed by control over communication channels (eloquent cases are represented by the media magnates Rupert Murdoch and Silvio Berlusconi).

Einstein's article was published at a time of crisis and instability, of violence and destruction in the aftermath of the World War II. In the face

of offended humanity, of widespread solitude and isolation, he questions social behavior and the possibility of a future, convinced that another world war would mean the end of society. In the face of concern for the well-being of the single individual as much as of society at large (formed of individuals) which, translated into semiotic terms, resounds as concern for the health of semiosis, consequently for life, we must inevitably ask the question, "Is there a way out?"

Einstein's answer focuses on the relational and social constitution of the human being in terms that very much recall reflections in a semiotic key by such thinkers as Charles Peirce, Victoria Welby, and Charles Morris, author of the *The Open Self*, published in 1948, just a year before publication of Einstein's own article "Why Socialism?" Each of these scholars evidence in their own terms the irrepressible interconnection, a dialogic interconnection, between identity and otherness, self and other, the human being as a single individual and society, between singularity and sociality:

Man is, at one and the same time, a solitary being and a social being. As a solitary being, he attempts to protect his own existence and that of those who are closest to him, to satisfy his personal desires, and to develop his innate abilities. As a social being, he seeks to gain the recognition and affection of his fellow human beings, to share in their pleasures, to comfort them in their sorrows, and to improve their conditions of life. Only the existence of these varied, frequently conflicting, strivings accounts for the special character of a man, and their specific combination determines the extent to which an individual can achieve an inner equilibrium and can contribute to the well-being of society. It is quite possible that the relative strength of these two drives is, in the main, fixed by inheritance. But the personality that finally emerges is largely formed by the environment in which a man happens to find himself during his development, by the structure of the society in which he grows up, by the tradition of that society, and by its appraisal of particular types of behavior. The abstract concept "society" means to the individual human being the sum total of his direct and indirect relations to his contemporaries and to all the people of earlier generations. The individual is able to think, feel, strive, and work by himself; but he depends so much upon society—in his physical, intellectual, and emotion existence—that it is impossible to think of him, or to understand him, outside the framework of society. It is "society" which provides man with food, clothing, a home, the tools of work, language, the forms of thought, and most of the content of thought; his life is made possible through the labor and the accomplishments of the many millions past and present who are all hidden behind the small word "society."

[. . .] dependence of the individual upon society is a fact of nature which cannot be abolished—just as in the case of ants and bees. However, while the whole life process of ants and bees is fixed down to the last detail by rigid, hereditary instinct, the social pattern and interrelationship of human beings are very variable and susceptible to change. Memory, the capacity to make new combinations, the gift of oral communication have made possible developments among human beings which are not dictated by biological necessities. Such developments manifest themselves in

traditions, institutions, and organizations; in literature; in scientific and engineering accomplishments; in works of art. This explains how it happens that, in a certain sense, man can influence his life through his own conduct, and that in this process conscious thinking and wanting can play a part. (Ibid.: 57–8)

According to Einstein, the essence of the crisis of his own day concerns the nature of the relationship of the individual to society and the dominant tendency in the direction of egotism and isolation. In the capitalist reproduction system, the individual has become more conscious of his or her dependence on society, and this condition is perceived as a threat to one's natural rights or even to one's existence in terms of economy. But the truth is that from the point of view of the properly human, the single individual can only find the sense and meaning of life in sociality, in the otherness dimension, that is, in the relation with the other:

Moreover, his position in society is such that the egotistical drives of his make-up are constantly being accentuated, while this social drives, which are by nature weaker, progressively deteriorate. All human beings, whatever their position in society, are suffering from the process of deterioration. Unknowingly prisoners of their own egotism, they feel insecure, lonely, and deprived of the naïve, simple, and unsophisticated enjoyment of life. Man can find meaning in life, short and perilous as it is, only through devoting himself to society. (Ibid.: 59)

2.4 Signs of Difference: From Identity to Unindifferent Difference

Global communication today is subject to the world market and to general commodification as it characterizes global communication-production society. A distinctive feature of global and world communication today is the tendency, as mentioned above, to level differences and exasperate the processes of homogenization. As an attempt to compensate, homogenization based on the sacrifice of otherness leads to the formation of delusory identities, individualisms, separatisms and egoisms, individual and collective, complementary to competitiveness, conflict, and mutual exclusion: the obsessive search for identity excludes the other. Consequently, the type of difference required in order to recognize and assert identity in the world of global communication today, in globalization, is *indifferent difference*, that is, difference grounded in the logic of closed identity, indifferent to the other, to other differences (Ponzio, 1995d). “Indifferent difference” based on the logic of identity is achieved by sacrificing otherness to varying degrees—one's own otherness as much as the otherness of others.

But the logic of closed identity and totalization, of separation, the tendency to raise boundaries among differences become indifferent to each other, among autonomous subjects does not tell of the original condition characterizing human relations. In origin is the relation with the other: the essence of the interpersonal relation between self/other, the essence of language is the logic of otherness beyond boundaries, “absolute otherness,” which implies the capacity for unindifference toward difference, the condition of intercorporeal involvement with the other, of responsibility/responsiveness toward the other: with Levinas and with Derrida after him, “friendship and hospitality” (Levinas, 1961: 305; Derrida 1967, 1994). Interrogation of consciousness and its configuration as a bad conscience, a guilty conscience, subtend the I, configuration of identity. This means to say that the I, one’s identity, originates from the accusative, from responsibility without alibis for the other. To be in the first person, myself, “I” means I must answer for my right to be, I must account for myself, that is, for my being in terms of a bad conscience: to be in the first person means to be put into question. To speak, to say “I”: this implies justification in regard of the other. Language, sociality, and communication originate from the need to answer for one’s right to be, that is, from one’s bad conscience, from unindifference and responsibility toward the other. Identity is a combination of justifications—justification of the position one occupies in the world, why me and not you. Unindifference toward the other implies a bad conscience, fear for the other: this fear lurks behind a good conscience and in spite of it; fear for the other comes to the I from the face of the other. The rights of identity originate from the need to justify my “being in the world,” my “place in the sun,” and my home. The rights of identity silence a bad conscience, fear for the other who has already been oppressed or starved by the I, by one’s usurpation of a place that might belong to the other (Levinas, “Nonintentional consciousness,” in Levinas, 1991).

But today’s sign universe as characterized by global communication tends to sacrifice the other, difference based on the logic of otherness, which ends up leading to a sense of frustration among identities and differences. These become ever more obstinate in the will to assert themselves and prevail over other identities and differences, in the will to assert their separation, the difference-identity that has been denied. Consequently, mutual indifference among differences inevitably translates into hostility and conflict toward that which is different, the stranger, the outsider.

In which signs can differences be traced, considering that signs have now entered the global communication network and circulate on the global world market whose vocation it is to eliminate difference? Difference based on the logic of otherness, difference-otherness, can only be traced in the past; the present cancels them. In fact, in the present day and age that which can unite and differentiate and, therefore, identify is a common past: religion, language, territorial distribution, origin, descendancy, roots, blood, color of the skin, etc. Identity searches for the possibility of asserting itself in that which constitutes difference, whether in the name of some “historical” or “natural” trait: traditions, customs, monuments, witnesses to a cultural past, language and dialect, religion, and ethnic group. Significantly, churches, museums, ruins, and the historical parts of a city are the only elements that characterize urban space, therefore the only elements of identification. Apart from such signs, urban spaces are anonymous and indistinct with respect to other urban spaces in today’s global communication world. Signs of identity are trapped between *indifference* and *mummified difference*. Consequently, what in the past could enter national territory, urban spaces, suburbs, neighborhoods, workplaces, and everyday life can now be kept at a distance at varying degrees of abjection, ranging from hatred to so-called tolerance. The connection with identity is given by religious, ethnic, and linguistic differences, cultural past, and so forth.

Signs of the *closed community*, of *community identity*, of the “small experience,” to evoke Bakhtin, can be counteracted by signs of the “great experience,” which flourish in ongoing processes of dialogical deferral from one sign to the next. Such processes subtend the *open community* and its signs and are regulated by the logic of unindifferent difference which is difference based on the logic of otherness, “interconnectedness with the other” (Levinas), planetary interconnection, involvement, and irrevocable responsibility for the other. Rather than closed communities, we must work for communities made of signs that are different, but without the signs of difference indifferent to the other; not signs of difference based on the logic of closed identity, but signs of difference based on the logic of otherness, that open to the other without limitations as imposed by the logic of identity, without the limits of property, territory, ownership, without inequality, without roots, outside identity, and belonging. This is what the prefix *post-* should really mean (Ponzio).

Each one of us is connected to every other according to the logic of otherness. This condition of interconnectedness and continuity is also

the condition for recognition of singularity and uniqueness as essential characteristics of the properly human—which does not imply the monadic separatism of Max Stirner’s (1844) conception of the unique individual. Otherness as we are describing it cannot be reduced to the logic of identity, whether of the individual or of the collectivity, it cannot be reduced to difference connected to a genre of any sort. The condition of otherness implies the condition of mutual estrangement, *étrangété*, which is also the condition of extralocalization. This is a condition we share with each other, on the basis of which each one of us is interconnected with every other, in a relation of unindifference toward the other. No form of difference grounded in the logic of closed identity with its identity interests can cancel the essential condition of mutual *étrangété*. But the logic of identity and identity interests are indifferent to the difference of individuals viewed in their singularity, as much as to other identity-differences, to the point of overpowering and even repressing them. In fact, another typical form of destruction characteristic of global communication today regards the signs of difference, that is, the signs of otherness, of absolute otherness, which are becoming ever more obsolete.

2.5 Migration, Unemployment, and Globalization

In the face of the anachronistic tendency to close borders and defend territory in the name of identity, an opposite phenomenon is also emerging, that of “deterritorialization.” Migratory fluxes are sweeping across the globe and cannot be contained in spite of rules and regulations. In globalization, migration is a worldwide and altogether different phenomenon from migratory fluxes as they took place, for example, after World War II; migration today no longer converges with the traditional emigration/immigration phenomenon, historically so important for countries like Australia, USA, and Canada. The difference is both quantitative and qualitative. Migratory fluxes today involve enormous masses of people shifting in numbers and according to modalities that are out of control. Moreover, the impact on territory is different from the past and, consequently, the difficulties involved in coping are different, in catering for needs. To understand the new face of migration today we must keep account of the current socioeconomic context in which it is staged, that of capitalist globalization. People migrate toward different countries across the world at different levels of capitalist development, with different environmental and demographic conditions, territorial expanse, space availability, etc. All the same migration today is part

of the same scenario, that of globalization—a phenomenon that is extraordinarily complex, vast, and difficult to treat comprehensively. The migration phenomenon involves a situation of exposition and opening to the other. And however unwanted the other might be, the only acceptable response is hospitality.

That globalized migration cannot be reduced to the traditional emigration/immigration phenomenon means that it cannot be considered in terms of labor force shifting from one area of the world to another, from one country to another. From this point of view, the capitalist production system in the globalization phase does not have control over migration as in the past. Whether or not migrants can be transformed and reduced to the status of labor force depends on such factors as level of socioeconomic development of the host country, availability of resources, and the political system. But migration is most often perceived as a threat to “lifestyle.” In the contemporary world this threat does not emerge in terms of a violent struggle against the capitalist system, but as a request from the masses for hospitality, a request that is generally perceived as inordinate, immoderate, and excessive. As such this request for hospitality is an accusation against identity, community identity, for not satisfying it, for not even acknowledging it. In such a context, fear of the other understood in the transitive sense of fearing the other is exasperated to paroxysmal degrees and translates into the need to defend identity at all costs (Petrilli, 2010: 212–7). However, fear is not the starting point in the constitution of identity, “*Homo homini lupus*” as described by Thomas Hobbes, but rather the point of arrival, a consequence of social practices based on exclusion and sacrifice of the other (Ponzio, 2007).

Migration today and the possibility of converting migration into emigration/immigration are expressions of the same problem, of the same capitalist reproduction system. Differently from traditional emigration/immigration processes, migration does not involve people shifting away from remote areas of the world relatively unaffected by the processes of capitalist development. Unlike emigration/immigration, globalized migration is not about people shifting according to regulated patterns from one socioeconomic system to another—the capitalist in its extreme phase of development. On the contrary, the causes of migration today—backwardness, pauperization, scarce resources, unsustainable life conditions, etc.—as much as the goals, values, and fantasies of migrants are all part of the same social reproduction system, late capitalism in the globalization phase. Migration is produced by the same socioeconomic

system that should absorb it; it is a product of that system and not just a passing trend or expression of a cyclical crisis. Paradoxically, migration (like unemployment) is structural to “globalization” and “global communication”—these expressions denote a new phase in history which more than ever before is planetary history. The problems that migration presents to the capitalist system are the same all over the globe. What varies does not concern the capitalist system in itself, but rather external factors such as those already hinted at—demographic density, territorial extension, natural resources, the capacity for building a multicultural and multiethnic society, etc.

To recapitulate: migration is a phenomenon that global communication produces and obstructs at the same time. In other words, migration is part of the global communication system, but it is also an obstacle to global communication, a product that the global communication system is unable to absorb: late capitalist globalized social reproduction is unable to absorb the phenomenon it produces. Migration involves masses of people that shift across the globe and cannot be transformed into merchandise and incorporated into the social reproduction cycle. The free circulation of potential migrants is constantly impeded, the “free labor market” and communication circuits shut down in the face of migration. Therefore, while the general tendency in global communication is to open frontiers and favor the circulation of commodities, migrants are excluded from these circuits (apart from that minimal part that can be transformed into the traditional emigration/immigration phenomenon). In global communication, migration does not converge with the circulation of labor force; migrants cannot be reduced to the status of workers and, instead, quickly become unwanted residues produced by the capitalist system. As such they contradict the labor market and obstruct its configuration as a worldwide and universal market.

Given that migrants cannot be absorbed by the labor market, they remain as individuals in their singularity and uniqueness in spite of themselves, incommensurable in terms of the abstract category of labor-in-general. In globalization, migration evidences the fact that the category of labor-in-general cannot be extended unlimitedly and that people can no longer be transformed into abstract individuals on the basis of the category of labor force, not even as labor force unable to sell itself on the market. The upshot is that these single unique individuals cannot be legally admitted to the “developed countries” toward which they are headed from the “underdeveloped” areas of the world: consequently, the right to

labor translates into the request for hospitality (Petrilli, 2005b, 2008a: 113–41; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2006). In terms of official discourse, this situation is reflected in language that distinguishes between the person who belongs to a given community, the regular “citizen,” and the person who does not, the unwanted migrant. The latter is most often variously designated with racist stereotypes of the ethnic, cultural, or religious order, etc. These include such expressions as “alien,” “illegal,” “asylum seeker,” “extracommunitarian,” “sans papier,” and “queue jumper.”

While the unemployed person is labor force that no longer sells on the market, the migrant is not even that. Migrants cannot be qualified in terms of the general category of labor; consequently they cannot even be considered as abstractions relative to the “search for work, for generic work.” And yet, though they are different phenomena, unemployment (which, like migration, is on the rise) and migration tend to converge in the sense that both present residues that are produced by the global social reproduction system. Progress in technology and automation produces unemployment. This implies that like migration and far from being a passing contingency, unemployment is structural to the capitalist production system in its advanced phase of development. Automation puts the unemployed in the condition of nonlabor, of excess with respect to the labor market. Like the migrant and in spite of himself or herself, the unemployed person too represents the absolute other with respect to identity logic in the late capitalist social reproduction system.

From this point of view, both migrants and the unemployed are what we propose to call “extracommunitarians”; both testify to the need for nonidentity communities, for communities founded on the logic of absolute otherness. However, despite these similarities, a basic difference distinguishes them: the unemployed are perceived as belonging to the community, migrants are not. The difference is established by the system and belongs to a sphere (“economics,” “reality,” “being”) that resists any claims to “the rights of man” (“equality,” “freedom,” “fraternity”). This difference is striking when expressed in racist terms no less than by the unemployed person against the migrant. Homologation is associated with the idea of equivalence and commensurability and is inherent to the logic of “equal exchange,” the condition for abstraction—but this process finds an obstacle in migration and unemployment.

Recent opinion polls in Italy reveal that a high percentage of Italians are favorable to resorting to the armed forces to guarantee security and control over frontiers, therefore over illegal migratory fluxes. This is indicative of a situation of widespread fear of the other. Xenophobia is

on the rise in Europe as over the globe generally. But fear of the alien is only one aspect of fear of the other. In reality, the object of fear is not the foreigner *tout court*, but the foreigner alien to the identity of a given community—whether the sociocultural, religious, political, or economic community. “Extracommunitarian” is the expression introduced by the European community for this type of alien and is an expression that can be generalized.

2.6 The Extracommunitarian Other

In accordance with the logic of binary opposition, all community identities have their own “extracommunitarian” to fear and from which to defend themselves. The extracommunitarian is the other, different from every other relating to the same community—not only different from every equal other forming the same community, but also from every different and opposite other within that same community. This claim applies to the large collective community as much as to the small community forming personal identity, the individual subject. By contrast with “community” generally understood as indicating a closed community regulated by the logic of identity (Tönnies, 1887; in the lexicon of Nazi Germany, *Gesellschaft*, society, was replaced by *Gemeinschaft*, community), this same term may be used (for lack of a better one) to indicate a form of sociality that is open to the logic of otherness, the open community, including the community forming the “open self,” as Charles Morris says (1948a). This concept of community is not based on the logic of equal exchange, which includes buying and selling labor force, and is free from obsession with identity, understood in terms of closed, egocentric, and shortsighted identity.

Subjectivity is formed by a community of selves variously interconnected either by relations of coherence, dialogue, peaceful coexistence or, instead, by hierarchical relations based on the logic of power and conflict. In any case, these relations concern the same function of self. According to the logic of identity, the other appears as a similar other, “other” in a relative sense, one’s “alter ego” with respect to self, manifest in a given role carried out by self with respect to another, etc. However, beyond this community of selves based on the logic of identity and “relative otherness” is the open community based on “nonrelative otherness,” that is, “absolute otherness.”

Absolute otherness is foundational for identity of the self, the condition for the formation of self which, however, is irreducible to identity thus conceived, like the self of self-consciousness. Absolute otherness

characterizes each one of us in terms of singularity, uniqueness, otherness from self; it precedes roles, choices, standpoints taken by self. Absolute otherness is nonrelative otherness, otherness connected with the body itself: not the individual body, the body as we imagine it to ourselves as self, as subject, but rather the body as the material of intercorporeal interconnection with the world and with others. The condition of intercorporeity precedes the bourgeois conception of the individual body whose level of autonomy, independency, freedom, self-belonging is relative to (the imaginary of) the social system it belongs to. The embodied self as it emerges from relations of intercorporeity and interconnectedness with the world, human and nonhuman, with others, is refractory to the tyranny of the subject, to the conscious of egocentric self. The “semiotic materiality” of subjectivity, the fact that the identity’s “multiplicity” and the “conscious” do not converge indicates the presence of otherness, absolute otherness, excess within the egological community itself (on the concept of “semiotic materiality,” see 5.9)

Singularity, uniqueness, absolute otherness of the single individual cannot be reduced to the identity of a genre, an assemblage, a group, or category of some sort—whether gender, race, class, religion, etc. In other words, absolute otherness, singularity, cannot be reduced to the individual’s identity determined on the basis of genre (see Petrilli, 2007b, 2008b: 33–64; Ponzio, 2007). Identity understood in terms of absolute otherness resists and is not reducible to identity, to self understood in terms of relative otherness. Absolute otherness is part of egological identity; it is structural to egological identity, but does not converge with identity understood in terms of relative otherness, the otherness of any one of the different selves constituting the community identity of each single individual. On the contrary, absolute otherness is the condition for the constitution of relative otherness, an a priori for the constitution of the different I’s, the different selves that form community identity. Absolute otherness is before and beyond the constitution of identity; it denotes singularity, the extracommunitarian in each one of us, the each of every one of us.

Thanks to the logic of otherness, absolute otherness, which characterizes each one of us in our singularity, the communities we constitute, and in which we are constituted, are extracommunitarian to themselves. With globalization and global communication, the formation of extracommunitarian societies as we are describing them is no less than a necessity worldwide. According to the same logic, the opposition between West and East has also become irrelevant. In extracommunitarian communities, “cultural difference” is best understood in terms of

“transculturalism” rather than of “interculturalism” and “pluri- or multiculturalism.” Transculturalism implies the welcome, listening, hospitality toward the other. Instead, interculturalism and pluri- or multiculturalism continue to imply persistence of difference based on the logic of identity, interpersonal relations based on the generic, on indifference and compliant tolerance with respect to the generic other.

On one hand, the subject claims difference relatively to a genre, whether gender, class, race, ethnic group, religion, nation, etc. In this case, difference is connected with identity, identity of the genre, therefore with the rights of identity, of relative otherness. On the other hand, subjectivity claims difference in terms of singularity, the other outside genre, outside an assemblage of any sort. In this case, difference is connected with the absolute otherness of each and every one of us, therefore with the rights of the other, of absolute otherness. Singularity or uniqueness represents an excess with respect to closed identity and social roles acted out by identity thus conceived, an excess that persists despite all efforts to absorb it. But these efforts only serve to justify attempts at rejecting and expelling the other, at sacrificing and eliminating the other. Absolute otherness of the single, unique individual implies absolute responsibility toward the other, responsibility without alibis. The absolute other calls for hospitality.

The “extracommunitarian” interrogates community identity and its laws and demands a response. But a satisfactory response to the extracommunitarian’s request for hospitality can only come from the condition itself of extracommunitarian, that is, from absolute and non-relative otherness, from the condition of “otherwise than being,” to use an expression introduced by Emmanuel Levinas (1978), with respect to the logic of the closed community, of community identity. This response implies critique of the community conceived in terms of closed identity and characterized by difference–indifference, alibis and limited responsibility, denial of unindifference, for example, on behalf of race, history, ethnicity, nation, region, religion, political party, the individual. Community logic tends to exclude, segregate, and sacrifice otherness, absolute otherness, otherness of the single, unique individual, but will never succeed in eliminating it completely. The extracommunitarian requests that the community should open to the absolute other with its request for hospitality, that it should welcome the other.

However, the extracommunitarian’s request for an open community is most often registered as a threat to identity and to community assemblages. How many measures and precautions—political,

economical, juridical, etc.—are necessary to push away this threat? How many armies, justifications, alibis? But at the same time, this request offers an opportunity—the last?—to free our otherness from the chains of closed identity, which means an opportunity to develop as unique, single individuals freed from the hard crust of identity, from identification with a genre, from the logic of equal exchange and interchangeability, which this type of identification implies; an opportunity to flourish as single individuals, rendered unique by the condition of unindifference, by the other as witness, by the condition of unlimited and unconditional responsibility for the other, which means to say responsibility without alibis. The request for hospitality offers an opportunity to transcend the social as the place of mutual indifference, as the place of encounter and clash among private interests; an opportunity to open all community spaces to the extracommunitarian, that is, to create communities that are structurally extracommunitarian, that are oriented by the logic of detotalization, by the capacity for listening to the other, outside the logic of closed identity, of the subject, for a reformulation of the community, collective and individual, founded on the logic of otherness, nonrelative, absolute otherness.

Identity wishes to forget the condition of obsession with the other. But such phenomena as migration and unemployment make this impossible, as they remind us, indeed face us with a fact we already know, that the body already knows: that to exclude the other is impossible. Historical languages, cultures, technics, industries, markets all know well that the other can be repressed, but never eliminated. National, ethnic, religious, ideological identities know this; individual identities, identities connected with class, role, gender, with any type of assemblage or genre, know this, even when they persist in their indifference to the other. But above all “intransitive” forms of writing, verbal and nonverbal, know that the other cannot be excluded or evaded; art forms, all those practices free from the obsession with identity, practices that involve nomadism, migration, shift in structural terms, as part of expressive procedure, know that the other cannot be eliminated.

2.7 Transcultural Communication, Ideology, and Social Planning

Coherently with capitalist ideology, the center of the world detains control over communication circuits and dominates over the periphery. In other words, in the era of global communication, the so-called developed

world, which today is even more degraded and dehumanized, continues to exploit the so-called underdeveloped world, which is expanding and is ever more proletarianized and pauperized. In a globalizing world, change simply means to readjust the parameters of dominion in terms of a “glocalizing world.” In spite of multinationals, the amplification of communication scenarios, encounter among different cultures, and foreignization, we are faced by the same misery: exploitation and profit-making by a few at the expense of many—phenomena on the rise at a worldwide level in “globalization” as global communication-production imposes itself as the only social reproduction system now possible. This phase in social reproduction is mostly qualified with the prefix “post-.” Another *passé-partout* expression is “cultural interaction,” which is also applied to translation processes. Other qualifying terms that circulate in global discourse today and call for reflection include “interculturalism,” “multiculturalism,” “hybridization,” “contamination,” in addition to such expressions as “postcapitalism,” “postcolonialism,” “postapartheid.”

We know that social reproduction today presents itself in terms of globalization, global communication, communication-production. Therefore, intercultural or, better, transcultural communication is now communication across languages, cultures, and value systems in a globalized world. From a semiotic point of view, to identify the context of communication today in globalization, in global communication-production means to evidence the interconnection between signs, ideology, and social programs as thematized, for example, by Rossi-Landi. In his monograph *Language as Work and Trade* (1968, Eng. trans. 1983), he analyzes language in terms of the relation between labor, trade, and consumption in global communication-production circuits and describes the homology relating the production of artifacts to the production of language.

Sign systems are the material of social reproduction, just as they are the material of human behavior, which is social signifying behavior. Behavior, whether conscious or unconscious, is programmed behavior, that is, behavior regulated by social programs. The individual may or may not be aware of the fact that behavior is organized socially, but all the same, as a social being, the individual behaves according to programs, whether one knows it or not. Rossi-Landi distinguishes between the expressions “program” properly understood, “project” and “plan”: a program is part of a project and a project is part of a plan. A plan is what we normally call ideology, and ideology can be defined as a social plan with specific

social interests, models, goals, and perspectives. A given ideology is always connected with the interests of a given social group or assemblage (for all these aspects, see Rossi-Landi, 1972, 1978, 1992).

That behavior is programmed behavior means that it is part of contexts that are progressively larger and inclusive, as in a series of concentric circles. Consequently, the idea of spontaneous or natural behavior in the human world is a mystification, for human behavior is always programmed behavior to varying degrees. Moreover, the idea that ideology has come to an end is simply another ideological mystification, the expression of a specific ideology now become dominant. The social sign systems that regulate individual behavior are pseudo-totalities that function as pieces in larger totalities. All social programs are controlled by a higher social level. The social interests of given communities are connected with verbal and nonverbal communication programs which are part of given social projects which, in turn, are part of given social plans.

The problem of ideology as social planning raises the problem of power and of the conditions that make control over human behavior possible in situations that are defined politically. The production and circulation of signs converges with the production and circulation of ideologies. Progression from smaller pseudo-totalities and their programs to larger totalities and their programs, projects, and plans, in which the former are inserted, affords a general overview of the control mechanisms that social programs exert upon each other concentrically. The processes involved are mostly retroactive and not unidirectional (in other words, they are not mechanical cause and effect processes, but dialectical processes, or, in the terminology of engineering, feedback processes). From a semiotic perspective, it is important to underline that this whole system coincides with the general global communication system. Whoever controls the system, or at least consistent parts of it, is in the best position to reach a situation of hegemony and power.

In a world of global markets and global capital, dominant ideology is so pervasive that it converges with the logic of social reality. From this point of view, rather than “logic” the more appropriate expression is “ideo-logic,” therefore “the ideo-logic of social reality” (Petrilli, 2004a, b). In global communication, great ideological narratives are in crisis and have been replaced by dominant communication-production ideology (or ideo-logic). In all societies, power is attained, organized, and reproduced through control over the communication network. But only

in the present day and age has the extent to which this is true becomes clear. Hegemony in the communication-production phase is not only the result of owning capital in the form of property and assets, etc., but is now largely, if not mostly, connected with control over the communication network together with exchange relations at the level of market and production. The ruling class is the class that controls communication, as clearly evidenced by Rossi-Landi (1978 and 1992; see also Petrilli, 1994, 1995b).

Transcultural communication involves intercultural and interlingual translation and can only be adequately understood keeping account of the connection between signs and the ideo-logic of the social reproduction system. The whole system of social reproduction is in communication and, therefore, in signs, verbal and nonverbal signs. Intersemiotic, interlingual, and endolingual translations are a constituent part of social structures and production processes (see 6.2). Communication, ideology, and production systems are interconnected in today's globalized world more than ever before and inevitably involve cultural interaction among different sign systems accompanied by processes of hybridization, domestication, and contamination among the different "post-" phenomena. To examine ideo-logic value in translation across different linguistic and cultural systems intended to enhance global communication functional to the social reproduction cycle, to the market, means to consider communication as a function of the production, exchange, and consumption of "signs and bodies" (Petrilli, 2010: 137–58). Transcultural translational processes are structural to global communication and consequently are influenced by its characteristics and functions. "Real politics," as anticipated, is the only kind of politics recognized by global communication understood as communication-production. This political-ideological dimension of communication is reflected in the function of translation understood as "cultural interaction." And an important aspect of cultural interaction or inter- or transcultural translation is the relation between the center and the periphery, that is, between target language and culture, on the one hand, and source language and culture, on the other.

Persistence of communication-production, in spite of all posts-, is *persistence of the same social reproduction system* over the planet, with all necessary adjustments for its survival (consider, for example, postapartheid in South Africa). Translation is an important instrument in reaching this target. World planning today is based on the productive character of communication and on the identification of communication

with “being” in social reproduction. But this plan is also based on the fact that control over social reproduction can only be achieved through control over communication, and transcultural communication is an important part of the game. Critical reflection on translation processes across languages, cultures, and values must address such issues, especially when a question of establishing the tasks and targets of the work of translation. From this point of view, a critique of translation and its functions in the processes of transcultural communication cannot be separated from a critique of the communication-production system and of the reproduction processes of that same system.

As has frequently been the case throughout history, institutions deriving from preceding economic, social, and cultural systems with their stereotypes and ideologies coexist as integral parts of the current society. This also applies to such concepts as “identity” and “difference” and to the social rules and conventions that regulate these concepts. Identity and difference imply transcultural communication together with the risk that interlingual translational processes may contribute to the homologation of identities and differences, linguistic and cultural, to their negation, thereby favoring the few and the survival of not many more.

Obsession with identity, with the “closed self,” is incompatible with such concepts as “social democracy” and “human rights.” As Levinas underlines in an essay originally published in the collective volume, *L’indivisibilité des droits de l’homme* (1985) and subsequently included in his monograph, *Hors sujet* (1987b), human rights are substantially conceived to be the rights of identity and never the rights of the other. The expression “human rights and the rights of the other” is symptomatic of the contradiction between claiming the rights of identity in the name of *human rights*, on the one hand, and claiming the rights of otherness, that is, the rights of the *other*, on the other hand. In *Voyous* (2003), Jacques Derrida underlines the mystifying nature of the expression “democracy” in such descriptions as “the present democracy,” or “our democracy,” commenting that “*la démocratie [est] à venir: il faut que ça donne le temps qu’il n’y a pas.*” Just as ambiguous is the concept of “freedom” and correlate expressions such as “free enterprise.” On Morris’s account, the *passé-partout* word “democracy” has become so ambiguous that in *The Open Self* he had already chosen to avoid it, observing that all sweet words are soured by misuse:

“Democracy” has become a strongly appraisive term, designatively unclear. To call oneself democratic is now as unrevealing, and as inevitable, as for politicians to be

photographed with babies. We have been told by one who ought to know that when fascism conquers America it will do so in the name of democracy. In fact, whatever is now done in America—or elsewhere on the earth—will be done in the name of democracy. So we need to talk concretely. None of the grandiose labels we bandy about is of much value today. The actual problems of the contemporary world are not helped by invoking such overworked words as “individualism,” “socialism,” “capitalism,” “liberalism,” “communism,” “fascism,” “democracy.” These terms are loaded appraisals. Each culture, and each group, will use them to its own advantage. If we were to use the term “democracy” designatively it would be synonymous with the phrase “open society of open selves.” But since we have this more exact phrase, and since no labels are sacred or indispensable, we can dispense with the word “democracy.” (Morris, 1948a: 156)

3

From Reason to Reasonableness: A Semioethic Approach to Subjectivity

*The essence of language is goodness, friendship,
hospitality.*

—Emmanuel Levinas

3.1 Listening, Hospitality, Restitution

In spite of good intentions, such expressions as “intercultural” and “multicultural” no less than “hybridization,” “contamination,” “postcapitalism,” “postcolonialism,” “postapartheid” all tend to remain anchored in the logic of identity and belonging. The logic of power and control persists which means that social practices of exclusion, more or less subtle, more or less manifest, also continue to persevere. When critical consciousness is inadequate, the expressions above resound as mystifications not only in the language of everyday life, but also in intellectual language, in the language of the sciences. The truth is that relations among cultural identities in the globalized world have become so tense that they easily degenerate into relations of mutual exclusion, violence, even destruction. This is all the more reason why the sign sciences today need to develop a trans-semiotic perspective capable of appreciating the complexity of a semiosphere originally regulated by the logic of dialogism and otherness. With special reference to the cultural semiosphere, this means to address the question of difference among signs that are not indifferent to each other, but that instead relate to each other on the basis of the logic of listening and hospitality (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2006).

Language and communication in the human world find their condition of possibility in the logic of otherness. This is to say that they subsist and

develop in the relation with the other, where the other is understood as an end in itself, in its uniqueness, outside the logic of identity and social roles, outside the logic of national, ethnic, and cultural difference. The I–other relation is a face-to-face relation (Levinas, 1935–36, 1948, 1961), a relation among singularities, between one single, unique individual and another. This relation rejects all forms of exclusion of the other, all forms of violence. It is presupposed by all forms of communication and representation, by all forms of objectification and nomination of the other. In this relation, the self is responsible toward the other in an absolute sense, which means to say without alibis (Bakhtin, 1920–24, 1990), without the possibility of escape: the self must respond to the other and for the other. All forms of communication presuppose hospitality toward the interlocutor.

The word, whether written or oral, is addressed to the other, to the otherness of the other which is contextualized in the face-to-face relation, and as such can neither be represented nor thematized. Listening to the other transcends space and time as these pertain to the world, to the world as it is, to the world of labor and labor-time – all of which pertain to war. In the economy of world logic thus described, peace is no more than momentary repose necessary to gather up strength and continue war, just as free-time and the night serve the day (Blanchot, 1949, 1969, 1973). Contrary to labor-time (that is, paid labor-time) and free-time, which are based on the logic of equal exchange, (the time of) listening belongs to the order of gift logic. That is to say, listening and listening-related practices involve a gift of time to the other (Vaughan, 1997, 2004). And from the perspective of the properly human, time for the other, the relation with the other represent the real social wealth.

In such a framework, transcultural communication can be conceived as communication for others, reconstruction with others, restitution to others of difference that is unindifferent to the difference of others. Transcultural communication, that is to say, translation across cultures and languages, can contribute to the condition of planetary interconnection without closed communities, without the signs of closed identities, which is what *post-* should be understood to mean. Transculturalism, translanguistics, transgender, transemiosis, etc., are all expressions that contribute to delineating an ideological perspective that is open to the otherness of the other, to encounter among languages and cultures beyond the logic of identity and belonging, beyond stereotypes and mystifications, in the dynamics between continuity and discontinuity, stability and uncertainty, opening and resistance, as characterizes signs in transit.

Storytelling is a form of communication—whether through verbal signs (oral or written) or nonverbal signs—that can be traced across the globe historically, a communicative practice based on listening and hospitality involving relations among singularities, the each of every one of us from different cultures and languages worldwide. Instead, global communication as it is commonly understood today in globalization characteristically involves forms of interconnection that are altogether different and by comparison relatively recent. “Global communication” is subject to the world market and to the processes of general commodification that characterize it. As such it is structural to globalization, therefore to what we have designated as “communication-production” society (see chapters 1 and 2). A distinctive feature of global communication-production is homologation, the tendency to level differences. Paradoxically, however, such an attitude ultimately leads to exasperating identities, individualisms, and separatisms of both the individual and community orders, and to reinforcing the mechanisms of competitiveness, conflict, and mutual exclusion. The paroxysmic search for identity or difference results in sacrificing the other. Difference functional to self-assertion, that demands recognition, is difference indifferent to other differences, to other identities. The condition of indifferent difference is achieved by repressing and sacrificing otherness in its various forms and to varying degrees—internal otherness and external otherness.

Instead, far from denying differences, storytelling exalts and interconnects them on the basis of the logic of mutual hospitality. Not only does storytelling favor encounter, listening, and understanding among different peoples, but it flourishes on and presupposes encounter, listening, and understanding. Storytelling consists of sharing and creating dialogic relations among differences across different languages, cultures, and discourse genres, relations regulated by the logic of otherness, by the practice of hospitality, interest and care for the other as other, *autrui*, and therefore by the logic of restitution. As testified by a common world patrimony of stories, legends, tales, fables, myths, parables, sayings, proverbs, etc., storytelling throughout the centuries has acted as a common heritage and kind of connective tissue favoring the circulation of common themes, subjects, values, and discourse genres and forming a web uniting different peoples across the world (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2001b). In contemporary society, communication is mostly oriented to a pathological degree by self-interest, that is, by the logic of personal advantage, profit and gain. Instead, in storytelling, communication is

oriented by the *interesting*, where that which counts is one's relation to the other, one's interest in the other *per se*.

The practice of narrativity is manifest in different types of discourse genres, including the novel, which is the most representative literary genre of our day. It is also manifest in the different kinds of media, whether through writing or orality, for example, in filmic discourse. The common characteristic of storytelling is that it is an end in itself, uniquely animated by the pleasure of invoking the other, of involving the other, of listening to the other. As such storytelling is distinct from the type of narrativity that serves power: the power to control and punish (stories narrated before a judge or police officer), the power to inform (newspaper chronicles), the power to heal (a medical case history that the physician draws from the patient, the story recounted by a patient during a psychoanalytical session), the power to redeem and save (confession, a discipline of the Roman church), the power to record and establish the Sense of History (as reconstructed by the historian), and so forth (Blanchot, 1973). But the practice of storytelling suspends the order of discourse which, instead, global communication is programmed to serve. As such storytelling offers spaces that interrupt the communication-production flow and allow for reflection, critical rethinking, dialogue, encounter, hospitality. For this very reason, with respect to the order of discourse storytelling is more or less suspect, more or less subversive.

Recalling the term *orature* introduced by Claude Hagège (1985), with coauthor Augusto Ponzio, we have coined the term *oraliture* by analogy with *écriture* (writing) to designate orality, or, better, the oral style of discourse, and confer validity upon it as a vehicle of knowledge and experience, similarly to writing. *Orature* is used to indicate the elements of orality in novelistic discourse (Paré, 1997), whereas the term *oraliture* is preferred to *orature* by Ponzio and myself for reference to the different genres of literature—short stories, legends, proverbs, rhymes, songs, etc.—that present orality, but in the form of writing, that is, translated into written genres and more or less complex literary expression. The expression *oraliture* is not only intended to evidence the fact that orality becomes writing insofar as it is transcribed or finds expression in the different forms of literary writing, but also that orality itself is already writing, manifest in different forms of nonwritten literature—writing *avant la lettre* (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003a: 7–11). No less than written literature and beyond its communicative function, *oraliture* is a modeling device; in other words, it models worldview and is endowed with

a capacity for creativity, innovation, and inventiveness, for “the play of musement,” to use an expression introduced by Charles S. Peirce (*CP* 6.458–461), and developed into the title of his monograph dedicated to the concept by Thomas A. Sebeok (1981).

3.2 Redefining the Subject

The concepts of “identity” and “subjectivity” are closely interconnected and play a central role in global and world communication—whether a question of the identity of an individual subject or of a collective subject, a community subject whatever the dimensions (Western world, European Community, nation, ethnic group, social class, etc.). However, the concepts of individual identity and collective or community identity need to be revisited in a semiotic key, remembering that in both cases identity is either oriented monologically or dialogically, and which of the two makes a profound difference.

Charles Peirce has contributed to redefining human subjectivity from a semiotic perspective. The human being, the I, the subject is an extremely complex sign made of verbal and nonverbal semiosis processes and of “language.” Moreover, the interpretive-propositional vocation of human semiosis allows for the generation of a potentially infinite number of signifying trajectories which may be characterized in terms of dialogism and otherness. With reference to verbal signs, says Peirce, “Men and words educate each other reciprocally; every increase in a man’s information involves and is involved by a corresponding increase in word information” (*CP* 5.313). Consciousness converges with the word given that “the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself” (*CP* 5.314; see 7.4). As a developing sign, the subject is dialogical and relational, an *open* subject in becoming in the intrapersonal and interpersonal relation with other signs and other subjects. The boundaries of the subject-sign are not defined once and for all, but can only be traced in the dialogic encounter with other signs. As Peirce says, when one studies the great principle of continuity, what he calls synechism, and sees that all is fluid, that every being is connected to every other, “it will appear that individualism and falsity are one and the same” (*CP* 5.402, n. 2). Human beings are possible members of society and are not whole so long as they are single, that is, stand separately from each other. One person’s experience is nothing, if it stands alone. “If he sees what others cannot, we call it hallucination. It is not ‘my’ experience, but ‘our’ experience that has to be thought of; and this ‘us’ has indefinite possibilities” (*Ibid.*). Individual action is a

means and not an end, just as individual pleasure is not our end: “we are all putting our shoulders to the wheel for an end that none of us can catch more than a glimpse at—that which the generations are working out. But we can see that the development of embodied ideas is what it will consist in” (Ibid.).

The single individual develops in sociality, in the relation with the experiences of others, and never in isolation. The self is a community in itself, a community of dialogically interrelated open selves, subject to the logic of otherness. The word “in-dividual” interpreted literally means “non-divided, non-divisible.” Again in Peirce’s own words, it is as follows:

Two things here are all-important to assure oneself of and to remember. The first is that a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is “saying to himself,” that is, is saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man’s circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respect of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. (*CP* 5.421)

Peirce contrasts the concepts of “personality,” “personal self,” “in-dividual self,” which imply a self-sufficient self, or, as he says, a finite self, with the concept of self in communion with other selves. The finite self, the “personal self,” is an “illusory phenomenon.” However, the different forms of egotism are not aware of this and the illusion of being able to egotistically isolate oneself ends up creating the very conditions for such isolation.

The social and communal character of self does not contradict its singularity and uniqueness or capacity for otherness with respect to any interpretive process that may concern it. The uniqueness of self, its irreducibility to a single and fixed referent, is unveiled and developed in the relationship with the other. Insofar as it is unique, the self is ineffable (*CP* 1.357). Echoing Emmanuel Levinas, the self is saying beyond the said. The utterances of self convey significance beyond words. And yet the ineffability and uniqueness of self do not imply the sacrifice of communicability, for what the self is in itself (in its finiteness) can always be communicated to a degree, even if only to communicate the impossibility of communication. From a Peircean perspective neither absolute solitude nor muteness characterizes the human condition in its specificity, in its most profound nature.

The problem of subjectivity is also at the center of Victoria Welby's attention. Her unpublished manuscripts include a file entitled *Subjectivity*, which collects a series of original papers written between 1903 and 1910 (Welby Collection, York University Archives, Scott Library, Toronto, Canada, now in Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 6). The subject's identity is multiplex, plurifaceted, and plurivocal. It is delineated and modeled in the dialogical relation among its various parts. Welby analyzes subjectivity in terms of the complex and articulated relation between what she calls the "I," or, introducing a neologism, *Ident* and the "self" (see the manuscripts of 1907–10, in Petrilli, 2009a: 646–70). The "I" develops in the relation with the "self" or, rather, with the multiple *selves* constituting the different faces of the *Ident*. Here, too, otherness emerges as a necessary condition for the constitution of subjectivity.

Distinguishing between I and self, Welby clarifies that "the Self is included in 'I,' but not conversely. . . . The race like the individual *has* a Self because it *is* an 'I'" ("The I and the Self," undated manuscript). The self is a representation of the I, a part of it, what we *have* and therefore cannot *be*. The I is what we *are* and therefore alludes to what we cannot *possess*. My "I" belongs to others just as "mine" belongs to (but does not coincide with) me.

Like the body, the *self*—for which Welby also proposes the term *ephemeron*—is mortal, ephemeral. By contrast, the I tends toward immortality beyond the mortality of the self and the body. The I or *Ident* coincides with the logic of gift making, giving without return, beyond possession. As understood by Welby, it transcends closed identity and converges with the capacity to resist the violence of monologism, univocality, the order of discourse, the said. In other words, the *Ident* is oriented by the logic of otherness and is characterized by high degrees of "semiotic materiality" (see 5.9) in the continuous flow of interpretants whose rhythm is beaten out by the succession, superimposition, multiplication, and cohabitation of the multiple *selves* forming subjectivity.

Far from being unitary and compact, identity formed in this way presents an excess, something more compared to closed and fixed identity, what we might indicate as the condition of extraneity, *étrangété* beyond the grasp of intentional will. This strangeness, extraneity may also be translated in terms of absolute otherness, which emerges as a provocation and calls for responsiveness. Self does not coincide with the I but is one of its representations, an opening, a means, an instrument, or modality, a response, but never an end in itself. Therefore, contrary

to the tendency to exalt the self, to establish a relation of substitution, usurpation, identification between self and I, identity develops from the open relation of dialogic otherness between self and I as well as among the multiple selves that constitute the I. Identity is the ongoing, generative, and dynamic outcome of the relationship of dialogical distancing and differentiation of self from Ident. Welby's generative and responsive conception of human consciousness, where subjectivity emerges from the dynamics between activity and passivity in the relation among signs, recalls Peirce's as it emerges from his own writings on the sign.

Peirce maintains that "self-love is no love" (*CP* 6.288). Along similar lines, Welby contends that the ultimate "sin consists in OUR giving our selves leave to demand and secure gratification, pleasure, ease, for their own sake: to be greedy of welfare at some human expense." In other words, it consists in allowing the *self* to transform *selfness* into *selfishness*. Though the action of the centripetal forces of *self* may be necessary for "self-preservation *here*," for "survival *now*," the condition of being oriented univocally toward one's own self generally defeats evolutionary development to the extent that it generates "self-regarding selfishness." Indeed, in reality, "egotism, however, properly speaking, is impossible: I cannot love or centre upon I, for I am essentially that which radiates: that which IS the knowing, living, activity: it is only selfism that we mean; not egoism."

In Welby's view, hedonist ethics, the dominant ideology of her times (much like our own), implies reducing the vastness of the cosmos to the status of mere annex to the planetary egoist and parasite. Therefore, it implies monological identity, which means to reduce the degree of difference (that is, otherness) in the relation between I and self to the advantage of self, understood as univocal self, separate from one's multiple selves. On the contrary, the "supreme function of the Ident's *self*," as Welby says, is to put itself at the service of the Ident and to collaborate in generating, knowing, serving, mastering, and transfiguring our actual and possible worlds; the mission of our multiple selves being "to master the world for Identity in difference . . . The Ident is one in all, but also All in each. The Ident's name is first multiplex—We, Us, then complex, I, Me. That Ident has, possesses, works through—a self, or even many selves." As she writes in her unpublished papers on subjectivity, "It is precisely our di-visibility that forms the wealth of our gifts."

For both Welby and Peirce, the subject is a community of distinct but inseparable selves. These parts or selves do not exclude each other, but rather are interconnected by relations of reciprocal dependency regulated

by the logic of otherness and unindifference among differences. Such logic also resists unindifferentiated confusion among parts, therefore the tendency to level the other onto the monological self. As Welby says, “to confound is to sacrifice distinction.” To the extent that it represents an excess with respect to the sum of its parts, the I or Ident is not the “individual” but the “unique” which may be associated with the concept of “non-relative otherness” or “absolute otherness” as thematized by Levinas (1961), with the condition of *étrangeté* before and after the configuration of sign. Thus described subjectivity implies the capacity for an original relation of involvement, compromission, and unindifference toward the other and the world in their detotalized totality.

3.3 Otherness and Intercorporeity

Viewed in a semiotic key, the body is sign material structured interconnectedly with other bodies. This is the material through which the self acts, expresses itself, and communicates, in which the self is embodied, but not imprisoned. In the words of Peirce:

When I communicate my thought and my sentiments to a friend with whom I am in full sympathy, so that my feelings pass into him and I am conscious of what he feels, do I not live in his brain as well as in my own—most literally? True, my animal life is not there but my soul, my feeling thought attention are. . . . Each man has an identity which far transcends the mere animal;—an essence, a *meaning* subtle as it may be. He cannot know his own essential significance; of his eye it is eyebeam. But that he truly has this outreaching identity—such as a word has—is the true and exact expression of the fact of sympathy, fellow feeling—together with all unselfish interests—and all that makes us feel that he has an absolute worth. (*CP* 7.591)

That identity is embodied subjectivity, intercorporeal semiotic material, that is, incarnated in a body connected to other bodies in open-ended semiotic processes from the very outset, an expression of the condition of semiotic intercorporeity on both a synchronic and diachronic level for the whole of life, that subjectivity is not incarnated in a body isolated from other bodies and signs, that the body is in the sign is not indifferent to our conception of human subjectivity. The subject is incarnate sign material from the point of view of biological evolution, of the species, as much as from the point of view of sociality and cultural history.

The body plays a fundamental role in the development of awareness or consciousness. Consciousness is incarnate consciousness. The body is a condition for the full development of consciousness and inferential processes, therefore of the human being as a “semiotic animal.” The self develops interrelatedly with other bodies and signs through which it

extends its boundaries, which are also the boundaries of one's knowledge and experience of the other, of the world as it is experienced. Peirce uses the expression "flesh and blood" to refer to the body (*CP* 7.591), which also serves to highlight the different dimensions of the body—the body within the boundaries of physical-organic material, by contrast to the body understood as semiotic material, sign material, which ultimately has a physical referent always, even though it may not be immediately obvious, as in the case of dreaming or of silent thought. The word is an extension of the body. Echoing Mikhail M. Bakhtin through Valentin N. Voloshinov author of an essay of 1928 on recent tendencies in Western linguistics, the word forms a bridge joining one's own body to the body of the other; it represents common territory uniting speaker to interlocutor such that to speak means somehow to respond to the interlocutor, that is, it involves responsiveness to the other, to the community and its expectations. Similarly to the word, the self in Peirce's conception is "outreaching identity," what we can also describe as inferential and transcendent identity in the ongoing interrelation between physical-organic materiality and sign materiality (on the concept of "materiality" in the sense introduced here, see Petrilli, 2010: 137–151).

3.4 Mother-Sense: An A Priori for Subjectivity, Signification, and Critique

In another series of unpublished manuscripts written at the beginning of the twentieth century (see Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 6), Welby formulates the original concept of *mother-sense* (also designated with the expressions *primal sense* and its variant *primary sense*). Mother-sense may be described as a device for modeling worldviews, for their construction and interpretation, and for the generation of sense—"sense," "meaning" and "significance" are the three levels of meaning theorized by Welby with her signifiacs (1893, 1896, 1903). This device is common to humanity and from this point of view may also be indicated as "common mother-sense," recalling expressions introduced by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi with his concepts of "common speech" and "common semiosis" (1961, 1992). Welby distinguishes between "sense" and "mother-sense," on the one hand, and "intellect" and "father-reason," on the other. This distinction indicates two fundamental cross-gender modalities in the generation and interpretation of sense producing processes, where "sense" is broadly understood to include "meaning" and "significance." Such processes may be isolated by way of abstraction, hypothetically, for the sake of

theorization, but on a pragmatic level, in the reality of concrete signifying practice, they are strictly interrelated (for all these aspects, see Petrilli, 2009a: 573–730, which also includes papers by Welby published for the first time).

On Welby's account, "mother-sense" is the condition for sense, creativity and critique. In my own terminology, it is regulated by the principle of dia-logic otherness and is the condition for the acquisition of knowledge through feeling, perception, intuition, and creative leaps. Beyond the logical processes of the intellect, of reasoning, mother-sense is the condition for *sympathetic understanding*, to evoke Peirce, for *responsive understanding*, in the language of Bakhtin, for creativity, intuition, and transcendence with respect to the limits of the logic of identity. Mother-sense, according to Peirce (who also introduces the expression "mother-wit"), allows for the idea to be intuited before it is possessed or before it possesses us. It is a capacity specific to humanity, says Welby, "knowledge of the race" which transcends gender, "an inheritance common to humanity," as much as woman may emerge as its main guardian on a historico-social level.

The intellect engenders *rational* knowledge through processes of reasoning, asserting, generalizing about data observed and experimented in science, logic, and everyday life. A limit consists in the tendency to allow for the tyranny of data which we intend to possess, but which instead possesses us. The intellect is a cognitive capacity often ruled by dominant ideology, which is most often monological ideology, therefore by the order of discourse, by the logic of dogma and convention. Moreover, the sphere of intellectual knowledge is mostly entrusted to the jurisdiction of the male, simply for sociocultural reasons and not because of some special natural propensity for rational reasoning exclusive to masculinity. Healthy intellect derives from mother-sense and must never be separated from it: otherwise, the penalty is loss in sense and significance, in the faculty for creativity and critique, leveling of the capacity for dialogic multivoicedness and polylogism. That which the intellect must exert itself to know mother-sense already experiences in a broad sense, that is, already knows in terms of intuition, perception, and feeling.

Mother-sense (in addition to "primal sense" and "primary sense," other synonyms introduced by Welby include "original sense," "racial sense," "native sense," "matrix") is connected with signifying processes oriented by the logic of otherness and iconicity; as anticipated, it alludes to the creative and generative forces of sense resulting from the capacity

to associate things which seem distant, but instead are attracted to each other; from the point of view of argumentation, it allows for logical procedure of the abductive type—which is regulated by the logic of otherness, creativity, dialogism, freedom, and desire (abduction is one of three types of inferential processes theorized by Peirce, the other two being deduction and induction). Peirce explicitly associates desire to meaning understood in both semiotic and axiological terms. Welby's correspondence with Mary Everest Boole (wife of the famous logician and mathematician George Boole and writer in her own right) is largely dedicated to discussing the laws of thought and the connection between logic, love, passion, and power (see Cust, 1929: 86–92; and Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 2).

According to Welby, logic proper is the place where the broader generative dimensions of sense (the original, primal, racial, mother-sense dimension, the “matrix”) interweave with reason dialectically, or, better, dialogically. The relation of responsive understanding (or answering comprehension) and reciprocal empowering between primal sense and rational life is necessary to the full development of critical sense and to the attainment of maximum value, meaning, and purport as regards experience in its complex and open totality. Welby's mother-sense brings into focus the value of significance before and after signification, as Levinas (1978) would say. Mother-sense concerns both the real and the ideal aspects of our signifying practices: the real insofar as it concerns the concrete aspects of praxis and the ideal insofar as it is the condition by virtue of which humanity may aspire to continuity and perfection in the generation of actual and possible worlds and of signifying processes at large.

Welby's conception of logic may also be associated with Peirce's when he claims that the great principle of logic is “self-surrender,” which we may translate as “passivity” (from the Latin *passivus* “capable of feeling or suffering,” from *pass-*, pp. stem of *pati* “to suffer,” also associated with “passion”), which means to regulate inferential processes according to the logic of opening to the other, of dialogic otherness (see 6.6). Nor does the principle of self-surrender from a pragmatic viewpoint imply that self is to lay low for the sake of an ultimate triumph. Even if attained, this must not be the governing purpose of any action (*CP* 5.402, n. 2). In a letter of 21 January 1909, Welby agrees with Peirce's observation that logic is the “ethics of the intellect,” which she relates to her own conception of primal sense: “Of course I assent to your

definition of a logical inference, and agree that Logic is in fact an application of morality in the largest and highest sense of the word. That is entirely consonant with the witness of Primal Sense” (in Hardwick, 1977: 91). Scientific rigor in reasoning is founded on mother-sense and is closely interconnected with logical procedure of the agapastic type, therefore with the logic of otherness, inexactitude, instability, and crisis, considered to be no less than structural to the evolution of sign, subjectivity, and signifying processes. Moreover, the critical instance of logical procedure, specially when a question of abduction, that is, logical procedure governed by the iconic relation of similarity, allows for prevision and is propositional. This type of logical procedure is favored by translational processes across different sign systems, therefore by the processes of interpretation, verification, and development of the signs of one sign system through the interpretant signs of another, whether verbal or nonverbal (see 8.1, 8.4; and Petrilli, 2007c).

The self’s vulnerability and readiness to venture toward the other, with all the risks that such movement implies, were portrayed by Plato and the myth featuring Eros (in the *Symposium*), a sort of intermediate divinity or demon generated by Penia (poverty, need) and Poros (the God of ingenuity), who finds his way even when it is hidden. According to Welby, a condition for the evolution of humanity is the connection between self-enrichment and risky opening toward the other. With reference to this connection, she elaborates a critique of “being satisfied” and theorizes the capacity for “transcendence” with respect to the world as it is, to ontological being that is given once and for all: “We all tend now, men and women, to be satisfied with things as they are. But we have all entered the world precisely to be dissatisfied with it.” “Dissatisfaction” is an important aspect of “mother-sense” and signals the need to recover the critical instance of the human intellectual capacity, the propensity for questioning in one’s search for the other. This implies the human species-specific capacity for dialogic displacement of sense in the deferral among signs—a movement which emerges as part of the human condition of extraneity, *étrangété* which drives one’s search for the other, one’s response to the other.

3.5 Semioethics and Humanism of the Other, a Way Out

A special task for semioethics is to evidence the biosemiotic condition of dialogic involvement among signs, the condition of intercorporeity, interconnectedness, therefore to unmask the delusory claim to the

status of indifferent differences. Semioethics is committed to a new form of humanism based on the logic of otherness, humanism of the other. This also emerges from its commitment to pragmatics and focus on the relation between signs, values, and behavior. Moreover, semioethics aims to transcend separatism among the sciences, insisting on the interrelation between the human sciences, the historico-social sciences, and the natural, logico-mathematical sciences. This new form of humanism is humanism of the other as thematized by Levinas throughout all his writings, in particular *Humanisme de l'autre homme* (1972). Humanism of the other involves a “movement” without return to the subject, a movement which Levinas calls *œuvre*, exposition to otherness with all the risks this involves: hybridization of identity, fragmentation, impossibility of reassuring monologism, evasion from the subject–object relation. *Outside the Subject (Hors Sujet)* is the title of another book by Levinas, published in 1987: “outside the subject” also in the sense of getting off the subject, of irreducibility to theme, to representation.

Human rights as they have so far been practiced tend to be oriented by identity logic and to leave aside the rights of the other. Traditionally the expression “human rights” is an interpretant of the humanism of identity, consequently it refers to the rights of identity, of closed identity, of self oriented by the logic of closed identity, to one’s own rights, forgetting the rights of the other. On the contrary, from the perspective of caring for life over the planet, human and nonhuman, for the health of semiosis generally, for the development of communication not only in strictly cultural terms but also in broader biosemiosical terms, this tendency must quickly be counteracted by the humanism of otherness, where the rights of the other are the first to be recognized—and not only the other *beyond self*, but also the other *of self*. The self characteristically removes, suffocates, and segregates otherness, sacrificing it to the cause of identity. But developed in such terms, identity is fictitious and destined to failure, despite all efforts made to recover identity, to maintain it.

Semiotics contributes to humanism of the other by evidencing the extension and consistency of the sign network that connects each human being to every other on both the synchronic and diachronic levels: the global and worldwide extension of the communication network is spreading at a planetary level and as such is susceptible to analysis in terms of synchrony; and given that the destiny of humanity is interrelated with the destiny of the individual, is conditioned by events, actions, and decisions made by the individual, from its remotest to most recent

manifestations, involving the past and the evolutionary future on both the biological and historico-social levels, diachronic investigations are also in place. The sign network includes the semiosphere created by humanity, that is, human culture with its signs, symbols, and artifacts, but as global semiotics teaches us—in particular as interpreted by Sebeok who postulates that semiosis and life converge—the semiosphere is far broader than the sphere of human culture and, in fact, coincides with the biosphere. The semio(bio)sphere is the habitat of humanity, the matrix whence we sprang and the stage on which we are destined to act.

Semiotics has the merit of demonstrating that whatever is human, indeed, from a global semiotic perspective, whatever is alive involves signs. This is as far as cognitive semiotics and global semiotics reach. But semioethics can push this awareness even further by relating semiosis to values and focusing on the question of responsibility, inescapable responsibility investing human beings as “semiotic animals,” which implies the human capacity to take responsibility for all of life over the planet (see Deely et al., 2005).

Human sign behavior can be interpreted in light of the hypothesis that if the human involves signs, signs in turn are human. However, far from reasserting monological identity once again or reproposing yet another form of anthropocentrism, this humanistic commitment implies radical decentralization provoking nothing less than a Copernican revolution. In Welby’s language, “geocentrism” must be superseded, then “heliocentrism” until we approximate a truly cosmic perspective where global semiotics and semioethics intersect. Otherness more than anything else is at stake when a question of responsibility, which is responsibility/responsiveness, and, therefore, of humanism understood as humanism of the other, oriented by the logic of otherness, remembering that by “otherness” is understood not only the otherness of our neighbor, even if distant spatially—though now relatively so given the worldwide expansion of the communication network—but also the otherness of living beings distant in genetic terms.

Reformulating Terence’s famous saying (*homo sum: umani nihil a me alienum puto*), Roman Jakobson asserts that *linguista sum: linguistici nihil a me alienum puto*. The semiotician’s commitment to all that is linguistic, indeed, to all that is sign material (not only relatively to anthroposemiosis or more extensively to zoosemiosis, but to the whole semibiosphere) resounds in both a cognitive and ethical sense. This commitment involves concern for the other, not only in the sense of

“to be concerned with. . .,” but also “to be concerned for. . .,” “to care for.” In such a framework, concern for the other implies a capacity for responsibility without limitations of belonging, proximity, or community, which of course is not exclusive to the “linguist” or “semiotician.” Developing Jakobson’s view, the claim is that not as professional linguists or semioticians, but more significantly as human beings, no sign is *a me alienum*, and leaving the first part of Terence’s saying unmodified, *homo sum*, we could continue with the statement that as humans we are not only *semiosic* animals (like all other animals), but also *semiotic* animals. From this point of view, humans are unique with respect to the rest of the animal kingdom with the consequence that nothing semiosical, including the biosphere and the evolutionary cosmos whence it sprang, *a me alienum puto*.

Semioethics does not have a program to propose with intended aims and practices, nor a decalogue or formula to apply more or less sincerely, more or less hypocritically. Rather, semioethics is focused on the human capacity for critique. From this point of view, *stereotypes*, *norms*, and *ideology* are subject to critical interpretation and with them the different types of value (see, e.g., Morris, 1964, for the triad “operative value,” “conceived value,” “object value” and subordinate tripartition “detachment,” “dominance,” and “dependence”). As anticipated above, the vocation of semioethics is to evidence sign networks where it seemed there were none. This means to bring to light and to evaluate connections and implications (which in truth cannot be escaped) where there only seemed to exist net separations and divisions, boundaries and distances, with relative alibis that serve to safeguard responsibility in a limited sense, the individual conscience (which is always ready to present itself in the form of a good conscience). Semioethics is not focused on a given value, an ultimate end, the *summum bonum*, but rather on semiosis in its dialogical and detotalized totality: indeed, with semioethics, the aim, as foreseen by the reality of infinite semiosis, is to transcend the totality, the boundaries of the closed totality—a being, an entity of some sort.

Understood not only as a science but also as an attitude (for metasemiosis, that is, for reflection and deliberation), semiotics arises and develops within the field of anthroposemiosis. Therefore, it is connected with the *Umwelt* and species-specific modeling device proper to human beings. This species-specific primary modeling device, also called language, endows humans (differently from other animals) with a special capacity for producing a great plurality of different worlds, real and imaginary,

and this means that humans are not condemned to imprisonment in the world as it is, to forms of vulgar realism. Semiotics is a fact of the human species, but the possibility of its effective realization is a fact of the historico-social order. In addition to being a biosemiosical endowment, the human *Umwelt* is a historico-social product, so that any possibility of transformation or alternative hypothesis finds its effective grounding and starting point, its terms of confrontation, its instruments for critique and programming in historico-social reality as distinct from merely biological material.

An important task for “semioethics” today is to interpret the social symptoms of semiosis and its malfunctioning as produced by globalization in today’s global communication-production society. As global semiotics, general semiotics today can carry out a detotalizing function and conduct a critique of all (claims to the status of) totalities, including global communication. Failing the task, general semiotics will be no more than a syncretic result of the special semiotics, a transversal language of the encyclopedia of the unified sciences, prevarication of philosophy suffering from the will to omniscience with respect to the plurality of different disciplines and specialized fields of knowledge. Semioethics can begin from the current phase in historico-social development, contemporaneity, and proceed to a critical and rigorous analysis of today’s society, interrogating communication-production social structures and relationships. The critical work of global semiotics and semioethics can contribute to uncovering the delusory condition of mutual indifference among differences and show, instead, how the destiny of each one of us is connected to the destiny of every other, in the last analysis, how the whole planet’s destiny is implied in the destiny of each single individual and vice versa.

Given that social forms of production in today’s communication-production system have been mostly homogenized, semioethics is at an advantage. We could even claim that the whole planet is regulated by a single type of social reproduction system, what we have designated as the “communication-production system” (which dominates and englobes the entire planet), by a single type of market. The dominant production, exchange and consumption cycle is so pervasive that it is determining the same type of human behavior globally. Not only have habits, taste, and fashion (including “dress fashion”) been homologated worldwide, but also the human imaginary, the capacity for the play of musement. A widespread consequence is that difference understood in

terms of *otherness*—with Levinas (1978), *autrement qu’être*, otherwise than being—is replaced ever more by difference understood in terms of mere *alternatives*—*être autrement*, being otherwise.

However, the “advantage” of this situation as we are describing it is a sad one for, having eliminated diversity and difference and sacrificed otherness, it presents us with just one type of reality. No doubt the task of analysis is simplified given that energy will not be dispersed in the effort to deal with a great multiplicity of different phenomena. But, obviously, the term “advantage” is ironical here, for the advantage of a monolithic block implies the condition of monologism, therefore death of the other, suppression of different points of view, of different voices. By contrast with polylogism, the violence of monologism is incapable of critical discourse. Plurivocality and polylogism favor creative interpretation, critical questioning, listening and responsibility for the other, translation across different signs and sign systems, freedom from the bonds of unquestioning univocality. In a world characterized by monologism the critical task of semioethics is rendered extremely difficult, almost impossible given that appropriate conceptual instruments adequate for the work of critique are not readily available. However, semioethics must face the challenge and invent working hypotheses and instruments of analysis that are not homologated to dominant ideology, that do not derive from common sense and cannot be taken for granted.

3.6 From Reason to Reasonableness

Following Peirce, but also authors like Rossi-Landi from the perspective of the human social semiotics (or anthroposociosemiotics), our gaze on human sign behavior must embrace the fields of ethics, aesthetics, and ideology. Thus equipped the logico-cognitive boundaries of semiotic processes are extended to contemplate problems of an axiological order. This approach focuses on the human capacity for values, critique, and responsibility in the direction of semioethics, or with Victoria Welby “significs.” Welby privileged the term “significs” for her theory of sign and meaning to underline the scope of her approach and focus on the question of “significance,” that is, on the relation of signs to values (as did Charles Morris after her), therefore on the axiological dimension of meaning. The term “significs” designates the disposition for evaluation, calling attention to the problem of value as signifying pertinence, to the import and significance of signifying processes, their sense for humanity.

Peirce’s semiotics describes semiosis in terms of its potential for deferral and *renvoi* among interpretants, whether endosemiosically across

interpretants forming the same sign system or intersemiosically across different types of sign systems. According to Peirce's approach, the sign by definition is never static or circumscribed to the limits of a single signifying system. On the contrary, to subsist as a sign, the sign must be continuously interpreted by another sign, its interpretant whether from the same sign system or a different one. The sign is characterized by its capacity for displacement and deferral, for shift across sign systems, engendering what we may also designate as the "flight of interpretants," "infinite semiosis." This movement results in enhancing significance as semiotic spheres expand and pulsate even more with sense and meaning. Continuous displacement indicates that otherness is a condition for the sign's identity, as paradoxical as this may seem. The question of otherness also leads back to the problem of the "limits of interpretation" (Eco, 1990). In regards to this point, it is important to observe that "semiotic materiality" or "otherness" of the "interpreted sign" with respect to the "interpretant sign" is an obstacle to arbitrariness. Furthermore, the threat of relativism or the violence of dogmatism in interpretive practice is also averted, thanks to the strategies of dialogic confrontation among signs oriented by the logic of otherness.

Otherness and dialogism are in the sign, in the relation between the interpreted and the interpretant that is structural to the sign, including the subject considered as sign; they constitute the condition for continuity of sign activity. Otherness and dialogism are in the self, that is to say they are constitutive of subjectivity in the semiotic processes of its actualization. Subjectivity emerges as a continuous responsive process that implies the relation of otherness, both internally and externally, even with respect to the process itself of its actualization as a subject, as a self. In other words, the otherness relation is a dialogic relation and implies interpretation in regards to the internal other (or others) of self, as much as the external other (or others). Nor does this imply interruptions or natural barriers between the responsive behavior of self, on one hand, and that of other selves beyond one's own self, on the other.

Coherently with his pragmatism or "pragmaticism," as he preferred in a subsequent phase of his research, Peirce developed his cognitive semiotics in close connection with the study of human social behavior and human interests globally. In this framework, as anticipated, the problem of knowledge necessarily presupposed problems of an axiological order. Peirce introduced the concept of "reasonableness" for inferential processes understood as open-ended dialectic-dialogic signifying processes, oriented by the logic of otherness, operative in the development

of thought unbiased by prejudice, in unfinalizable sign processes regulated by the principle of continuity or synechism. In fact, the dialogic conception of signs and otherness is a necessary condition for Peirce's doctrine of continuity or synechism, the principle that "all that exists is continuous" in the development of the universe in its globality and of the human subjects that inhabit it (see *CP* 1.172).

The dialogic relation between self and other—the other from self and the other of self—emerges as one of the most important conditions for the growth of reasonableness and continuity in the creative process, in creative argumentation. A driving force within this creative process is love, that is, *agape*. According to Peirce, the most advanced developments in reason and knowledge are based on the creative power of reasonableness and the transformational suasions of *agape*. As Levinas teaches us, love is unindifference toward the other, an original precatagorical condition that precedes the development of cognition and consciousness.

Peirce transcended the limits of theoreticism in semiotics working in a direction that could be described as pragmatic-ethic or operative-valuative, semioethic in our own terminology, significal in Welby's. During the last decade of their lives, Welby and Peirce corresponded intensely, discussing and modeling their ideas in constant "dialogue" with each other, mutually influencing each other's research. In the final phase of his research, Peirce significantly turned his attention to the normative sciences. He linked logic to both ethics and aesthetics: while logic is the normative science concerned with self-controlled thought, ethics focuses on self-controlled conduct, and aesthetics ascertains the end most worthy of our espousal. Peirce addressed the question of the ultimate good, the *summum bonum*, or ultimate value, which he neither identified in individual pleasure (hedonism) nor in a societal good—such as the greatest happiness for the greatest number of human beings (English utilitarianism)—, but rather in the "evolutionary process," that is, a process of growth, and, specifically, in the continuous "development of concrete reasonableness":

Almost everybody will now agree that the ultimate good lies in the evolutionary process in some way. If so, it is not in individual reactions in their segregation, but in something general or continuous. Synechism is founded on the notion that the coalescence, the becoming continuous, the becoming governed by laws, the becoming instinct with general ideas, are but phases of one and the same process of the growth of reasonableness. This is first shown to be true with mathematical exactitude in the field of logic, and is thence inferred to hold good metaphysically. It is not opposed to pragmatism in the manner in which C. S. Peirce applied it, but includes that procedure as a step. (*CP* 5.4)

The most advanced developments in reason and knowledge are achieved through creative reasonableness and are fired by the power of love, agapasm: “the impulse projecting creations into independency and drawing them into harmony” (CP 6.288). Peirce developed his concept of evolution keeping account of the Gospel of St. John (whose evolutionary philosophy predicates that growth comes from love) and the theosophy of Emanuel Swedenborg (1688–1772). In this framework, human semiosis is enhanced by the power of love understood as orientation toward the other, opening toward the other, response to attraction exerted by the other, in the relation of unindifference and care for the other. Reasonableness is endowed with the power of transforming one’s horror of the stranger, the alien, one’s fear of the other understood as the fear one experiences of the other foreign to self, into sympathy for the other. Recalling his essay of 1892, “The Law of Mind,” Peirce in fact claims that the type of evolution foreseen by synechism is evolution through the agency of love where reason becomes reasonableness and the hateful becomes lovable:

Everybody can see that the statement of St. John is the formula of an evolutionary philosophy, which teaches that growth comes only from love, from I will not say self-*sacrifice*, but from the ardent impulse to fulfill another’s highest impulse. [. . .] It is not dealing out cold justice to the circle of my ideas that I can make them grow, but by cherishing and tending them as I would the flowers in my garden. The philosophy we draw from John’s gospel is that this is the way mind develops; and as for the cosmos, only so far as it yet is mind, and so has life, is it capable of further evolution. Love, recognizing germs of loveliness in the hateful, gradually warms it into life, and makes it lovely. That is the sort of evolution which every careful student of my essay “The Law of Mind” must see that *synechism* calls for. (CP 6.289)

Love is directed to the concrete and not to abstractions, to one’s neighbor not necessarily in a spatial sense, locally, as anticipated above, but in the sense of affinity, someone “we live near [. . .] in life and feeling”: love is a driving force where iconicity, abduction, and dialogism are operative at high degrees. Moreover, on Peirce’s account, love should not be understood in terms of sacrifice, whether to self or to the egotistic impulses of others, but as the capacity to respond to the other, creatively, and, we might add, with generosity—“the ardent impulse to fulfill another’s highest impulse,” as he says in the citation above.

With polemical overtones Peirce contrasts the “Gospel of Christ” which has the capacity for progress depend on a relation of sympathy among neighbors, to the “Gospel of greed” which he believes reflects the

dominant trend of his time and has progress depend on assertion of one's individuality or egotistic identity over the other, at the other's expense:

The Gospel of Christ says that progress comes from every individual merging his individuality in sympathy with his neighbors. On the other side, the conviction of the nineteenth century is that progress takes place by virtue of every individual's striving for himself with all his might and trampling his neighbor under foot whenever he gets a chance to do so. This may accurately be called the Gospel of Greed. (*CP* 6.294)

Peirce's critique of arrogant individuality and self-centeredness parallels Welby's theory of subjectivity when she thematizes the distinction between *I* and *Self*, critiquing the self's tendency to transform "selfness" into "selfishness" or "selfism" (Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 6; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: chapter 2). In Peirce's interpretation, Charles Darwin (1809–82), author of *The Origin of Species* (1859), grounds the principles of natural selection, the survival of the fittest, the struggle for existence in a concept of individual which he derives from nineteenth-century political economy and applies to evolutionary theory, thereby translating from the sphere of political economy to the sphere of the life sciences. On the contrary, Peirce privileges the agapastic theory of evolution and even considered his own strong attraction for this doctrine as possible proof of its validity insofar as it responds to the "normal judgment of the Sensible Heart" (*CP* 6.295).

Recalling Henry James, Peirce distinguished between self-love, that is, love which is directed to another considered identical to self, and creative love which instead is directed to that which is completely different, other, even "hostile and negative" in regards to self, love directed to the other as other. On this basis, a typology of love can be developed progressing from a high degree in the logic of identity to a high degree in the logic of otherness. But truly creative love, as both Welby and Peirce teach us, is love oriented by the logic of otherness, love for the other, directed without second ends to the other as other. The logic of agapasm converges with the logic of otherness and dialogism which constitutes the generating nucleus of sign and sense in the human world, of the interpersonal relation, of communication:

[. . .] the love that God is, is not a love of which hatred is the contrary; otherwise Satan would be a coördinate power; but it is a love which embraces hatred as an imperfect stage of it, an Anteros—yea, even needs hatred and hatefulness as its object. For self-love is no love; so if God's self is love, that which he loves must be defect of love; just as a luminary can light up only that which otherwise would be dark. Henry James, the Swedenborgian, says: "It is no doubt very tolerable finite or creaturely love to love one's own in another, to love another for his conformity to

one's self: but nothing can be in more flagrant contrast with the creative Love, all whose tenderness *ex vi termini* must be reserved only for what intrinsically is most bitterly hostile and negative to itself. (CP 6.287)

The Peircean concept of reason fired by love can be connected to Welby's own association of love to logic. The excerpt below is from a letter to Peirce of 22 December 1903:

May I say in conclusion that I see strongly how much we have lost and are losing by the barrier which we set up between emotion and intellect, between feeling and reasoning. Distinction must of course remain. I am the last person to wish this blurred. But I should like to put it thus: The difference e.g. between our highest standards of love and the animal's is that they imply knowledge in logical order. We know *that*, *what*, *how* and above all, *why* we love. Thus the logic is bound up in that very feeling which we contrast with it. But while in our eyes logic is merely "formal," merely structural, merely question of argument, "cold and hard," we need a word which shall express the combination of "logic and love." And this I have tried to supply in "Significs." (Welby to Peirce, in Hardwick, 1977: 15)

In an advanced phase of his studies and in the framework of his pragmatism, Peirce described subjectivity as a set of actions, practices, and habits. Furthermore, he identified "power" as an essential characteristic of the subject as opposed to "force." The incarnate self is a center of power oriented toward an end, an agent devoted to a more or less integrated set of "purposes." This approach can be related to Welby's description of "purport" or "ultimate value" which is associated with "significance," the third element of her meaning triad (the other two terms being "meaning" and "sense"). Power is not "brute force" but the "creative power of reasonableness" which by virtue of its agapastic orientation rules over all other forms of power and is accompanied by doubt (see CP 5.520). Power associated with reasonableness is the capacity to respond to the attraction exerted on self by the other; therefore, power and reasonableness denote the capacity to respond to the other, which presupposes relations regulated by dialogism, by unindifferent difference, the dia-logic of listening and intercorporeity.

We know that in the architectonics of Peirce's thought system the self, subjectivity is not described as an individual in an absolute sense. The self is not an undivided, closed totality or a coherent and noncontradictory identity (Colapietro, 1989; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: chapter 1). Insofar as it is a sign, or better, part of an open-ended semiotic chain of deferrals from one sign to the next, the self doubles into interpreted sign and interpretant sign, so that where there is one sign there are

immediately two, and given that the interpretant is also a sign and therefore the interpreted of another interpretant, there are immediately three signs, and so forth according to the principle of infinite semiosis. As evidenced by the activities of speaking, deciding, discussing, coming to consciousness, reasoning, self is structurally, constitutively other. It follows that self is not monologic but, quite on the contrary, is modeled by a plurality of voices, points of view, parts in dialogue. Therefore, self's identity is dialogic, polylogic, plurivocal, detotalized identity.

Echoing Peirce, self may be envisaged as a community of selves, endowed with a capacity for critique and projectuality, a community that interacts with the social community conceived as a sort of more fluid and less compact person (*CP* 5.421). The other is structural to identity, at the very heart of identity while at once representing the external force of attraction that contributes to shaping identity in an evolutionary process of development oriented by the principle of love, by attraction for the other—the emotional other, the cognitive other, the ethic other, and the aesthetic other.

3.7 Sense and Expression

Both Welby and Peirce have significantly contributed to developing a global science of signs capable of accounting for signifying processes in all their complexity and articulation, of considering meaning in terms of sense, signification, and significance. Though never having met personally, they confronted their ideas and corresponded intensely during the last decade of their lives, as testified by the volume *Semiotic and Significs* (Hardwick, 1977), leaving a rich corpus of letter exchanges of high theoretical value, and mutually influencing each other's research itineraries. Following Peirce and Welby, it is clear that the study of signs and signifying processes cannot make claims to neutrality, therefore should not be merely descriptive.

The approach to signs adopted by the authors mentioned so far, presupposes a special focus on the human being's involvement in the life of signs viewed not only from the theoretical–cognitive perspective, but also from the ethical–pragmatic. In particular, from the point of view of the present chapter, both Peirce and Welby work toward a general science of signs and meaning able to account for semiotic processes, human and nonhuman, verbal and nonverbal in all their diversity, complexity, and articulation; in relation to specifically human semiosis, this also involves accounting for meaning not only in terms of signification but

also of significance, or sense as understood by Levinas. In fact, both Peirce and Welby knew, and similarly such authors as Morris and Levinas after them (though independently of each other), that signs are not neutral and cannot be sufficiently analyzed in descriptive terms alone. To study subjectivity and its signs with claims to neutrality is reductive and entirely inadequate for a full understanding of semiosis in the human world. Beyond a strictly gnoseological approach, a global understanding of human consciousness and behavior, verbal and nonverbal, requires, on the one hand, a special focus on the relation of signs to values, and on the other, adequate contextualization in terms of biosemiosis, and even beyond with cosmo-semiosis.

Both Peirce and Welby work on problems that re-emerge in the thought system of a contemporary philosopher like Levinas, for example, who thematizes the otherness relationship throughout all his writings. According to Levinas, the relation to the other, desire of the other, attraction to the other is an original experience, an essential condition that confers sense upon social experience, even the most insignificant.

Developing Peirce's discourse in the direction of the philosophy of subjectivity as elaborated by Levinas, love transforms fear *of* the other—in the double sense of fear provoked in the subject by the other, the subject's fear of the other, on the one hand, and fear provoked in the object, the object's fear, on the other hand—into fear *for* the other. Beyond the "subject genitive" and the "object genitive," foreseen by traditional grammatical categories, fear *for* the other, as suggested by Augusto Ponzio in his studies on Levinas (see Ponzio, 2006b: 30–2), may be described as the "ethic genitive," therefore fear for the other as fear for the other's safety and well-being to the point of becoming responsible for the other and taking the blame even for any injustice endured. Therefore, under the hardened crust of identity, the subject rediscovers the capacity to fear *for* the other, fear that renders the subject incessantly restless and preoccupied with the other. Love, reasonableness, creativity are all grounded in the logic of otherness and dialogism and together enhance the evolutionary dynamics of human consciousness. The ancient vocation for love and absolute otherness is anarchical, it precedes origins and principles, the formation of consciousness and subjectivity in terms of identity, and characterizes the properly human.

Levinas critiques approaches to language analysis in contemporary philosophy that focus on hermeneutic structure and on the cultural work of expression by incarnate being, while forgetting a third dimension: that

is, orientation toward the other, this other that is not only a collaborator and neighbor in the cultural gesture of expression, or a client for our artistic work, but far more significantly, an “interlocutor.” Levinas defines the interlocutor as the person to whom the expression expresses, for whom the celebration celebrates, at once the term of orientation and primary signification. In other words, before being the celebration of being, expression is a relation with the person to whom I express the expression and whose presence is a necessary condition for the very production of my cultural gesture of expression. The other who is in front of me, the dimension of subjectivity that Levinas indicates with the term “*autrui*,” cannot be englobed by the totality, that is, by expressed being, but, on the contrary, it escapes being. The other thus described is what Levinas calls the shadow of being, its face; this metaphor refers both to the a priori of being and at once to that which transcends the boundaries of being; it refers to the human capacity for excess with respect to being and its limits, to the capacity for evasion from being. The other is neither a cultural signification, nor a simple given. Far more significantly, the other is primordial sense, the possibility of sense for the expression itself. Only thanks to the other, can such a phenomenon as signification even enter being (see Levinas, 1972: 49–50).

3.8 The Open Society of Open Selves

In his book *The Open Self*, Charles Morris recognizes a uniting factor that subtends difference, diversity, multiplicity in human beings: what he identifies as “creativity.” This may be related to Sebeok’s conception of the human primary modeling device. This human modeling device is a syntactical device. It is endowed with a capacity for metasemiosis, which means to say for reflection, creativity, orientation, and projectuality. Metasemiosis alludes to the capacity to suspend immediate action and deliberate, to interrogate the existent, and take a stand (see 1.2). As human animals, we are not only semiosical animals, but also metasemiosical, syntactical animals. Moreover, evoking Peirce, we are not only rational animals, but also reasonable animals.

Following Peirce, the synechetic continuum of semiotic fluxes converges with the fragmented time-space of the multiple. The single, unique individual proceeds from multiplicity, from difference, from otherness, which it contains; a universe of the many, infinite within the finite. The finite totality encompasses the infinite of a fractioned and discrete continuum which transcends the limits of the totality itself, of

being, as the open-ended chain of deferrals continues from one sign to the next. In the logic of continuity and interconnectivity is determined the singularity and uniqueness of each and every one of us. In *The Open Self* Morris encourages humanity to work toward attaining the social situation of multiple open selves united around the common ideal of “the open society of open selves,” in which too uniqueness is enhanced, one’s own as much as of others. The unique self is an open self, a relational self. And only in such a situation will it ever be possible to pursue the values which should inspire all human societies—such values as social harmony, peace, justice, freedom, responsibility. As Morris claims with a statement that refers to society in the United States of America, but that in reality may be extended to the whole of humanity:

The alternative to a paralyzed stalemated America and to a Romanized imperialistic America is an America rededicated to its traditional ideal of an open society of open selves and resolutely at work to reduce the anxieties which if unrelieved tend to the closed society. That, and that alone is our way out. (Morris, 1948a 168)

We know that communication in the present day and age is characterized in terms of globalization, but the paradox of globalized communication in today’s dominant socio-economic system, the capitalist in its extreme phase of development, is the inadequacy of communication and dialogue, the lack of interconnectivity among bodies, of intercorporeity in the terms described by Bakhtin. Communication today risks provoking the end of communication, and if we agree that communication, semiosis and life converge, the end of communication implies the end of life (see 2.2). A task for semiotics understood as semioethics is to refine the human capacity for listening and hospitality toward the other, which is no less than a necessary condition for the health of semiosis worldwide, human and nonhuman. As semioethics, semiotics must strive to account for the “reason of things.” However, the capacity for detotalization as the condition for critical and dialogic totalization implies that the *reason* of things cannot be separated from *reasonableness*, which is grounded in the logic of otherness. Therefore, if the health of semiosis, of life and human relations is a concern, if such values as those listed above—social harmony, peace, justice, freedom, responsibility—are a priority, the problem may be summed up as follows: considering today’s global communication-production system and the risks it entails for semiosis, indeed for life generally, the *human being needs to transform at the very earliest from a rational animal into a reasonable animal* (see Petrilli, 1998a: 151).

Semioethics offers the broadest view possible to semiotic animals (human beings) today. As *cosmically* responsible agents, not only should we do justice to the human capacity for semioethics on a theoretical level, understand and explain it, but we must also evidence the vital need for it in social practice (these days more than ever before) to the end of safeguarding not only human life, but all of life indiscriminately over the planet—humanism of the other requires nothing less. In fact, if the health of identity, of self, of semiosis at large are to be safeguarded in the present-day global communication-production system where the logic of shortsighted identity dominates over the rights of the other, violates the other, a semioethical approach developed in the most conscientious, imaginative, and responsible terms possible may contribute to indicating a way out.

4

Communication, Language, and Speech from a Global Perspective

4.1 Moving Toward Global Semiotics

Thomas A. Sebeok is among the figures of the twentieth century who has most contributed to the development of sign, language, and communication studies, to the institutionalization of semiotics internationally and to its configuration as “semiotics of life” or “global semiotics.” His studies at the intersection between the life sciences and the sign sciences led to the introduction of “zoosemiotics,” in 1963, promotion of “biosemiotics,” and ultimately to his original proposal of “global semiotics.” The expression “global semiotics” was first introduced by Sebeok as the title of a paper of 1994 and subsequently reiterated as the title of a monograph published in 2001, with which he sealed his legacy to the community of researchers.¹

Global semiotics provides a meeting point and observation post for studies on the “signs of life” and the “life of signs” and, in fact, stands as a strong critical statement against the *pars pro toto fallacy* as incurred by the semiological tradition, thereby inaugurating a real revolution in the sign sciences. Echoing Charles S. Peirce, Sebeok claims that the entire universe is perfused with signs and as such is of interest to global semiotics. He posits that *semiosis*, that is, sign activity and *life* converge. Indeed, from this holistic perspective, semiosis is described as originating with the first stirrings of life which led to the formulation of his cardinal axiom: “semiosis is the criterial attribute of life” (Sebeok, 1986a: 73).

Of Hungarian origin, Thomas A. Sebeok (Budapest, 9 November 1920—Bloomington, 21 December 2001) emigrated to the United States in 1937, where he became a citizen in 1944. He was a faculty member

of Indiana University (Bloomington, USA), where he remained for the whole time of his academic career. He benefited from his contact with two great masters of the sign, Roman Jakobson and Charles Morris (among many others), and developed his semiotic studies according to a tradition that refers to Charles Peirce as the founder in its modern phase. Sebeok taught for most of his life at Indiana University where, in 1956, he also founded the Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies, which he directed until the end of his days. His research interests were diversified and broadly ranged from the natural sciences to the human sciences. He was among the first internationally to hold a Chair in Semiotics, a record he shared with his friend and colleague Umberto Eco in Italy. Sebeok acted as Editor-in-Chief of the journal *Semiotica*—the official organ of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS), produced and sponsored by Mouton de Gruyter, in Berlin—from the time it was founded at the Association's first meeting in Paris, 21–2 January 1969, until his death in 2001.

Inauguration of the International Association for Semiotic Studies saw the participation of such high key scholars as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Roman Jakobson, Umberto Eco, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Algirdas Julien Greimas, Emile Benveniste, and Sebeok himself. Five goals are listed for the Association in Article 2 of the statute established on that occasion: (1) promouvoir les recherches sémiotiques dans un esprit scientifique; (2) renforcer la coopération internationale dans ce domaine; (3) collaborer avec d'autres associations similaires; (4) organiser des colloques nationaux et internationaux et des stages de formation; (5) publier une revue internationale trimestrielle: *Semiotica*. Moreover, Article 4 recites the following: L'association est ouverte à tous ceux qui travaillent dans des domaines dans lesquels la notion de signe est ou peut être reconnue et discutée tels la logique, la linguistique, la théorie de l'information, l'analyse des relations sociales, l'étude des types de discours (épistémologie, anthropologie, psychanalyse, etc.), la poétique, l'esthétique. As such Article 4 is an explicit declaration of the interdisciplinary vocation characteristic of semiotic research, which could not be otherwise given the transversal nature of its specific object of study, the sign, or better "sign relations," "sign activity," "semiosis."

In such an interdisciplinary framework and as the direct result of his focus on animal communication, Sebeok, as anticipated, had already formally introduced zoosemiotics by 1963 (see Sebeok, 1963, 1972). In fact, the whole course of his professional and intellectual life may be

read as the story of the fulfillment and development of the goals and principles inaugurating this new phase in contemporary semiotic research. Sebeok's global approach to semiotic theory and practice presupposes his critique of anthropocentrism and glottocentrism. He opened the science or "doctrine of signs" (for this expression, see 4.3) to zoosemiotics or even more broadly to biosemiotics, on the one hand, and to endosemiotics, on the other, extending his gaze to semiosis throughout the whole living universe, to the realms of both macro- and microorganisms.

In Sebeok's conception, the sign science is not only the *science qui étudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale*, to evoke the great master of signs, Ferdinand de Saussure. On the contrary, to be properly understood, human social communicative behavior, communication in culture must be contextualized in the broad sphere of biosemiosis. Sebeok extended the boundaries of semiotics far beyond the traditional limits of *sémiologie*, as practiced by the Saussureans, fully evidencing the multiform character of semiosis. Human communication in itself can be examined globally from different points of view, that is, keeping account not only of verbal signs, but also of nonverbal signs—facial expressions, gestural signs, and other forms of nonverbal behavior—that convey information, integrating, but sometimes even contradicting that which is expressed through words.

Semiotics is knowledge acquired through study of the action of signs; whether bio-, zoo-, anthro-, myco-, phyto-, or physio- simply specifies the particular focus of a given study—the realm of culture, animals more generally, sign-action in plants, in the physical environment, etc. The traditional view has long divided living things into plants (phytosemiosis), animals (zoosemiosis), and humans (anthroposemiosis). In John Poincot's day (1589–1644) the action of signs was presumed to extend to what Tom Sebeok identified as anthroposemiosis and zoosemiosis and not plants (phytosemiosis). Subsequently, in 1981, Martin Krampen introduced the concept of phytosemiotics (study of phytosemiosis, action of signs in the plant world).²

Anthropo-, zoo-, phyto-, and mycosemiosis constitute "biosemiosis," semiosis coextensive with the realm of living things, the study of which hence would be "biosemiotics," wholly embraced by Sebeok. But the universe is older than life, and cosmic evolution preceded biological evolution perforce, since the universe had to change considerably in order for life to become possible in the first place. Is there a semiosis involved in that prior "cosmic" evolution and, indeed, even today in the

nonliving elements of the physical universe? In his essay “The Evolution of Semiosis,” Sebeok addresses this issue as well and, recalling Giorgio Prodi (1977), proposes the concept of “protosemiosis” (Sebeok, 1991b: chapter 8). As Sebeok clearly stated in his essay “Semiosis and Semiotics: What Lies in Their Future?,” the axiom that life and semiosis are coextensive posits that life inevitably involves semiosis, but this does not exclude the possibility of semiosis apart from life (Ibid.: chapter 9). At least this is certain: to affirm the former does not mean to deny the latter.

The general science of signs (semiotics) provides the overall perspective, context, and unifying thread of Sebeok’s research which to all effects was interdisciplinary, or better, transdisciplinary. His studies branch out into multiple directions to cover the life sciences—he described himself as a “biologist manqué”³ (Sebeok, 1986a: 72–3)—the human sciences, and artistic discourse. He studied nonverbal human communication systems such as dance, the plastic arts, music which he described as a communication mode common to humans and to birds. In addition to animal communication, his special interest areas included folklore, anthropology, linguistics, and he also promoted psycholinguistics.⁴

Global semiotics is the natural outcome of Sebeok’s long-term biosemiotic approach to semiosis with which he evidenced the interconnection between nature and culture and between the disciplines that study the latter under different aspects, thereby promoting a trans-sign, transcultural and transdisciplinary orientation in semiotic research. Sebeok’s global approach to semiosis favors the discovery of new perspectives, interdisciplinary interconnections, and interpretive practices, new cognitive fields and languages, all of which interact dialogically as foreseen by the open and *detotalizing* nature of semiotics. He identified sign relations where there only seemed to exist “mere” facts and relations among things, independently from communication and interpretation processes.

A pivotal notion in global semiotics is “modeling” which contributes to explaining different forms of life and behavior in their specificity. Modeling is an a priori in the Kantian sense; it is the condition of possibility for communication and signification. Modeling systems theory investigates semiotic phenomena from the perspective of modeling processes (Deely, 2007; Sebeok and Danesi, 2000). Keeping account of biosemiotic research, Sebeok maintained that the modeling capacity is observable in all life-forms which subsist in species-specific worlds. In other words, living beings model their worlds and signify and communicate in species-specific ways. Sebeok also introduced the term “language”

to designate the primary modeling device specific to human beings as distinct from “speech” which appeared much later in human evolution and designates the capacity for verbal communication. With the rise of speech for communication, different historical languages proliferate and through exaptation assume a secondary modeling function. Instead, the plurality of different cultural systems which have gradually emerged over the globe constitute tertiary modeling (see, 5.8).

Differently to the Russian semiotician Jurij M. Lotman (1922–93), Sebeok describes the “semiosphere” as extending beyond the human cultural sphere to coincide with the biosphere, the object of study of biosemiotics which is concerned with the sign behavior of all living organisms. In his entry “Biosemiotics” (in Cobley, 2001 and 2010a), Sebeok observes that throughout Western history most semiotic theories and their applications have focused on messages, verbal and nonverbal, in the human cultural world (see also the entries “Semiosphere” and “Semiosis” by Paul Cobley). Since ancient times semiotic inquiry has tended to be anthropocentric and logocentric with the partial exception of “iatic semiotics” (symptomatology, diagnostics, etc.) practiced and thematized by the ancient physicians Hippocrates of Cos (ca. 430 BC) and Galen of Pergamon (129-c. 200) and by their innumerable modern successors, notably Thure von Uexküll (1908–2004). Sebeok traces the beginnings of what by contrast to the dominant anthropocentric tradition can be described as the “biosemiotic turn” in sign studies in the modern era:

Step by hesitant step, the scope of traditional semiotics has widened immensely since the 1920s, or, to put it the other way around, “normal” semiotics gradually became embedded and submerged in the far vaster domain of what the Italian medical oncologist Giorgio Prodi (1928–87) came to denominate “nature semiotics” (1988). The study of biological codes is nowadays more commonly designated *biosemiotics*—a term independently coined in recent decades in the USA and elsewhere—which harks back to the work of Jakob von Uexküll’s (1864–1944) now classic work, *Theoretische Biologie* (1920, et seq.). Biosemiotics presupposes the axiomatic identity of the semiosphere with the biosphere. (Sebeok in Cobley, 2010a:179–80)

Subsequently to writing this entry for the original 2001 edition of *The Routledge Companion* (reproposed in the enlarged and revised edition of 2010), the International Society for Biosemiotic Studies (ISBS) was founded, in 2005. No doubt Sebeok would have hailed this event enthusiastically having promoted research and publications in the field and participated in a series of preparatory meetings with various scholars internationally, including Giorgio Prodi and Thure von Uexküll. More

than the name of a new branch in semiotics studies, the expression “biosemiotics” also indicates a theoretical perspective and global vision subtending and orienting “general semiotics” understood as the general “theory” or “science” or “doctrine” of signs (see Sebeok, 1976).

Thanks to his intellectual curiosity and commitment, Sebeok produced over six hundred publications between books and articles, while promoting and animating numerous international congresses and interdisciplinary research projects.⁵ He described his important monograph of 1979, *The Sign & Its Masters*, as a “transitional book” (Introduction, p. 7), an observation which, keeping account of current debate in philosophical–linguistic and semiotic theory, can be extended to all his research. A transition is taking place from “code semiotics” to “interpretation semiotics,” from semiotics centered on linguistics and verbal signs to an approach which accounts for the autonomy and arbitrariness of nonverbal signs, whether “cultural” or “natural” (see 4.3). Sebeok privileged interpretation semiotics in his early theoretical volume *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs* (1976) and explored semiotics as a methodological tool applicable to different fields in his more discursive volume, *The Play of Musement* (1981) after *The Sign & Its Masters*. Other important volumes followed soon after in rapid succession: *I Think I Am a Verb* (1986), *Essays in Zoosemiotics* (1990), *A Sign is Just a Sign* (1991), *Semiotics in the United States* (1991), and *Signs: An Introduction to Semiotics* (1994)—nor did his prolificness diminish after retirement from his teaching commitments in 1991. Counting just the last two years of his life, he had published a series of volumes including *Essays in Semiotics I: Life Signs*, 2000, *Essays in Semiotics II: Culture Signs*, 2000, a book with Marcel Danesi, *The Forms of Meaning. Modeling Systems Theory and Semiotics*, 2000, a second edition of *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics*, 2001, *Global Semiotics*, 2001, and a book coauthored with myself and Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotica dell’io*, 2001.⁶

4.2 Remembering . . .

When I first encountered Thomas A. Sebeok, he was already internationally renown for his contribution to semiotics not only as a researcher in his own right, but for having promoted research by others, editorial projects, encounters, seminars, and conferences worldwide. He had edited numerous important collective volumes and was Editor-in-Chief of *Semiotica*. Sebeok was committed to the international community of researchers, often recovering important figures whose work had been

overlooked or forgotten, or whose relevancy to semiotic studies was unknown or had not been sufficiently perceived, as in the case of his so-called cryptosemioticians—the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, the linguists Gyula Laziczzius (1896–1957), John Lotz (1913–73), Heidi Hediger (1908–92), and still others (Sebeok, 1979). Moreover, Sebeok acted as a sort of talent scout as he discovered young researchers whose work, enthusiasm, and curiosities he appreciated and was always ready to encourage.

At the time of contacting Sebeok, I was familiar with two of his volumes, *Writings on the General Theory of Signs* (1971, a collection of writings by Charles Morris, edited by Sebeok) and the collection *Perspectives in Zoosemiotics* (1972), which I had become aware of thanks to Ferruccio Rossi-Landi whose monograph, *Linguistics and Economics* (1975), Sebeok had promoted for publication with Mouton de Gruyter. Two monographs by Sebeok on semiotics were already available in Italian: *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs* (1976) and *The Play of Musement* (1981). When I contacted him, encouraged by Augusto Ponzio, it was to propose the Italian translation of his book, *The Sign & Its Masters*. Subsequently I translated and wrote the introduction to other works by Sebeok including, *I Think I Am a Verb* (1986), *Semiotics in the United States* (1991), a collection of essays, *Come comunicano gli animali che non parlano* (1998, see 4.8–4.13), *A Sign Is Just a Sign* (1991), and *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics* (1994). In the meantime, Sebeok was asserting himself internationally as one of the greatest masters of the sign of the twentieth century.

My first conversation with Tom Sebeok was in 1983 when I called from Bari on his arrival to Milan to inform him of my wish to translate *The Sign & Its Masters* for the book series “Segni di Segni” (directed by Augusto Ponzio and his wife Maria Solimini). Sebeok himself recounts this conversation in his Preface—dated 18 May 1988, Bloomington—to my book *Significs, semiotica, significazione* (1988: 15–8). He had just arrived “at Malpensa in the early hours of a spring morning in 1983 after a tiring transoceanic flight,” and on his arrival at his “favorite hotel in Milan,” heard his telephone ringing with insistence as the bell boy made way for him toward his room.

A lady in perfect English, even if with a “colonial” accent, informed me that she was calling from the University of Bari on behalf of Professor Augusto Ponzio. [...] I then learnt that the lady whom I had exchanged for an English woman had in reality passed from one point to the other of the globe, that is, from Adelaide to Bari. Susan Petrilli, this was the name of my interlocutor, was born in Australia of Italian

parents and had established herself in Puglia [. . .]. In brief, she seemed equipped to translate my book and eventually, I thought to myself, a second one as well (as effectively occurred with Sellerio publishers in Palermo). [. . .] Subsequently, I also commissioned her the English translation of a book by Giorgio Fano on *Origini e natura del linguaggio*. (Ibid.: 15)

We met personally for the first time in Alcabideche in Portugal:

I didn't actually meet Susan Petrilli until 18 September 1983 when I first encountered her at a reception at Hotel Sintra-Estoril in Alcabideche in Portugal. I had been invited there to participate at an Advanced Study Institute, organized by Nato, on "Semiotics and International Scholarship," which took place in that enchanting Portuguese meeting-place. For the occasion I delivered a series of lessons on semiotic anomalies, referred, that is, to empirical observations of "facts" that could not be explained from any existing theoretical perspective. All my arguments had been drawn from fairly popular fields of everyday semiosis, such as magic practiced as a profession, particularly telepathic communication, a vulgar form of deception, conjuring tricks, illusionistic games, so-called parapsychic phenomena, and other divinatory practices of this type. Ms. Petrilli followed the whole session, so we had ample opportunity to get to know each other, as we discussed problems concerning her work in progress on the translation of my book, and even more importantly problems connected with the themes of her research. (Ibid.: 16)

Sebeok's narration of this initial phase in our relationship concludes as follows:

. . . given that Susan Petrilli and I both share an appreciation of Robert Graves's love poetry [. . .], she had discovered that his lyrical works offer an ideal terrain for excursions into the analysis of poetry, it is fitting that I should conclude my Preface with a citation from *The Boy Out of Church*. Whomever already knows this poem will note that I have only modified seven letters in a sole word:

I do not love the Sabbath
The soapsuds and the starch
The troops of solemn people
Who to Semiotics march. (Ibid.: 18)

4.3 Nothing that Is a Sign Is Alien to Me

Sebeok began his higher education studies during the second half of the 1930s at the University of Cambridge where as a young college student, he became aware of Charles K. Ogden's and Ivor A. Richards's monograph *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923), long before it became a classic. Subsequently, he also discovered the two great masters of the sign who in different ways acted as his mentors: Charles Morris and Roman Jakobson (Sebeok, 1979, 1986a, 1991b). Of course we know that

Sebeok's research was influenced by Charles Peirce whose heritage in terms of Peirce scholarship he impacted in turn (Houser, 2010: 91–6).

While the expression *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, “something that stands for something else,” describes the sign relation in dyadic terms, Peirce's definition evidences the irreducibly triadic structure of the sign relationship, thereby placing the condition for theorizing the movement of *renvoi*, transferral/deferral structural to semiosis. Sebeok draws attention to this particular aspect of the Peircean approach to sign structures and relations:

Peirce's definition embodies the core concept of *renvoi*, or transfer, Jakobson's compressed coinage (*Coup d'œil sur le développement de la sémiotique* [1975]) for the celebrated antique formulation, *aliquid stat pro aliquo*, but it contains one very important further feature. Peirce asserts not only that *x* is a sign of *y*, but that “somebody”—what he called “a *Quasi-interpreter*” (4.551)—takes *x* to be a sign of *y*. (Sebeok, 1979: viii)

Not only is a sign a sign of something else, but there is also a “somebody,” a “*Quasi-interpreter*” (Peirce, *CP* 4.551) that interprets something as a sign of something else. Peirce further analyzes the implications of this description when he says, “It is of the nature of a sign, and in particular of a sign which is rendered significant by a character which lies in the fact that it will be interpreted as a sign. Of course, nothing is a sign unless it is interpreted as a sign” (*CP* 2.308). And again, “A sign is only a sign *in actu* by virtue of its receiving an interpretation, that is, by virtue of its determining another sign of the same object” (*CP* 5.569).

As an irreducibly triadic structure, the sign cannot be reduced to a question of “representation” as use of this term for the relation between sign and object may fallaciously lead one to believe. In his famous definition reported in *CP* 2.228 (see 5.2), Peirce does not specify the kind of relationship that associates the sign to the object—which in any case is not limited to the logic of representation, of “standing for” something. Nonetheless, specification of the type of relationship connecting sign to object and sign to interpretant is a determining factor in his classification of signs. Two significant examples are his trichotomies: icon, index, symbol; and rheme, dicisign, argument (*CP* 2.243).

An important contribution to the development of semiotics after Peirce comes from Charles Morris, such that we can speak of a “Peircean-Morrisian sign model.” Two important aspects in Morris's semiotics include (1) attribution of semiosis to living organisms—subsequently developed by Sebeok and his biosemiotics, and (2) focus on the relation

of signs and values, explicitly theorized by Morris in his book of 1964, *Signification and Significance*. By contrast with the reduction of semiotics to anthroposemiotics conceived as a cognitive, descriptive, and ideologically neutral science, the most promising trends in semiotics today are those that practice a global approach to semiosis, while recovering the axiological dimension. With coauthor Augusto Ponzio, we have proposed the expression “semioethics” for an approach to the study of semiosis that is focused on the relation of signs to values and that in line with the global semiotic perspective is critical of separatism and of false or illusory totalities (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003b, 2005; see 1.3, 1.4).

In spite of his global approach to semiotics, Sebeok designates it neither with the ennobling term “science,” used by Saussure, nor with the term “theory,” used by Morris, but preferred the expression “doctrine of signs,” which he adapted from John Locke (for whom “doctrine” indicates a body of principles and opinions that vaguely go to form a field of knowledge). Subscribing to John Deely’s (1978) interpretation of his use of the term “doctrine,” Sebeok states that “I had deliberately selected *doctrine*—a scholastic term also used in a like context by both Locke and Peirce—because its burden is, first of all, a pedagogical one, as against, say, Saussure’s *science* or Morris’s *theory*, which both arrogate more than the field can as yet deliver” (Sebeok, 1979: vii). Sebeok also used the expression “doctrine of signs” as understood by Peirce, that is, keeping account of the instances of Kantian critique. In other words, the task of semiotics is not only to observe and describe signs, but also to interrogate the conditions of possibility for the characterization and specification of signs for what they are, as emerges from observation (necessarily limited and partial), and for what they must be.

The task of semiotics understood as the “doctrine of signs” is at once humble and ambitious and led Sebeok to a critical interrogation *à la* Kant of the conditions of possibility of semiotics itself: the doctrine of signs is the science of signs that questions itself, attempts to answer for itself, and inquires into its very own foundations. As a doctrine of signs, semiotics presents itself as an exercise in philosophy not because it deludes itself into believing it can substitute philosophy, but simply because it *does not* delude itself into believing that the study of signs is possible without keeping account of philosophical issues that regard its conditions of possibility.

Sebeok extended the boundaries of sign studies, providing an approach to “semiotics” that was far more comprehensive than was

traditionally practiced by “semiology.” As anticipated above (section 4.1), the limit of *sémiologie* as perspected by Saussure is that it is based on the verbal paradigm and consequently is vitiated by the *pars pro toto* error—in other words, it mistakes the part (human signs and in particular verbal signs) for the whole (all possible signs, human and nonhuman). On the basis of this mystification, semiology wrongly claims to be the general science of signs. When, instead, the general science of signs chooses the term “semiotics” for itself, it takes its critical distances from semiology and its errors. Sebeok dubbed the semiological tradition the “minor tradition” by contrast to the “major tradition” delineated by John Locke, Charles Peirce, and with reference to the ancients, Hippocrates and Galen, who studied symptoms (Petrelli and Ponzio, 2000b). He propounded a wide-ranging vision of semiotics that actually converges with the study of life and its evolutionary development.

On a question of terminology concerning how to best nominate the study of signs and, therefore, on the distinction between “semiotic,” “semiotics,” “semeiotics,” and “semiology,” Sebeok offers the following clarification in his introductory note to his 1971 collection of Charles Morris’s classic works:

In conformity with traditional English usage, Morris called the science of signs *semiotic*. This Stoic term was reintroduced, in 1690, into English philosophical discourse by John Locke, as his label for the “doctrine of signs,” a science which was greatly advanced thereafter by Charles Sanders Peirce, commencing in the late 1860s. Around 1897, Peirce used the word *semiotic*, in Locke’s sense, for “the quasi-necessary, or formal, doctrine of signs.” Saussure’s etymologically kindred term, *sémiologie*, by which he meant “une science qui étudie la vie des signes. . .,” was first recorded in a note of his dated November, 1894, and has also passed into English usage; to cite a single recent example, Roland Barthes’ *Eléments de sémiologie* (1964) was rendered by its translators as *Elements of Semiology* (1968). Although sometimes *semiotic* and *semiology* are interchangeable synonyms, certain authors—perhaps most notably Louis Hjelmslev—differentiated between them sharply and consistently; *semiology*, however, especially in its French and Italian equivalents, is also one name of a well established branch of medicine, more commonly designated in English as *symptomatology*.

So far as I can determine, the variant *semiotics*, with the programmed definition for a field which “in time will include the study of all patterned communication in all modalities,” was publicly introduced by Margaret Mead, on May 19, 1962, and then became embodied in a book published two years later. Undoubtedly, *semiotics* was an analogic creation on *pragmatics*, *syntactics*, and especially *semantics*. It has, over the past decade, been widely, although not universally adopted. Some workers continue to regard it as a needless barbarism. Nevertheless, I have accepted it for the title of our series, *Approaches to Semiotics*, in which this book appears. By contrast, the International Association for Semiotic Studies, when debating a proper name for

our international journal, came to the Latin compromise title *Semiotica*, thus avoiding the embarrassment of having to choose among the alternative mentioned.

The terminological quandary is complicated by various further circumstances. For instance, Earl W. Count selected still another variant, *semeiotics*, defending his choice by arguing that “The spelling is better etymology than semiotics, and avoids the ambiguity of semi-. Semiotics would be nonsense. . . .”

In brief there are strong scholarly predilections in this matter, variously rationalized. This situation has parallels in Europe, particularly in the Romance languages, as Umberto Eco has clearly shown for Italian and as could easily be demonstrated for French as well. (Sebeok in Morris, 1971: 9–10)

Max Fisch (1986: 322) notes that Peirce employed the term “semeiotic” and never “semiotics” to designate the science of signs. The Saussureans identify their own approach with the term “*sémiologie*,” but the term “*signologie*” was also in vogue at the time, as observed by R. Engler (1968: 46). Today, as foreseen by Sebeok, “semiotics” is the most widely accepted expression prevailing over others (see also Sebeok, 1976: chapter 2). In his monograph of 1991, *Semiotics in the United States*, in addition to recalling that Charles Morris preferred the term “semeiotic,” Sebeok also claims that

The denotation of each of these academic jargon terms is, no matter how leaky, the ‘same.’ But each harks back to a different tradition and, being overburdened by complex emotional resonance, carries different connotations. Dialectical divisions of this nature are confusing for the public, of course, and have impelled some practitioners to concoct [. . .], and then attempt to impose, *post hoc* divergences in denotation. *Semiotics*, with its foreign language cognates, now appears to have the best chance for survival. (Sebeok, 1991a: 62)

In his introduction to *The Sign & Its Masters*, Sebeok states that “semiotics begins and ends with biology and that the sign science and the life science ineluctably imply each other” (Sebeok, 1979: viii), a concept he repeats on many occasions in his writings and oral presentations. Paul Bouissac identifies four leitmotifs in his interpretation of Sebeok’s 1976 monograph, *Contributions to the Doctrine of Signs*, among which “advocation of biosemiotic research”: the other three are “critical assessment of the Saussurean tradition,” “efforts to build a taxonomy of signs,” and “insistence on the pertinence of R. Thom’s topological theory for semiotics” (cited in Sebeok, 1979: viii). After Sebeok’s work, the general conception of semiotics as a field of inquiry and of its history has effectively changed. Thanks to this great master of the sign, semiotics at the beginning of this new millennium has developed broad horizons relatively to the sign universe—far more so than could have ever been envisaged during the first half of the 1960s.

Claude Lévi-Strauss comments on the extension, depth, and significance of Sebeok's semiotic research in his Avant-propos to the 1986 collective Festschrift entitled *Iconicity. Essays on the Nature of Culture*, dedicated to Sebeok and his work. Lévi-Strauss recounts that they met in 1952 at a conference involving anthropologists and linguists, organized by Sebeok at Indiana University, Bloomington. At the time, Sebeok was already inspired by an intuition that led to the conference itself and that he developed, amplified, and disseminated throughout the whole course of his research. Lévi-Strauss recounts:

Une de ces intuitions révélatrices comme, au cours de l'histoire, quelques savants seulement en eurent le profit, lui dévoila la présence d'un immense domaine aux confins de la linguistique, de l'anthropologie et de la biologie: non pas inconnus, certes, mais qui, depuis des siècles, était resté à l'abandon, livré à la confusion et au désordre. (Lévi-Strauss, "Avant-propos," in Bouissac et al., 1986: 2)

After pointing out how Sebeok had quickly understood the importance for semiotic research of the connection with biology (no doubt in tune with Charles Morris before him), Lévi-Strauss goes on to describe the extraordinary range, wealth, and variety of issues introduced by Sebeok to scientific research: his focus on both verbal and nonverbal sign systems and implications for animal communication generally, human and nonhuman; his critical reading of the relationship between semiotics and linguistics—"la sémiotique," as Lévi-Strauss interpreter of Sebeok claims, "ne derive pas de la linguistique, comme le croyait encore Saussure" (Ibid.); his critique of anthropocentrism when human faculties are attributed to nonhuman animals, etc.:

A lire les ouvrages de Sebeok, on est confondu par sa familiarité avec les langues et les cultures du monde, par l'aisance avec laquelle il se meut à travers les travaux des psychologues, des spécialistes de neuro-physiologie cérébrale, de biologie cellulaire, ou ceux des éthologues portant sur des centaines d'espèces zoologiques allant des organismes unicellulaires aux mammifères supérieurs, en passant par les insectes, les poissons et les oiseaux. Ce savoir plus qu'encyclopédique se mesure aussi aux milliers de noms d'auteurs, de langues, de peuples et d'espèces composant les index des ouvrages écrits ou dirigés par lui, et à leurs énormes bibliographies. (Ibid.: 3)

Lévi-Strauss concludes his considerations with an image that does full justice to this eclectic, insightful, and prominent master of signs, by associating him with the Renaissance:

[. . .] Sebeok apparaît ainsi comme la vivante image d'un de ces esprits puissants et singuliers que comptèrent la Renaissance et le XVIIIe siècle. Dans un tout autre état de la science et sur des sujets différents, ils surent, comme lui-même aujourd'hui,

ressusciter des mondes perdus ou oubliés, maîtriser des secteurs entiers du savoir, jeter les bases et dresser le programme de recherches qui, des siècles après eux, guident toujours leurs successeurs. (Ibid.)

In his survey of the problems relevant to semiotics, Sebeok discusses various aspects characterizing two different modalities of practicing semiotics, easily summarized under the name of two masters of the sign, Ferdinand de Saussure and Charles S. Peirce. The study of signs is “in transit” from “code semiotics” to “interpretation semiotics” as represented by these two emblematic figures and has now taken a decisive turn in the direction of the latter (see chapter 5). Sebeok’s critique of anthropocentrism and glottocentrism orients the general direction of his semiotic discourse and applies to all those approaches that refer to linguistics as their sign model. His interest in cultural processes at the intersection between nature and culture also led to his rediscovery of such scholars as Jakob von Uexküll, a so-called “cryptosemiotician,” among those he studied most, that is, a practitioner of semiotics without knowing it.

To get free of the anthropocentric perspective means to take other sign systems into account, that is, nonverbal sign systems, beyond verbal sign systems specific to human beings. Nonverbal sign systems are neither alien to the human world, nor species-specific, that is, they do not specify the human world. Nonverbal sign systems are involved in the encounter between human communication and the communicative behavior of non-human communities as much as with the environment. They are involved in interspecies communication (communication among different species) and not only in intraspecific communication (communication within the same species) but also in endosemiosis communication processes, which take place inside the body ontogenetically and phylogenetically, studied by endosemiotics. Thanks to his global approach to semiosis, Sebeok avoids all forms of biologism typical of approaches that reduce human culture to communication systems traceable in other species; just as he avoids the opposite fallacy of anthropomorphism, that is, of reducing nonhuman animal communication to characteristic traits and models that specify communication among human beings.

To posit that life converges with sign activity, as does Sebeok, means that to maintain and reproduce life, and not only to interpret it scientifically, necessarily involves signs. In other words, signs are not only the material of interpretation at a metasemiotic level, a higher interpretive level, but they are also the immediate material of life. After theorizing a direct connection between the biological and semiotic universes,

therefore between biology and semiotics, he also develops Peirce's statement that "man is a sign," adding that this sign is a verb: to interpret (see Sebeok's 1986a monograph, *I Think I Am a Verb*, in particular the introduction where he masterfully elaborates on this concept). In Sebeok's conception of reality, the interpretive activity converges with the activity of life, all life, including all of his own life as a researcher semiotician. If I am a sign, he seems to be saying through his life as a researcher, then nothing that is a sign is alien to me—*nihil signi mihi alienum puto*; and if the sign situated in the interminable chain of signs is necessarily an interpretant, then "to interpret" is the verb that best helps me understand my own self.

4.4 On Biosemiotics and Its Recent History

While semiotics, at least in the vital Locke-Peirce-Morris tradition, continues to widen its horizons to comprehend the entire animal kingdom, indeed, the whole of organic existence (hence G. Tembrock's preference for a broader label, *biosemiotics*), as well as the sign function of machines (so S. Gorn speaks of the fundamental semiotic concepts of computers), ethology is likewise moving to enlarge its scope to embrace man. (Sebeok, 1976: 93)

Biosemiotics is Tom Sebeok's holistic response to the state of the art in the study of signs, language, and communication, which in truth he already began to formulate in the late 1940s and early 1950s, if we consider his early focus on linguistics in relation to biology (as Lévi-Strauss did not fail to evidence), convinced as he was from the very outset of the need to foster ongoing dialogue between the life sciences and the sign sciences as he paved his way toward his grand project for "global semiotics." Sebeok critiqued separatism among the sciences, challenging the typical tendency among specialisms and specializations to create barriers and separations. From this point of view, he compared himself to a honey bee, *ape mellifera*, which sucks the nectar and fertilizes all it touches as it shifts from one flower to the next. Sebeok knew that anthroposemiosis could not be properly accounted for in any of its aspects if separated from the larger context, that is, from semiosis pervading the entire biosphere, and that contrary to anthropocentric temptations, anthroposemiosis (even more limitedly, anthroposociosemiosis, in particular verbal semiosis), in other words, the part, must not be exchanged for semiosis in its totality (a tendency which instead characterized the Saussurean tradition, what Sebeok dubbed the "minor tradition"), the *pars pro toto* fallacy, just as the verbal sign model was not to be exchanged for the general model of sign.

No doubt Sebeok was a worthy student of Charles Morris, the great master of signs before him who following in Peirce's footsteps systematized the general theory of signs with his epochal *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, of 1938. That essay benefited from Morris's research of the early 1920s when he had already signaled the need to cast theorizing about signs in the language of biology (Morris, 1938, 1948b, 1993). A general sign model with any claim to adequacy needed to be general enough to account for the particular, that is, verbal signs, as much as the general, verbal and nonverbal signs, and the latter pertaining not only to human semiosis but to all semiotic processes globally, human and nonhuman.

During one of his several masterful lectures delivered at Bari University (where I was based), Sebeok discussed the expressions "domain" and "field" clearly envisaging biosemiotics as an open and distinctly dialogic domain where the human sciences and the natural sciences, culture and nature, the humanities and the life sciences communicate with each other beyond separatisms and specializations. Sebeok's lecture was mainly inspired by his paper "Semiotics as a Bridge between Humanities and the Sciences"⁷ in which he makes a number of vital points: he criticizes the metaphor of a "bridge" in relation to semiotics and the various sciences and focuses on the concept of "mediation" (thirdness) with its strong Peircean-Morrisian overtones, he underscores the role of meta-discourse (metasemiosis) beyond artificial boundaries with respect to continuous semiotic fluxes, carefully distinguishes between "semiosis" as subject matter and "semiotics" as knowledge developed by the study of semiosis, and highlights the need for interconnections among different discourse genres—therefore, for dialogue between scientific discourse and discourse of the humanities (a term whose signifying implications are connected with the concepts of *humanitas*, *humus*, *humilitas*). Different discursive domains should freely interact, and thanks to such interaction or dialogue, they effectively enhance each other (on the concept of metasemiosis, see 1.2, 1.3, and 5.7).

Sebeok's language is rich in metaphors that refer to both scientific and literary discourse, and to different areas of research, the humanist and the scientific. He believed that the tendency toward separatism and lack of dialogue among the sciences was a serious obstacle to progress in knowledge. To recognize the need for dialogue means to recognize otherness (even if implicitly) as a motor for the development of semiosis in its multiplicity, and for an adequate understanding of its complexity;

it means to recognize the need for listening to the other across barriers and separations:

Unfortunately, although the “two cultures,” as ideal assemblages, still by and large “can’t talk to each other” (Snow, 1971: 17), that is only the lesser part of our—that is, the semiotic community’s—predicament. Much more enfeebling is the prevailing estrangement within the riven worldwide semiotics commonwealth itself, between the many who would style themselves humanists and a scientifically cultivated minority. In a paper, “A semiotic perspective on the sciences: steps toward a new paradigm” (Anderson et al., 1984), six of us tried to address this dilemma, but in the short run to no avail. The number of scholars who nimbly scud back and forth between the “two cultures” remains heartbreakingly miniscule. Peirce and Morris were two among rare American paragons, exemplars who could do so with the kind of panache that, say, the late Giorgio Prodi could (e.g., 1988), or our colleague Floyd Merrell today can muster (see 1992, 1995, 1996).

The Russian master, Jurij M. Lotman, has by contrast taken the boldly original step of doing away with the concept of “bridge” altogether, replacing it by the semiotically sensitive maneuver of transcoding. A main principle of his research method was the elimination of the opposition between the exact sciences and the humanities by treating the fabrics of these complementary domains as if they were readily transmutable from one semiotic system to another. (Lotman, 1990: 271; Sebeok, 2000c: 80)

Sebeok takes his place in a tradition clearly delineated (in consideration of relatively recent developments) by such figures as John Locke, Charles S. Peirce, Roman Jakobson, and Charles Morris through to Giorgio Prodi in Italy, and another American polymath, Sebeok’s colleague, Floyd Merrell who survives him. Interpreting Locke, but also Peirce, Sebeok maintains that “semiotics” (see section 4.3 for his considerations on this term and its analogues), at least for that part which deals with “communication” (Sebeok, 1991b: 22–3), bridges the whole array of sciences from the natural sciences to Locke’s moral sciences. In Sebeok’s words, “Just as the idea is a sign of—that is, signifies—the thing, so the word, or name, is a sign of—that is, signifies—the idea” (Sebeok, 2000c: 79; see also Appendix A of Poinset’s *Tractatus*, pp. 344–51). And on this point, he further cites Morris from *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, 1938: “Semiotic holds a unique place among the sciences. [. . .] Semiotic is not merely a science among sciences but an organon or instrument of all the sciences” (in Morris, 1971: 67).

Since Sebeok’s death in 2001, a series of important events have occurred related to biosemiotics. For an update on the current perception of biosemiotics and its history today, I asked a few colleagues and practitioners internationally the question: “When was biosemiotics founded

and by whom?” This led to a series of e-mail exchanges between 23 and 25 March 2010, briefly reported below, which apart from the interest of their contents testify to the liveliness of the debate among researchers working in this dominion and to the healthy inclination for dialogue and confrontation shaping it. As is often the case when a question of new ideas, expressions, and cultural trends, exact birth dates and signatures may be difficult to pinpoint, but the effort to pin down such facts is always helpful to the dialogue that these ideas engender and was something Sebeok encouraged. From this perspective, Mikhail M. Bakhtin’s own dialogic and nonauthorial/nonauthoritative approach is exemplary. Ideas are in signs that make their way through ongoing semiotic fluxes and find expression in different voices—whether related to each other or independently. To paraphrase Peirce, ideas circulate and attract the mind, by the power of sympathy, that is, by virtue of the continuity of mind, before being possessed by it (*CP* 6.307).

To my question concerning the rise of biosemiotics and its recent history, Paul Copley, editor of *The Routledge Companion to Semiotics*, 2010, responded by citing the first paragraph from Sebeok’s own entry on the subject, “Biosemiotics.” Moreover, he signals Sebeok’s early usage of the term in the final pages of his essay on zoosemiotics in *The Tell-Tale Sign*, 1975, together with the fact that, according to Sebeok, the foundations of biosemiotics are in the work of Jakob von Uexküll and Giorgio Prodi, though the term was first actually used in a scientific context by Friedrich S. Rothschild (1962: 777). As reports Copley, “this is what Tom said”:

Throughout Western history, most semiotic theories and their applications have focused on messages, whether verbal or not, in circulation among human beings, generally within their cultural setting. This kind of semiotic inquiry—characterized as anthropocentric and logocentric—has been the rule since ancient times, with the partial exception of iatric semiotics (symptomatology, diagnostics, or the like), practised and written about by physicians such as Hippocrates of Cos (c. 430 BCE) or Galen of Pergamon (129–c.200 CE), as well as their innumerable modern successors, notably Thure von Uexküll, MD (1908–2004), who regards biosemiotics as an underlying exemplar for all psychosomatic medicine. Indeed, the ultimate cradle of biosemiotics rests, if tacitly, in antique medicine. (Sebeok in Copley, 2010a: 179)

The same question was also turned over to two biosemioticians from a scientific background in biology, who responded as follows:

Kalevi Kull:

- (1) No beginning.
- (2) Jakob von Uexküll founded it.

- (3) Tom Sebeok founded it.
- (4) Sebeok & co founded it (first with Thure Uexküll, Giorgio Prodi, *et al.*, then with Jesper Hoffmeyer).
- (5) First printed usage of the term “biosemiotic”—Rothschild 1962 (see description in Kull, 1999a,b—<http://www.zbi.ee/~kalevi/kull27.htm>).
- (6) Jurij Stepanov 1971 coined it independently—I’ve asked him about this recently, and he confirmed this in his letter to me.
- (7) It can be that Marcel Florkin 1974 also coined it independently.
- (8) all (1)—(7) can be true.

Jesper Hoffmeyer:

I looked up the verb “found” in my computer’s dictionary which had this to say: “establish or originate (an institution or organisation), esp. by providing an endowment: the monastery was founded in 1665 [as adj.] (founding) the three founding partners; plan and begin the building of (a town or colony). 2 (usu. be founded on/upon) construct or base (a principle or other abstract thing) according to a particular principle or grounds: a society founded on the highest principles of religion and education; (of a thing) serve as a basis for; the company’s fortunes are founded on its mineral’s business. Origin, Middle English: from Old French *fonder*, from Latin *fundare*, from *fundus*, bottom, base.” In other words it seems that we should decide on when, where and by whom biosemiotics was institutionalized. Now, I see three answers to this:

- 1) Sebeok and Th. v. Uexküll together with a bunch of German medical doctors and I did attempt to found a Biosemiotics organisation in Glottertal in 1991 (I think [in fact it was 1992]). However, nothing much came of this attempt, so it hardly qualifies as a founding event.
- 2) In 2000 Kalevi Kull, Claus Emmeche and I decided (in my lab at Sølvgade 83, Copenhagen) to call for the first international conference devoted uniquely to biosemiotics. This conference took place in 2001 and actually did succeed.
- 3) In 2004—I think it was in the spring time before the Gatherings in Urbino—a group of people decided to establish ISBS.

I think one of these events deserves to be called the founding event, but which of them? Formally the formation of ISBS would probably best qualify, but practically I think the Gathering event was most important for the institutionalization of biosemiotics.

After an e-mail correspondence with Kalevi Kull, Hoffmeyer added the following:

In my personal opinion the first successful institutionalization of biosemiotics was the call for the “Gatherings in biosemiotics” conference in Copenhagen 2001. I think this may be called an institutionalization because it was followed ever since by annual conferences so that this summer (2010) we will have the 10th conference in Portugal. The call for the first conference was decided in a small meeting between Kalevi Kull, Claus Emmeche and myself in my laboratory in Copenhagen in the autumn of 2000.

Then in 2005 we created the ISBS, The International Society for Biosemiotics Studies (<http://www.biosemiotics.org/index.html>). The process behind this event has been described by Don Favareau in his essay “Founding a world biosemiotics institution: The International Society for Biosemiotic Studies” (*Sign Systems Studies* 33(2): 481–5, 2005). To quote Don: “[. . .] an online ‘Skype-conference’ linking biosemioticians from Copenhagen, Tartu, and Singapore [. . .] took place on June 12, 2005 and [. . .] could be considered to be the founding ‘cyber-meeting’ of the ISBS” (p. 483). This Skype conference took place on 12 June between Don Favareau, Kalevi Kull, Claus Emmeche and myself. I’ll leave it to you to judge whether the first or the second of these events best deserves to be called the foundation of biosemiotics.

To my question reformulated as “when was biosemiotics founded as a discipline and by whom?” Donald Favareau (see also 2010b) responded that

You raise an interesting question, to which I’m sure that I have no good reply! But I will try my best. Tom Sebeok—as you know far better than I from first-hand experience—really launched what he called “the latest iteration” (Sebeok, “Biosemiotics: Its roots, proliferation, and prospects, 2001), in the project of biosemiotic study which, he claims (quite rightly I think), has appeared in many different forms (e.g. medical symptomatology, as well as animal study of any kind) since antiquity. Tom’s famous sabbatical studying the literature on animal communication at the Stanford University Center for Advanced Studies in the Behavioral Sciences in 1960, in many ways, marks the beginning of this project, and we find the first use of the term “zoosemiotics” from him in 1963 (in his review “Communication in Animals and Men”). Try as I have, I am not quite sure that I can pinpoint Tom’s original coinage of the term “biosemiotics”—I think it is 1975, but Kalevi Kull has suggested 1972 (personal email communication, see also Kull, 2003). Still, of course, other scientists who were completely outside Tom’s circle (F.S. Rothschild in 1962); Marcel Florkin in 1974 also independently coined the same term, “biosemiotics,” for their research agenda—but those projects were never developed beyond the work of those individual researchers (thus far, anyway).

Tom’s interests in bringing together scientists and semioticians to investigate “biosemiotics,” as again you know and have written about so admirably, was part of his larger project of “global semiotics”—so if by “the discipline of biosemiotics,” we are talking about the current group of (primarily scientific-backgrounded) researchers associated with the name (Jesper Hoffmeyer, Kalevi Kull, Claus Emmeche, Marcello Barbieri, and their colleagues who run the peer journal *Biosemiotics* and the International Society for Biosemiotic Study), we can say that 1992 was the year that this group first started to form, as that is the year when Jesper Hoffmeyer met both Tom Sebeok and Kalevi Kull at a conference that Tom was putting on in Glottartal. Hoffmeyer and Kull started slowly coalescing a larger group of semiotically-interested scientists (Sören Brier, Claus Emmeche, Mogen Kilstrup, Charbel El-Hani) and their students (Timo Maran, Luis Bruni, Mette Boll, Morten Tonnessen) who worked together, reading and building upon each other’s work, in a way that Tom’s earlier scientific colleagues (eg, Giorgio Prodi, René Thom and Heine Hediger) never did. So in this sense, it was this group—aided and abetted by Tom Sebeok throughout—that moved Tom’s project of biosemiotics somewhat closer to a traditional scientific “discipline.” (Tom himself, you know, felt that it should remain more of an open-ended “domain” than a traditional academic “field”).

When Tom died in 2001, Hoffmeyer, Emmeche and Kull arranged the First Annual International Gatherings in Biosemiotics in Copenhagen, and this conference saw an influx of several new scholars who had also been—up till that time—pursuing similar lines of investigation independently. Such scholars included cell physiologist and hermeneutician Anton Markos, embryologist and semantic biologist Marcello Barbieri, plant physiologist Frantesek Baluska, and a number of roboticists, cognitive scientists, philosophers, and assorted lost souls such as myself. Out of these annual conferences grew a fairly cohesive group committed to the project of more firmly “establishing a discipline of biosemiotics” and in 2005, the International Society for Biosemiotics was formed. Our website, <<http://www.biosemiotics.org/>>www.biosemiotics.org went online the same year. In 2007, Springer Science publishers published the first in its *Book Series in Biosemiotics* (now with six volumes) and the international peer-review journal *Biosemiotics* began publication at three issues a year in 2008. The first PhD program in biosemiotics now exists at the University of Tartu, Estonia, where Kalevi Kull is the world’s first Full Professor in Biosemiotics and presides over the Thomas A. Sebeok Memorial Library.

This year we will hold our Tenth annual Gatherings in Biosemiotics, and—nine years after his death—Tom Sebeok is still the person whom we feel really “founded” our field . . . though it is hard to pinpoint an exact date “when”! Again, I would probably choose the Glottertal conference of 1992 as the real “birth” of the current “field”—with its coalescence into a more traditionally conceived “discipline” occurring at the first Gatherings in 2001. Jesper Hoffmeyer is the connecting thread between these two eras, along with his colleagues Claus Emmeche and Kalevi Kull, and Jesper’s two books (*Signs of Meaning in the Universe*, 1996, and *Biosemiotics*, 2008) probably have made more new converts to the current discipline of “biosemiotics” than any others. Barbieri and myself, for the most part, run the Society, which I supposed “formalized” (or at least “legalized”) the project in 2005. But the whole thing is a very open-ended and egalitarian, ongoing experiment—much as Tom wanted it to be, I think!

Marcello Barbieri referred me to his essay, “A Short History of Biosemiotics,” 2009, and John Deely to his own of 2009, “Pars Pro Toto from Culture to Nature.” In it he observes that,

When we consider Sebeok’s pioneering role, both in synthesizing the theoretical work developed at Tartu University by Jakob von Uexküll at the beginning of the 20th century with the work there by the Russian Estonian Jurij Lotman at the end of the 20th century, and in laying the foundations of biosemiotics generally, together with his promotion of the biosemiotic work of Kull and Hoffmeyer both in issues of the journal *Semiotica* and in his book series, it is hard to avoid speaking today rather of a “Tartu–Bloomington–Copenhagen school” as having succeeded the earlier “Tartu–Moscow school”; and it is this “school” which has provided the main theoretical thrust within the biosemiotics development up through the first decade of the 21st century. (Deely, 2009: 184)

Frank Nuessel’s response to my question fits well here:

I defer to both Don Favereau and John Deely and their observations about biosemiotics. I concur with Favereau that it was Sebeok who launched the field, though he labeled it “zoosemiotics” in 1963. I think few would challenge that assertion. Since

Sebeok's initial naming of a new field of scientific inquiry, it has grown from an area of interest to a full-fledged discipline as evidenced by university course work, numerous publications, programs of concentration, and doctoral degrees in the field. Everything that John Deely (in his 2009 "Pars Pro Toto" essay) says is true, albeit problematic for pinpointing a precise beginning and a single person who created it. I would still go with Tom Sebeok as its founder and greatest proponent, though it is hard to ignore Uexküll.

To my further question as to whether he agreed or not with my statement that the germs of Sebeok's conception of biosemiotics go back as early as the late forties, Deely responded as follows in our e-mail exchanges between 18 and 19 April 2010:

Well, I am not sure. In 1963 Tom invented zoosemiotics,⁸ which extended the action of signs to the whole animal realm; but that was still short of "biosemiotics." Then, in 1981 Tom published Martin Krampen's essay, "Phytosemiotics," which I commented on favorably in my essay of 1982 "On the Notion of Phytosemiotics" [. . .] At that point, with semiosis extending to all animals and now to plants, the base was in place to speak of "biosemiotics," a semiotics coextensive with life—plant, animal, human. It was on 1 October 1990 that I first heard Tom, in his address to the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, "The Sign Science and the Life Science" (published in "*Symbology*," bound together with *Semiotics 1990*, pp. 243–52), propose that semiosis presupposes life, so that "sign-science and life-science are co-extensive." I remember vividly sitting in the audience and thinking "Tom, you're wrong about this"; so when he invited me to send him an article I eagerly did which I entitled, "Semiotics and Biosemiotics: Are Sign-Science and Life-Science Coextensive?," 1991 (and since revised as chapter 6 "How Do Signs Work?" in Deely, 1994a: 151–82). So I would say that the main "foundation" or "framework" for biosemiotics, in its total contrast with semiology, was triangulated with zoosemiotics in 1963 and phytosemiotics in 1981. But of course there is background to all this, which you know better than I, in Tom's academic and personal relations with Charles Morris (and even Maritain, which you can see from Brooke Williams Deely's 2009 SSA paper), and his interest even as a linguistics major in biology, all of which inclines me to think that the 1940s & 1950s indeed are the "fermentation period" of biosemiotics in Tom's person and mind. Yet, even though Tom was citing Tembrock using the term "biosemiotic" as early as 1971, not till the foundation stones of zoösemiotics and phytosemiotics were in place was the idea of biosemiotics formally possible, and properly named as such. Most amazed I was in returning to the Latin text of Augustine to realize that in fact the phyto-zoo-anthropo foundation stones were already there in Augustine's Latin (Deely, 2006). So there is absolutely no doubt that Tom was the constellating central figure in the actual "birth" of biosemiotics (Deely, 2009, 2010c), the single most important development so far of our new century (along with our "new definition" of "human being" [Deely et al., *The Semiotic Animal*, 2005; also Deely, *Semiotic Animal*, 2010], although it is quite independently interesting and important to pin down, if we can, the actual "coinage" of "biosemiotics."

4.5 Signs and Life: The Gaia Hypothesis

We know that with "global semiotics," Sebeok posits that semiosis and life converge. In this framework themes at the center of his attention

and briefly dealt with in this chapter include the relationship between his doctrine of signs and biosemiotics, anthroposemiotics and zoosemiotics, semiosphere and biosphere, and between icon, symbol, and index. Sebeok hypothesizes three closely interconnected worlds forming our gigantic ecosystem called Gaia: the “lilliputian” world of molecular genetics and virology at the lower limit; the man-size world of Gulliver in the middle; the biogeochemical “Brobdingnag” world at the upper limit. All this together results in a multiform plurality which finds a common denominator in semiosis. The “Gaia hypothesis,” formulated during the seventies by James Lovelock (1972, 1979), proposes a unified planetary worldview according to which the atmosphere, the hydrosphere, and the lithosphere interact with the terrestrial “biosphere” (Theilhard de Chardin, 1959; Vernadsky, 1926), each being a compound component of a global unitary autopoietic, that is, self-regulating homeostatic system. If, proceeding in this direction, we accept the more general idea that symbiotic relations exist between the universe and life, as proposed by Greenstein (1988), we end up contemplating a biosphere in which messages/emitters/generators/sources/interpreteds, on one hand, and addressees/receivers/interpretants, on the other, all belong to one and the same gigantic semiotic network (or to use an organic metaphor dear to Sebeok “web”), that is our semiosphere (see Sebeok, 1986a: 29–39; 1991b: 96; for the web metaphor, see Sebeok, 1976: 149–188; Sebeok and Umiker-Sebeok, 1991).

Interpreting Peirce in our own terminology, the sign, or as he says, the “action of a sign,” can be described in terms of a triadic relation among object, interpreted sign, and interpretant sign. Peirce used the term “semiosis” (or, as he sometimes put it, *semeiosis*, see CP 5.473) which he adapted from Philodemus (1978: 141), endowing the term with a definition of his own as an “action,” or “tri-relative influence” (Sebeok, 1991b: 152). Peirce explicitly coupled sign processes with processes involving mediation or “thirdness”:

It is important to understand what I mean by semiosis. All dynamical action, or action by brute force, physical or psychical, either takes place between two subjects. . . or at any rate is a resultant of such actions between pairs. But by “semiosis” I mean, on the contrary, an action, or influence, which is, or involves, a co-operation of *three* subjects, such as a sign, its object, and its interpretant, this tri-relative influence not being in any way resolvable into actions between pairs. . . my definition confers on anything that so acts the title of a “sign”. (CP 5.484)

The sign converges with this triadic relation which, furthermore, is not isolated but rather is part of a “sign process.” To evoke Charles Morris

who connects the notion of semiosis to the notion of animate existence (1971 [1946]: 366), a sign process is “a process in which something is a sign to some organism,” and is so interconnected with other sign relations forming “interpretive routes,” to use Ponzio’s terminology, which intersect and form a sign network with undefined boundaries (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005; Ponzio, 1990a; see below, 5.7). In fact, something that was a sign can stop being a sign and something that was not a sign can become a sign, as stated by Rossi-Landi (1992). Included in the trichotomy object–interpreted–interpretant is also the interpreter, that is, the subject that uses, puts into motion, activates interpretants. Moreover, from a semiotic perspective, the subject consists of the interpretants it activates. Consequently, the interpreter too is part of the “sign network,” or, if we prefer the organic image, of the “semiotic web.” If we subscribe to Morris’s conception of semiosis according to which something is a sign for some organism, we can maintain, as does Sebeok, that at least one link in the semiotic chain is organic. In Sebeok’s interpretation, this may be just a part of an organism, or a product created by that organism: in the case of human organisms, for example, a computer, robot, automata in general, something that can replace the human body, whether *in toto* or partially, and therefore acts as a sort of extension on life, or even engender a type of semiosis able to flourish beyond life itself.

In Sebeok’s view (1991b: 152–3), what may be understood by “life” is still an open question. And in fact his research overall may be read as a lifelong endeavor to respond to two interlinked queries: what is semiosis? and what is life? For example, in his own description of the plant–animal–fungus trichotomy, referring to the manifold but complementary nutritional pattern of each group on which this classification is based (that is, on the way in which information or negentropy is maintained by extracting order from the environment, which makes plant–animal–fungus a semiotic taxonomy), Sebeok underlines how in photosynthesis plants interact with inorganic energy-information sources with which the former transform the inorganic into the organic. Most interesting, in his description, animals emerge as mediators between the other two superkingdoms, and as mediators they have consequently become incomparable “virtuosi at semiosis” on several levels: intercellular, that is, in the interactions among their multitudinous cells; intraspecific, that is, among members of their own species; interspecific, that is, with members of all other life forms extant within their *Umwelten*. All this leads Sebeok to hypothesize,

a fruitful analogy between the systematists' P-A-F model and the classic semioticians' O-S-I model: according to this, in general, a fungus/interpretant is mediately determined by an animal/sign, which is determined by a plant/object (but plant/fungus are likewise variant life forms, of course, just as object/interpretant are both sign variants; cf. Peirce to Welby, Hardwick, 1977: 31, 81). (Sebeok, 1991b: 156)

In dialogue not only with philosophers like Peirce and Morris, but also with scientists like the mathematician René Thom, the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, the geneticist François Jacob, and so forth, we know that Sebeok developed a "biosemiotic" perspective on signs and hypothesized that semiosis invests the entire living world. Semiosis and life—which, as far as we are aware today, is terrestrial life (Sebeok, 1991b: 85)—converge; indeed, semiosis is the criterial attribute of life. At this point, Sebeok also draws attention to the role played by iconicity in biological relations and genetic reproduction:

The sole feature that distinguishes living matter from nonliving (including crystals, which grow, and even reproduce) is evolution by natural selection; [...] the dynamics of semiosis is *the* criterial regulatory activity which contributes to the homeostasis of every animal and to the equilibrium of such groupings as social-organisms belong to. Organisms—or, at least, their individual cells—are best defined in terms of replication, which is significant precisely because it confers no obvious benefit on the replicating entity; genetic copying is the semiotic process *par excellence*, and iconicity plays a pivotal role in it. (Sebeok, 1979: 120)

Sebeok analyzes the evolution of semiosis on Earth, from the single cell to the multiform diversity of the "biosphere," which is subdivided into five superkingdoms: monera (bacteria), protists (including microbes), and the three multicellular superkingdoms—plants, animals, and fungi. All presuppose prokaryotes, the initial cellular formations (which originated approximately four billion years ago), and eukaryotes (which appeared about eight hundred million years ago), and which are still active today. According to this model, the living world presents itself as a single gigantic organism consisting of a confederation of even more complex cells, and yet other complex organizations, such as elaborate economic-political-ethical-social systems, in the human world. Moreover, current multiform diversity contains the germs of future transmutations yet to be accomplished and does not exclude the hypothesis (formulated by Peirce and developed by Sebeok following Margulis and Sagan, 1986) of a cybersemiotic dimension where sign processes aided by biotechnology and computer technology extend beyond life, develop in machines, and give rise to hybrid life forms (Sebeok, 1986a: 27–44; 1991a: 100–118; 1991b: 83–96, 97–100). Therefore semiotics

as a discipline and research area extends over all terrestrial biological systems contemplated by the gigantic organism called Gaia and even beyond in a temporal-spatial dimension that has yet to be discovered:

At the nether end of time, semiosis began when life began, but it would be erroneous to assume that, as life, including human life, changes in the future and eventually terminates, semiosis will also come to a stop. Sign processes, fabricating unlimited interpretants, are likely to continue, independently of us, in machines. [. . .] life and nonlife will blend and interbreed. Biotechnology and computer technology already provide humanity with an opportunity to redesign itself, but the new step will take place in the domain of robotics.

Cybersymbiosis [. . .] could also be dubbed cybersemiosis, to underline the exchange of signs between life forms, such a bacteria, for example, to activate biochips based not on silicon but on complex organic molecules [. . .].

Machines will thus become not merely the agents of evolutionary change—in some measure they already have—but also the loci for what Peirce has called “the essential nature and fundamental varieties of possible semiosis,” which, as he also foresaw, “need not be of a mental mode of being.” (Sebeok, 1991b: 98–9)

Thus interpreted the semiotic field, that is, the “science” or “theory” or, as Sebeok preferred, the “doctrine of signs” (indeed the oldest and most general term for semiotics following St. Augustine and Poinset, Locke and Peirce) extends well beyond the limits assigned to it by conceptions that refer the notion of sign (and therefore semiosis, meaning, interpretation, communication, etc.) exclusively to the human socio-cultural world. His approach accounts for the specificity of the human world, of culture, without ignoring continuity with the natural world. Indeed, the problem of specificity can be dealt with more adequately in light of such continuity. The human and all that which characterizes it as species-specific, for example, language, which is one of its most fundamental distinctive traits, is part of the biosphere and is the place where the natural world and the cultural world meet. The human is also the perspective of such encounter. As Peirce had already clarified in a letter to Victoria Welby dated 20 May 1911, “It is perfectly true that we can never attain a knowledge of things as they are. We can only know their human aspect. But that is all the universe is for us” (in Hardwick, 1977: 141).

Sign action converges with the flux of vital messages, with the ongoing cycles of the production, circulation, and consumption of energy-information, that is, with the processes of communication and signification. From an evolutionary perspective, this occurs on both the diachronic and synchronic axis where scenarios and actors change, as does the type of sign material, of elaboration/articulation sign material (Petrilli, 1990b, 2010: 137–58).

Sign processes allow for study from diverse points of view relatively to the object of analysis, the specific interests of the researcher and scientific dominion in question. The term “phytosemiotics” was introduced in 1981 by Martin Krampen to indicate the study of sign activity in plants. To this we may add “cytosemiotics” for the specific semiotic processes in cells, “mycosemiotics” for the study of fungi, and so forth. “Zoosemiotics” indicates the discipline that (with ethology) studies sign behavior in the single animal species, while the expression “anthroposemiotics” refers to semiosical systems specific to the genus *Homo*, which makes it a specialized branch of “zoosemiotics” (Deely, 2010b; Maran, 2010; Sebeok, 1976: 3). Anthroposemiotics focuses on those subsystems that compose human communication and are studied by “linguistics” (or, better, the various linguistics: sociolinguistics, ethnolinguistics, psycholinguistics, textual linguistics, dialectology, etc.) focused on the verbal sign; and by “semiology” understood as the study of signs used by mankind for communicative purposes (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2008a; Sebeok, 1991b: 59–67). However, anthroposemiotics also deals with types of signs that can be traced elsewhere in the animal kingdom—e.g., icons, indices, and symbols. Other neologisms include “endosemiotics” coined to indicate the science that studies cybernetic systems inside the body and the already mentioned “cybersemiotics” for semiotic systems generated in the world of artificial intelligence and virtual reality (see the essays included in the collective volumes Petrilli, 1999/2000, 2000a, 2001a).

A fundamental limit of “semiology” is that it is grounded in the verbal paradigm and mistakes the part for the whole, that is, human signs, in particular verbal signs, for all possible signs, human and non-human. Instead, following Charles Morris, Sebeok defines semiosis as a process in which something is a sign to some organism which implies the presence of a living entity. Whereas physical phenomena involving interactions among nonbiological atoms, subsequently among inorganic molecules, are described as “quasi-semiotic” processes. The notions of “quasi-semiosis” and “protosemiosis” are metaphorical. Sebeok distinguishes between nonbiological interactions, on the one hand, and “primitive communication,” on the other, which refers to information transfer through endoparticles, as in neuron assemblies where transfer in modern cells is managed by protein particles.

From the perspective of global semiotics, semiotics is not only *anthroposemiotics*, but also *zoosemiotics*, *phytosemiotics*, *mycosemiotics*, *microsemiotics*, *cytosemiotics*, *machine semiotics*, *environmental*

semiotics, and *endosemiotics* (that is, the study of cybernetic systems within the organic body on the ontogenetic and phylogenetic levels). Sebeok's semiotics unites what other fields of knowledge and human praxis generally keep separate either for justified needs of a specialized order or because of the useless, even harmful tendency to shortsighted sectorialization. The semiotic field extends over all terrestrial biological systems, from the sphere of molecular mechanisms at the lower limit to a hypothetical entity at the upper limit christened "Gaia," the Greek word for "Mother Earth"—a term introduced by scientists toward the end of the 1970s to designate the whole terrestrial ecosystem englobing the interactive activity of different forms of life over the planet.

Keeping account of semiosis on Earth as a global system—which wards off anthropocentric, logocentric, and phonocentric temptations—at least two aspects emerge: verbal and nonverbal. Nonverbal semiosis does not only cover human nonverbal behavior, but nonverbal behavior of all life-forms on earth (the human body included). It functions at both the microcosmic level (genetic code, immune system, etc.) and the macrocosmic. Nonverbal signs obviously surpass verbal signs by far in terms of quantity and extension. In any case, human life is characterized by its capacity for two orders of signs, verbal and nonverbal. However, it is the nonverbal sign that invests terrestrial semiosis overall and constitutes the distinctive characteristic of life itself. In four of the five superkingdoms mentioned above, semiosis is uniquely nonverbal; only in the fifth, that which is inhabited by the animal called *Homo sapiens sapiens*, do verbal signs come on to the scene to join nonverbal signs.

To recapitulate, a species-specific characteristic of human reality is the fact of having two orders of signs, distinct but overlapping, the nonverbal and the verbal. Signs circulate through the different forms and systems of terrestrial life without interruption, with the specification that in the human world, the verbal sign appears as well. Consequently, whether general or sectorial, semiotics must necessarily keep account of both verbal and nonverbal signs for a global vision of sign activity and adequate contextualization of specific semioses. Beyond regional interests and competencies, it is important to realize that a general model of sign is necessary and cannot be ignored for an approach to the study of signs with any claim to adequacy. All worlds at the semiotic level, the level of immediate sign reality, but also at the semiotic level, the level of "regional ontologies" pertaining to the difference sciences, are pervaded by sign processes.

Echoing the Latin expression *doctrina signorum* after the variegated usage of the Schoolmen, Sebeok designates semiotics with the expression “doctrine of signs” (which, as anticipated, he prefers both to the more ennobling term “science” and to “theory”), referring to a tradition that begins with Locke (1690)—who used the term “doctrine” to describe a *corpus* of principles and opinions that vaguely form a field of knowledge—passes through Berkeley (1732) and on to Peirce (“On a New List of Categories,” 1867 in *CP* 1.545–1.559). With Peirce following Kant who thematizes the conditions for the generation of signifying processes, it is at last possible to identify the foundations common to both the human sciences and the natural sciences. With Peirce’s “doctrine of categories,” the Aristotelian conception of reality as separate and independent from mind, on the one hand, and the opposite conception which describes reality as dependent on mind, on the other, come together and form a third path according to which our perception of both natural and cultural objects are the mediated result of sign experience (Peirce, *CP* 6.24). With the expression “doctrine of signs,” Sebeok highlights the educational aspect of semiotics which he views as a teaching maneuver combined with a learning stratagem. In addition to this he recovers the critical instance of semiotic inquiry which he invests with the tasks of observing and describing sign processes, as well as of interrogating *à la* Kant the conditions that make these sign processes and the disciplines that study them possible (Sebeok, 1976: 1–7, 176–81; and 1991b: 151–8).

That semiosis is not limited to the cultural sphere but invests the whole living world and is even recognized as the criterial feature of life, neither implies that life consists of semiosis alone, nor that semiosis is exclusive to the living world, nor that the nonliving universe is populated exclusively by signs. This opens to two interesting specifications: first, that not all is sign material, although anything can become sign material, an issue amply thematized by Rossi-Landi (1992) among others; in the second place, considered in all its extension semiosis reveals several manifold levels. In fact, semiosis extends from the level of chemical–physical sign action, from “involuntary,” “unconscious” sign action (“unconscious” at least in terms of criteria relative to human consciousness), through different levels of biosemiotic processes to the cognitive level with the appearance of *Homo*; at this level, semiotic processes are capable of objectifying other semiotic processes, including precognitive semiotic levels. The objectifying capacity of human semiosis is unbounded. It extends to organic and inorganic material, indeed to the

entire universe. Insofar as it is material of interpretation at different levels of cognition through to the scientific, the material objectified in interpretive processes, that is, the material object of interpretation, is material transformed into sign material: bodies become signs. In other words, nonsign bodies while maintaining their status as nonsigns, as bodies, also become signs. Insofar as the whole universe can be objectified in interpretive processes, it is prone to becoming semiosical; and insofar as it becomes part of the sign network, it can also contribute to determining the semiotical character of such objectification.

4.6 Signs and Nonsigns

Differently from Sebeok who maintained that all is sign, but following Rossi-Landi who distinguished between signs and nonsigns, a further distinction can be made between the object-interpreted that is already a sign independently from the interpretant and the object-interpreted that becomes a sign, thanks to the interpretant. In other words, a distinction can be made between an interpretant faced with an interpreted that is already a sign independent of the former, an interpreted that is already an interpretant, and, instead, the other case where sense is conferred upon the interpreted by the interpretant, where the interpreted receives sense and becomes a sign, enters the sign network, thanks to the interpretant.

A wet raincoat on someone entering the house becomes a sign if we interpret it as meaning, for example, that “it’s raining outside.” The wet raincoat is not already a sign, but becomes a sign on receiving an interpretant that interprets it as an interpretant of an interpreted (rain). Instead, a knock on the door is already a sign before and independently of the interpretation that “someone wants to enter.” A vocal sound is a verbal sign if it is interpreted as a given *phonia*, but, whether or not it effectively is a *phonia* (for example, the sounds made by the gorilla in “The Murders in the Rue Morgue,” by Edgar Allan Poe, wrongly exchanged for incomprehensible sentences in a foreign language), it is already a sign before interpretation intervenes.

However, it is not always easy to distinguish between that which is a sign on its own account and that which becomes a sign as the result of a given interpretive occurrence. Differently from a road sign, a footprint and the track left by a cart are not signs on their own account, but they become signs as a result of interpretation. Even blushing would seem to be a sign only as a consequence of being interpreted as a sign (of shyness, anger, lying and deception, etc.). In reality, as anticipated,

even before being a sign insofar as it is interpreted as disappointment or shyness, etc., blushing is already a sign in itself insofar as it is the body's response, independently from the subject's will, to a situation, let us say, of unease. A spot on the skin, the sign of liver disease, is already a sign, an interpretant response to an anomaly in the body to which the organism reacts as revealed by the skin disorder.

Another example, the honeybee, *ape mellifera*, identifies a group of flowers as the source of nectar: the flowers are the object-interpreted sign upon which the honeybee confers an interpretation, so the flowers become a sign because of this interpretation (naturally in the world of honeybees, given that insofar as they are living, for example, insofar as they are capable of photosynthesis, flowers are already *subjects of semiosis* even before being *subject to semiosis*).

When the honeybee begins its "dance" to communicate the presence and position of the flowers to its companion honeybees, the former in turn becomes an interpreted, but it is already a sign before receiving an interpretation: in this second case, the honeybee explorer is a sign in itself, on its own account insofar as it is an interpretant before becoming an interpreted. Instead, the flowers are not signs if not after having received an interpretation from the honeybee explorer. And yet it could also be argued that in the honeybee *Umwelt* the flowers are objective signs and are so on their own account, before interpretation, like road signs in the human world.

We shall now consider ten examples of semiosis provided by Sebeok in his 1994 monograph, *Signs. An Introduction to Semiotics* (second edition 2001):

- a radiologist spots a silhouette on a chest X-ray photograph of a patient and diagnoses lung cancer;
- a meteorologist notes a rise in barometric pressure and delivers the next day's forecast taking that change into account;
- an anthropologist interprets the ceremonial exchanges practiced among members of a tribe;
- a French-language teacher interprets the picture of a horse as a "cheval" and corrects a student for interpreting it as a "horse";
- a historian takes a look at the handwriting of a former president and therefrom gains insight into her subject's personality;
- a watcher observes the proximity of a person to another very influential person during a ceremony and surmises the former's important status;
- a compromising fingerprint is introduced as evidence on the basis of which the defendant is convicted;

—tracks impressed in the snow by a certain type of hoof enable the hunter to surmise that he is following a fully grown bull elk;

—a dog growls and positions itself in such a way as to appear as an interpreted toward a person who interprets its behavior as a sign that he is in danger of imminent attack, and takes evasive action;

—a peacock displays to a peahen susceptible to coition.

No doubt ceremonial exchanges, the picture of a horse, the word “horse” and the word “sign,” the growling dog, and the peacock’s exhibition are all signs on their own account, and not as the result of an interpretation. Therefore, we can distinguish between that which is already a sign and that which becomes a sign as the object of interpretation, even if this distinction is not always easy to make. To say that everything indifferently is a sign does not help to analyze the different situations in which semiosis occurs. The distinction (which Sebeok himself refers to *en passant* in *Signs*, pp. 9–10) made in the field of medical semeiotics (or symptomatology) between *subjective signs* (what the patient refers or indicates about his or her own body), or “symptoms,” and *objective signs*, or “signs” properly understood (what the physician observes—a “death rattle,” spots on the skin, a silhouette on an x-ray), is, in effect, the distinction between *what which is a sign only as a result of interpretation and that which, instead, is a sign on its own account*.

Sebeok is right when he rejects the distinction between *signs properly understood* and mere *symptoms*, as much as the distinction proposed by Ernst Cassirer between “signs” described as belonging to the physical world and “symbols” considered as part of the human world. Distinctions made within the various semioses should all be included in the concept of sign in general, as occurs with the icon, index, and symbol in Peirce’s typology.

The Peircean semiotic triad according to which the Sign is determined by the Object and determines the Interpretant, which is always the Third with respect to the Object and the Sign, remains valid in semiosis even when something that was not a sign becomes a sign as a result of interpretation. Once something is a sign, even if it owes its being a sign to the interpretant, the interpretant posits it as existing autonomously and objectively with respect to itself and posits itself as determined by the sign. It is in this sense that we have made the claim that with respect to the Sign and its Object the Interpretant is Third.

We shall specify this concept better as it may be the reason why Sebeok refuses the distinction between that which, in semiosis, was already a sign and that which was not a sign before and has become a

sign in semiosis—the process, situation, or relation in which the sign emerges as sign.

In fact, even when something that was not already a sign on its own account becomes a sign as the consequence of becoming the object of interpretation, that is, the interpreted of an interpretant—as in the case of the tracks left by a cart, or the wet raincoat, or a cigarette butt—at that moment it becomes a sign; it becomes a sign because the interpretant interprets it as the interpretant of an object-interpreted, that is, as already being an interpretant, as already being a sign determined by an object. Therefore, even when a question of something that is not already a sign on its own account, *the Interpretant of that which is assumed as a sign (whether rightly or wrongly) is always a Third with respect to a Second, the Sign, and with respect to a First, the Object.* In any case, the condition for something to be a Sign, which stands for something else, the Object, is that there be an Interpretant in the place of Third.

Whether something is already a sign on its own account or becomes a sign as the result of interpretation, as a Sign, it comes before its Interpretant because the latter already interprets it as an interpretant of another interpreted, the Object; in other words, the interpretant interprets the interpreted-sign as a response, therefore as already endowed with meaning on its own account.

On the basis of this specification and in the framework of Sebeok's global semiotics, clearly *not everything is a sign, but anything can become a sign.* That which is only endowed with materiality, that is, with otherness, objectivity of a *physical* order is not a sign before becoming the interpreted of an interpretant. This is the case of that which belongs to the inorganic world. Instead, that which is also endowed with materiality, that is, with its own otherness, with objectivity of a *semiosical* order, presents itself as such because it is already a sign on its own account, is already a response, an interpretant. This is the case for that which belongs to the organic world (see 5.9).

A mere reaction may occur in the inorganic world, a reaction and not what may be properly considered as a "response." Instead, when the reaction presents itself as a response, we are in the living, organic world.

Evidently, in both cases, contrary to that mistaken conception of the organic that went under the name of *vitalism*, we are dealing with physical–chemical processes. But an interpretant on its own account, which is a response and not a simple reaction, is what characterizes the living world. Therefore we can distinguish between *physical materiality* and *semiosical materiality*, claiming that the former belongs to the

nonorganic, nonliving world and, instead, the latter is a prerogative of the living world (see Petrilli, 2010: 151).

No doubt information exchanges, chemical-electric processes, etc. that can be described in terms of reaction are present in the inorganic world, but certainly it would be improper to speak of “responses.” Consequently, if in the former case we can also speak of “quasi-semiosis,” no doubt in the latter it is appropriate to speak of “semiosis.”

Therefore we are now in a position to make three specifications: (1) semiotic materiality exists where an interpretant on its own account is possible; (2) this occurs in the sphere of the organic world; (3) the organic world is made of “entities” that are already signs as such, insofar as they are living; instead, the inorganic world is that world where “entities that are not signs” can become signs, thanks to a conferral of sense by “entities” that are signs as such.

To proceed in this direction means *to identify semiosis with life* as does Sebeok. But differently from Sebeok, even if in the same perspective, we believe, following Rossi-Landi, that *not everything is a sign, though anything can become a sign*. That which is already a sign, that is, already a response even though it can be further endowed with sense as a result of other responses, is the living. Instead, that which is not already autonomously a sign but which can become a sign as a result of a response to it (by something that is living) is the nonliving, the inorganic (however, internally to the inorganic, but *within the sphere of anthrosemiosis*, we find human artifacts which too *are already signs even before they are interpreted*).

In the universe, life consists of signs, which is also why the entire universe seems to be perfused with signs, a concept Peirce himself problematizes when to the statement that “the universe is perfused with signs,” he adds the reflection “if it does not consist exclusively of signs.” The concept of a universe perfused with signs has been variously discussed leading to debates across the twentieth century and into the twenty-first on idealism versus materialism in semiotics,⁹ or to accusations of practicing “pansemiotics.” In fact, the universe would seem to consist of signs and nonsigns. But neither are such in an absolute sense: that which is living can stop being so and therefore lose its specificity as sign material, “no longer show signs of life”; and even that which is nonliving can become sign material if interpreted from the perspective of life. So far, even if most probably this is only a momentary and partial view, life would seem to be limited to the planet Earth. Therefore,

semiosis would seem to be a prerogative of life on this planet (on all these aspects, see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2001a, 2002a, b).

4.7 Icon, Index, and Symbol

Sebeok dedicates the second chapter in *Signs* to “Six Species of Signs,” as recites the title (which reproduces chapter 8 of his 1976 monograph), that is, to the typology of signs or sign systems. Moreover, as regards types of signs, this book of 1994 (precisely chapters 4, 5, and 6) has a special focus on “Symptom Signs” (chapter 4 in *I Think I Am a Verb*, 1986), “Indexical Signs” (chapter 13 in *A Sign is Just a Sign*, 1991), and “Iconic Signs” (chapter 6 in *The Sign & Its Masters*, 1979).

Sebeok draws on Peirce’s classification of signs; by 1906, Peirce had identified as his ultimate and maximal scheme sixty-six different varieties of signs (which he elaborated over a period of some forty years). Icon, index, and symbol form one of his most renowned triads and the one used most by Sebeok. This triad was originally presented by Peirce in his famous essay of 1867 “On a New List of Categories” (*CP* 1.545–1.559). With his own research, Sebeok amply demonstrated that beyond semiosis in the human world, all three types of sign relation can be traced in nonhuman semiosis as well. As an example of the symbolic/conventional relationship, Sebeok refers to a species of the dipteran, *Hilara Sartor*, which belongs to the carnivorous family Empididae. The male offers what Sebeok describes as an arbitrary sign, that is, an empty balloon to the female before copulation in order to avoid being devoured by her (Sebeok, 1979: 19). Iconicity is present, as we have already had occasion to mention, in the ant’s behavior toward the aphid (*Ibid.*: 13). In the “dance” performed by bees, either the indexical or the symbolic, that is, conventional aspect prevails depending on how it is performed and the criterion of orientation (for a synthesis of the comparison relatively to this typology, between the world of humans and the rest of the animal world, see also Sebeok, 1976).

Nonetheless with reference to sign type, no difference is observed between human semiosis and nonhuman semiosis. In the light of Sebeok’s studies, icons, indices, and symbols can clearly be traced in languages (which are human) and in nonlanguages (Petrilli, “L’immagine nei linguaggi e nei non linguaggi,” in Petrilli and Ponzio, 1999). Beyond the great subdivision of signs into verbal and nonverbal, but also beyond the distinctions between inorganic and organic signs, animal signs and specifically human signs, vocal and nonvocal signs, inner and outer signs,

witting and unwitting signs, etc., beyond all specifications, signs circulate without breaks or interruptions. All signs are part of the great complex semiotic network represented by the vast ecosystem denominated Gaia (see 4.5). And insofar as they are signs, the signs of the biosphere share features that can be classified in the light of typologies that transcend the boundaries of the divisions just listed. The tripartition into symbol, index, or icon is one of these.

Sebeok makes an important observation; on referring to Peirce's typology, he states that "it is not signs that are actually being classified, but, more precisely, aspects of signs: in other words, a given sign may—and more often than not does—exhibit more than one aspect, so that one must recognize differences in gradation" (Sebeok, 1976: 120). In certain cases, object-interpreted signs and interpretant signs simply share in certain common characters, in a community of qualities (see *CP* 1.545–1.559), a topological similarity (Sebeok, 1976: 128–30), a likeness (similarity or resemblance) of the iconic type (Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 8), where what is relevant as a criterion of likeness depends on conventions and habits of behavior according to which the interpretive process is organized. With Peirce, this relation is of the *iconic* type. From the point of view of the relation of signs (or representations, initially Peirce used the term *representamen*) to the real world they model, the icon is connected to its object by a relation of similarity. Sebeok specifies the concept of similarity in relation to the notion of iconicity as understood by Peirce. That which is relevant as the criterion of similarity depends on the habits of behavior that orient the interpretive process. This in itself already tells us that iconicity is never pure, but rather is always "degenerate," contaminated by the presence of symbolicity which, in Peirce's description, characterizes the relationship between the interpreted sign and the interpretant as prevalently based upon a habit, which as such is an "arbitrary" relationship.

Symbolicity (or conventionality), iconicity (likeness, similarity), and indexicality (contiguity/causality) are always copresent and are so to varying degrees: some signs are prevalently symbolic, others are prevalently iconic and others still prevalently indexical. Furthermore, symbolicity, iconicity, and indexicality come into play not only in semiotics and in the typology of signs, but also in logic and the typology of arguments (or inferences). Induction is the type of inference in which the premises and the conclusion stand as interpreted and interpretant in a relation of the symbolic type; in abduction, the premises and the

conclusion are connected on the basis of an iconic relation; in deduction, the relation is indexical (Petrilli, 1999c).

Peirce classifies icons into three subclasses: images, diagrams, and metaphors (*CP* 2.277). In the image, the iconic relation between interpreted and interpretant is a relation of general and direct similarity; in the diagram, the relation among the parts represented is of analogical similarity; while, instead, the metaphor pictures a parallelism. In icons, the relation of the interpretant to the object-interpreted sign reaches a maximum degree of independence and is a relation of hypothetical similarity; it is neither a relation of necessary contiguity (index), nor is it based on *habitus* (symbol).

This is another reason why in terms of inference and cognitive processes iconicity contributes to the development of abductive reasoning at different degrees of innovative capacity (for all these aspects, see also *CP* 2.247–2.249, 2.266–2.270, 2.273–2.304). All the same with Rossi-Landi's research, it has become clear that the icon—whether image, diagram, or metaphor—does not in itself explain the innovative value of abduction. Instead, the innovative capacity is determined by a special type of similarity, what he calls “homology,” adapting the term from the biological sciences (Rossi-Landi, 1968, 1975a: 70–120, 1992: 163–228). Innovative sign processes *par excellence* are dominated by a relation of homological iconicity between interpreted and interpretant signs. This type of similarity is not immediately obvious, but rather operates at the deep level of dynamical, genetical-structural formation processes beyond surface similarity, that is, beyond similarity that is immediately obvious and already given at the surface level, what Rossi-Landi calls analogy. Therefore, in terms of inference, iconicity presents different degrees in innovative capacity depending on what type of likeness, on what type of associative relation prevails, whether analogical or homological, transferring and developing this concept from the field of biology.

The relation between the object-interpreted sign and the interpretant sign may also be dominated by contiguity/causality. In this case, the relation among the parts forming the sign situation is of the indexical type. Here the relation of the sign to its object consists of a correspondence, in fact (*CP* 1.558). In a section entitled “A Second Trichotomy of Signs,” in Peirce's posthumous *Collected Papers*, we find the following description of the index. His description of the symbol and icon in the same text are also reported below. These descriptions evidence the condition of “degeneracy” characteristic of this special sign triad:

An *Index* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of being really affected by that Object. It cannot, therefore, be a Qualisign, because qualities are whatever they are independently of anything else. In so far as the Index is affected by the Object, it necessarily has come Quality in common with the Object, and it is in respect to these that it refers to the Object. It does, therefore, involve a sort of Icon, although an Icon of a peculiar kind; and it is not the mere resemblance of its Object, even in these respects which makes it a sign, but it is the actual modification of it by the Object. (CP 2.248)

Similarly to iconicity and symbolicity, indexicality is also closely related to the other two types of sign and can only be separated from them by abstraction for the sake of analysis. Indexical relations, too, can be distinguished according to three subclasses: (1) *symptoms*, where the relation among the parts is of contiguity *and* of causality: spots on the skin (interpreted), liver disease (interpretant); smoke (interpreted), fire (interpretant); (2) *clues*, where the relation is of causality, though not immediately present, but deduced on the basis of *assumed contiguity*: cloudy sky (interpreted), rain (interpretant); (3) *traces*, where instead the relation is of contiguity, though it too not immediately present, but deduced on the basis of *assumed causality*: a track (interpreted), animal (interpretant); a given phobia (interpreted), a given event that produced it (interpretant).

When the interpreted–interpretant relation is neither regulated by similarity nor contiguity–causality but rather by a habit of behavior, this relation by comparison is “arbitrary,” that is “conventional” (“symbolic,” in Peirce’s terminology, but the term “symbol” is misused and can cause misunderstanding). Peirce describes the symbol as follows:

A *Symbol* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes by virtue of a law, usually an association of general ideas, which operates to cause the Symbol to be interpreted as referring to that Object. It is thus itself a general type of law, that is, a Legisign. As such it acts through a Replica. Not only is it general itself, but the Object to which it refers is of a general nature. Now that which is general has its being in the instances which it will determine. There must, therefore, be existent instances of what the Symbol denotes, although we must here understand by “existent,” existent in the possibly imaginary universe to which the Symbol refers. The Symbol will indirectly, through the association or other law, be affected by those instances; and thus the Symbol will involve a sort of Index, although an Index of a peculiar kind. It will not, however, be by any means true that the slight effect upon the Symbol of those instances accounts for the significant character of the Symbol. (CP 2.249)

Unlike the icon and the index, in the symbol, the relation between the interpreted and interpretant is neither a relation of similarity nor of contiguity/causality, respectively, but rather is based on convention. Important symbol subspecies include, among other signs, allegory, badge,

brand, device (in heraldry), emblem, insignia, mark, and stigma (when not embodied as a symptom, as in the expression venous stigmata, suggesting alcoholic excess) (Sebeok, 1976: 135).

To the icon, index, and symbol, Sebeok (Ibid.: 121–2) adds another three “species of signs”: the *signal* (“when a sign token mechanically or conventionally triggers some reaction on the part of a receiver, it is said to function as a signal,” Ibid., 121); the *symptom* (“a symptom is a compulsive, automatic, nonarbitrary sign, such that the signifier is coupled with the signified in the manner of a natural link,” Ibid.: 124); the *name* (“a sign which has an extensional class for its designatum is called a name,” Ibid.: 138) which is distinguished from the symbol insofar as the latter is a sign which has an *intensional* class for its designatum.

The symptom is effectively a subclass of the index, and the name is a subclass of the symbol. However, it is important to underline that according to Sebeok, the symptom is another species of sign by comparison to the index so much so that he speaks of “six species of signs” (Peirce’s three categories—icon, index, symbol—with the addition of *name*, *signal*, and *symptom*). Sebeok develops this classification in his 1994 monograph *Signs* (pp. 39–64) in which he makes a clear distinction between index and symptom and, in fact, dedicates an entire chapter to each as well as to the icon. However, as observed in my monograph on Sebeok coauthored with Augusto Ponzio, *I segni e la vita* (2002), we prefer Peirce’s analysis of the relation between “index” and “symptom.” As Sebeok himself pointed out, for Peirce, a *symptom* is never a distinct species of sign, but merely a subspecies of one of three canonical sign categories, that is, the index. The symptom represents a relatively genuine degree of secondness by contrast with the demonstrative pronoun, for example, which instead illustrates secondness of a “degenerate” nature (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2002a: 195).

The signal may be considered not as a species of sign, but as a sign at a low degree of signhood. Multiple interpretive routes generally branch out from the sign. To reduce these routes to only one is to move in the direction of signality. The interpreted–interpretant relation can be of the indexical, iconic, or symbolic type and is a *signal* if it only finds its place in a single interpretive route. Differently from the sign, the signal is not invested with a high degree of signhood, that is, of alterity; in other words, it is not at the intersection of multiple interpretive routes: the ring of a bell for Pavlov’s dog, the icon interpreted as “woman” on the WC door, red traffic lights are all signals and only give rise to a single interpretive route.

This does not exclude the possibility of the signal becoming the object of different interpretations in special cases and presenting itself as a sign. In the film *Modern Times*, starring Charlie Chaplin, double senses, equivocation and comicality ensue from investing a red flag that had fallen from a cart, a danger signal, with a different meaning than was intended when it falls into the hands of Charlot who by chance was heading a strike. Under certain aspects, all signs are also signals; in other words, all signs, including the verbal (which insofar as it is characterized by plurivocality is a sign at a high degree of signhood), contain a certain degree of signality.

The attention that the problem of iconicity tends to attract is largely due to its power of evocation and suggestion. In Peirce's description:

An *Icon* is a sign which refers to the Object that it denotes merely by virtue of characters of its own, and which it possesses, just the same, whether any such Object actually exists or not. It is true that unless there really is such an Object, the Icon does not act as a sign; but this has nothing to do with its character as a sign. Anything whatever, be it quality, existent individual, or law, is an Icon of anything in so far as it is like that thing and used as a sign of it. (CP 2.247)

With reference to the human world, the importance of iconicity and its consequences in the history of culture is particularly tangible in ritual systems, exoteric practices, magic (Frazer, 1951: 12–13, distinguishes between magic through the manipulation of icons—effigies—according to the “Law of Similarity” versus magic through the manipulation of indices, according to the “Law of Contact or Contagion”). Furthermore, the iconic component is also present in verbal language not only on the level of sound (use of onomatopoeia) and lexicon (where the effect of the icon is only virtual), but more significantly on the level of syntax (Jakobson, 1965; Sebeok, 1979: 113). Peirce states that “language is but a kind of algebra” and given that “algebra is but a sort of diagram,” language is a method for forming a diagram. Moreover, he continues, “The meanings of words ordinarily depend upon our tendencies to weld together qualities and our aptitudes to see resemblances [. . .] upon associations by *similarity*” (CP 3.419). He then comments on “the living influence upon us of a *diagram*, or *icon*, with whose several parts are connected in thought an equal number of feelings or ideas [. . .]” (CP 7.467). In any case a full understanding of the theory of iconicity according to Peirce requires an understanding of his existential graphs, as he advised Welby (Hardwick, 1977: 96–108). Furthermore, Sebeok predicts the possibility of further developments by relating Peirce's graphs (see CP 4.530–4.572) to René Thom's topology.

Sebeok reports two paradigmatic cases regarding the icon effect in the contemporary world, the Dr. Kenneth Edelin trial and the case of Karen Ann Quinlan, with which two great ethical-political affairs were decided on the basis of recourse to the category of iconicity: the issues involved were the right to abortion and the right to “pull the plug.” But the decision was entrusted to people who were altogether incompetent for the task. In the first case, the abortionist physician was condemned for homicide on the basis of a photograph of the fetus exhibited to the jury. The problem was to establish at what stage should the replica or copy or image (the *homunculus*) be interpreted as an iconic representation of its model (human baby). In the second case, the problem was to establish the point in life when death occurs, that is, when the iconic representation (regressively vegetative embryo) can be deemed to have ceased to resemble its model (typical high school senior) (Sebeok, 1979: 112).

Sebeok maintains the hypothesis that iconicity is predominant among speechless creatures, is essential to survival of the single individual, to its well-being, and carries out an important role for evolution generally (Ibid.: 107–27).

The instances of iconicity in zoosemiosis are countless and invest all channels available for the transmission of messages—chemical, visual, auditory, tactile, olfactive (Sebeok, 1976: 128–31). An example of the iconic function of the chemical sign in the animal world is given by emission of an alarm substance, pheromone, by the ant, *Pogonomyrmex badius*, to signal danger. The quantity of released pheromone is proportional to the degree of danger that it represents iconically and functions as a sort of diagram where the relation of similarity is given by relations of proportion: “The sign is iconic inasmuch as it varies in analogous proportion to the waxing or waning of the danger stimuli” (Ibid.: 126). Another example of how visual iconic signs function in the animal world is the ant worker’s behavior toward a particular aphid species (*Myrmecophilous*). On the basis of an iconic relation of similarity, the ant exchanges the hind end of an aphid’s abdomen, and the kicking of its hind legs, for the head of another ant together with its antennal movement. On the basis of this double misunderstanding—the ant exchanges the aphid for another ant and the aphid treated in the manner of an effigy is induced to imitate the ant—the ant worker induces the aphid to secrete the droplets of honeydew that are consumed by the ants. Genetically programmed iconicity carries out a pivotal role in “deception,” which can also be traced in nonhuman animal behavior (on the hypothesis for the capacity among animals for lying, see Sebeok, 1976: chapter 9, 1986a:

chapter 10). Acoustic imitation of the wasp (*Dolichovespula arenaria* F.) by the fly (*Spilomyia hamifera* Lw.) illustrates the iconic function of an auditory sign. This icon serves to deceive a predatory bird called *Muscicapidae* (Sebeok, 1972: 86ff). There exist numerous examples of iconic antipredation such as that enacted by the orb-weavers. This spider adapts the environment to its own image by weaving copies of itself in order to deviate the predator's attention away from the living model's body toward its numerous replicas. But camouflage is only one among the many examples of how iconicity functions in the animal world.

For Sebeok to speak about the role of the icon in semiosis, the iconic relation, means to deal with the dynamics of topological relations, that is, with "topological similarity" in the relation between an interpreted sign (which implies the object insofar as it is subject to interpretation) and an interpretant sign, relative to the internal structure of the sign (which can only be isolated by abstraction), to the relation among signs, and to the relation between sign and external world, "reality" which semiosis at once presupposes, models and generates. "A sign is said to be iconic when there is a typological similarity between a signifier and its denotata" (Sebeok, 1976: 128). Sebeok prognosticates that catastrophe theory will provide new analytical tools for problems at the center of our attention (Stewart, 1975), thanks to the connection with topological analysis (Thom, 1974a: 245). In fact catastrophe theory, as proposed by Thom and developed by Zeman, belongs to a branch of mathematics known as topology that deals with the different points of a figure and its fundamental properties that remain constant even when the figure is deformed. The study of iconicity also emerges as the study of the topological relationship between the interpreted sign and interpretant sign: in Sebeok's words, it shows "how the process of copying operates throughout the molecular level, governs perception, imbues the communication systems of animals as well as of man, and constitutes a fundamental principle of socio-biology, in brief, is capable of integrating globally far-reaching problems of a universal character involving mutual dynamic relations between signifier and signified" (1979: 121).

With "global semiotics" or "semiotics of life," Sebeok makes a significant contribution to semiotics from a historical-social perspective as much as the theoretical, thanks to his work on core problems and concepts and to his indications for future developments. With Sebeok, semiotics is not only thematized as a discipline, but also as a capacity for reflection on signs specific to human beings, for conscious awareness

and responsibility, especially once we realize that to deal with signs is to deal with life.

4.8 Communication and Speech

The question of “how animals communicate without speaking”—an expression which figures as the title of an Italian collection of essays by Thomas Sebeok on animal communication, *Come comunicano gli animali che non parlano*, 1998—does not just signal a curiosity or simply allude to a zoological or ethological issue. Far more broadly, it concerns general semiotics and the place of human communication and verbal language in the sign universe and studies thereof.

Let us immediately observe that this question is a plausible one. By common sense consensus, it is generally agreed that animals communicate. Yet many sign experts, particularly the “semiologists,” tend to circumscribe their interest in communication to the human world. Some still consider the expression “communicating animal” as a qualification specific to human beings. In reality, all animals communicate: not only the human, but also the nonhuman. Indeed, to qualify human beings as “communicating” is simply to evidence the fact that they belong to the animal kingdom. Even more, studies in the sphere of biology now reveal that members forming the other two superkingdoms, plants and fungi, also qualify as communicating. In addition to this, communication is also present in microorganisms. Communication involves cells endowed with an unencapsulated nucleus, that is, prokaryotes and bacteria. And it also involves the more developed cells endowed with an encapsulated nucleus, that is, eukaryotes. These go to form the three superkingdoms (also a fourth superkingdom, the protists, inclusive of that which is neither plant, nor animal, nor fungi given that nourishment occurs neither through *photosynthesis* with plant-composers, nor through *ingestion* with animal-transformers, nor through *decomposition* with fungi-decomposers, but through a combination of all three processes as in the case of algae). Such expressions as “intercellular communication” (which nobody would misunderstand as referring to two people communicating with a mobile!) and “genetic code,” etc., now circulate in ordinary language. Consequently, to say that the human being is a communicating animal is like saying that the human being is a living being. In fact, while it is not certain that where there is no life, there is no communication, there is no doubt that where there is life, there is communication (and modeling). In fact, the claim is that

life and communication (understood in a broad sense) converge. Therefore, by comparison with the presumed “definition” of the human being as a “communicating animal,” the definition of the human being as a “mammal” is by far much more characterizing, though it too says nothing about the specificity of the genus *Homo*.

But not even characterization as a “speaking animal” qualifies the human being. That speech is not a necessary requisite to qualify the human being as such is testified by the existence of deaf-mutes—to all intents and purposes, people capable of high levels of cultural expression and yet they do not speak. What specifies human beings as human is not speech but language understood as a modeling device—language for modeling, not language for communication (see 5.8). And—vital—communication among infants (as the expression already tells us) occurs completely outside the verbal. As Sebeok evidences, infants (“in” is the privative prefix that precedes the present participle of “*fari*” “to speak”) communicate nonverbally as do people suffering, for example, from aphasia and as a consequence are considered as disabled (Sebeok, 1986a: 13).

As revealed by these initial considerations, it is not easy to respond to the question of how animals communicate though they do not speak, without dealing with human communication. “Animals that communicate without speaking” is an expression that can only be conceived from an *anthropocentric* point of view. Moreover, this point of view is also *logocentric* given that speech is considered as a necessary condition for human beings to obtain, which of course is a fallacy and does wrong to deaf-mutes. But the question of deaf-mutes aside, apparently only 1 percent of human communication occurs through speech, that is, through verbal signs, while the remaining 99 percent is through nonverbal signs. Moreover, human beings learn verbal language on the basis of vital nonverbal communication between infant and mother, or others involved in caring for the child. And for the infant, nonverbal communication is no less than decisive not only for survival, but for the whole course of its subsequent development as an adult.

In the terms formulated “how animals communicate without speaking,” in other words “speechless animals,” poses a question that in fact is badly put if the focus is on communication among nonhuman animals, as is effectively the case. What distinguishes nonhuman animals from humans is not the absence of speech: is it really true that “my dog only lacks speech”? (and reference is always to one’s own special dog, “my” dog!). That speech alone is lacking is true of the deaf-mute, or of the

infant. But we easily run into such expressions, just as we apply the question of how speechless animals communicate to nonhuman animal communication. Even Sebeok inadvertently uses such expressions as “speechless creatures,” while insisting that what distinguishes other animals from human beings is the fact that they do not have “language.” Here “language” is understood as a *primary modeling device* distinct from speech and from historical-natural languages that are *secondary modeling devices*, and are so only as a consequence of *exaptation*, given that speech originally developed as a result of *adaption* with *uniquely communicative functions* (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2002a: I.5, II.4; Sebeok, 1991b: chapter 5, 1994: chapter 9). But more on this later. First, I wish to evidence the difficulties involved in getting free of anthropocentric, logocentric, and phonocentric perspectives despite good intentions and however broad or unprejudiced our ideas.

4.9 Communication among Others

When dealing with communication among others different from ourselves, we easily make the mistake of investing it with the shortcomings, similarities, or potential typical of human communication, referred to as the criterion of evaluation. Even Ludwig Wittgenstein, renowned for his capacity for critique and open-mindedness, wrongly claimed that in Russian the copula is implied, so that the Russians say “snow red” “implying” predication of the verb “to be,” therefore “snow is red.” However, this is a clear example of prejudicially assuming the characteristics of one’s own language as the characteristics of thought and language generally. This type of confusion can be traced in English analytical philosophy when it claims to describe the general characteristics of ordinary language, in reality the specific characteristics of the English language. Noam Chomsky makes a similar mistake when he claims to refer to innate universal grammar, in reality identifying rules relative to English. In fact, his linguistic examples are not workable when translated into other languages.

The problem of understanding communication among others does not only concern linguistic, ethno-linguistic, or cultural anthropology dominated by prejudice of the linguistic-ethnocentric order; it also concerns nonhuman animal communication. Despite great diversity, even the characteristics of nonhuman animal communication tend to be established on the basis of anthropocentric prejudice. Therefore, we pass from the tendency to limit communication to anthrosemiosis, indeed, even more

restrictively to anthroposociosemiosis, that is, human social communication, implicitly denying that nonhuman animals communicate (in this case, semiotics would be a uniquely human science)—to the opposite excess. In other words, to certain nonhuman animals (chimpanzees, horses—the Clever Hans phenomenon—dogs, seals, dolphins, etc.) are attributed specifically human cognitive capacities such as counting, or even verbal behavior, simply on the basis of scientific-ideological trends that come and go. First, the study of animal communication should be oriented by a disposition toward the other; communication is connected with the problem of otherness. To relate to the other from self means to avoid projecting self onto the other or identifying with the other, as much as the opposite tendency to separate from the other and create barriers. Such an attitude often implies the arrogance of overevaluating self, the observing subject, and dominating over the other, in this sense violating the other.

4.10 Homologies and Analogies in Zoosemiosis

The study of animal communication is now part of that discipline known as *zoosemiotics*. With *phytosemiotics* (which studies communication in the plant world), *mycosemiotics* (the potential study of communication among fungi), *microsemiotics* (which studies bacteria or prokaryotes), and *endosemiotics* (communication in large organisms), zoosemiotics enters the domain of *biosemiotics*. Biosemiotics deals with the *semiosphere* understood in a different sense from Jurij Lotman who referred this expression to the human cultural sphere. But with recent developments in biosemiotics, it is now clear that the semiosphere converges with the entire *biosphere* given that life implies semiosis (that life does not subsist without semiosis is certain and is what we are directly concerned with here, but that semiosis subsists without life is yet to be demonstrated and in any case is not relevant to our present focus).

There are two ways of considering differences and identifying relations with the other: one by *contrast*, the other by *similarity*. The first does not help toward identifying specificities, as evidenced by Mikhail Bakhtin. Bakhtin, in fact, refused the approach proposed by the Russian Formalists, the “specifiers,” who explained the specificity of literary language by contrasting it to ordinary communication. Instead, Bakhtin worked with the category of similarity. And, in fact, in his splendid essay “Discourse in Life and Discourse in Art (Concerning Sociological

Poetics) (1926, in Voloshinov, 1927, Eng. trans.: 93–116), he evidences the specificity of the literary word on the basis of similarity to the word of ordinary life. Of course, the type of similarity alluded to is not surface similarity, so-called analogy, but rather deep-level similarity, genetic and structural similarity, that is, “homology.” Bakhtin knew the difference on the basis of his experience with the life sciences. In fact, disguised as a biologist (his friend and collaborator Ivan I. Kanaev), he also studied problems connected with evolutionary development and was critical of *vitalism*, which at the time was enjoying consensus. Not even the biologist and cryptosemiotician highly considered by Sebeok, Jakob von Uexküll, was immune (Sebeok, 1979: 187–207).

Victoria Lady Welby also thematized the distinction between analogy and homology as a result of her extensive studies and special interest in biology: the difference is between similarity that is not scientifically significant (analogy), that is, similarity among things that in ordinary language may even be called with the same name (the wing of an insect and the wing of a bird), and similarity which is scientifically significant (homology), for example, the wing of a bird, the upper limb of a human, and the pectoral fin of a fish. Approaches that oppose separatism among the sciences, in particular the human and the natural sciences, can do so on the basis of homological similarity, as illustrated by Sebeok (2000c, see note 21). Rossi-Landi (a major critic of separatism) also underlines the importance of homological similarity for the identification of differences and specificities, and even describes his own general approach to the study of signs, his “methodics,” as a “homological method” (see Petrilli, 2010: chapters 2, 3, 5).

The specificity of human and nonhuman animals, the degree of otherness distinguishing them emerges even more clearly in the light of the genetical–structural similarity, that is, homological similarity that relates them on both a diachronic and a synchronic level. For example, it has been scientifically demonstrated that nonhuman animals (whether separately for each species or viewed overall) use the same types of signs as humans. Referring to Peirce’s triadic distinction between *symbols* (based on convention), *indices* (based on contiguity or causal succession), and *icons* (based on similarity), all three types of sign (symbol, index, icon) are present in the animal world, human and nonhuman. In addition to this, nonhuman animals also use names and are capable of lying, as Sebeok has amply demonstrated in his many essays on naming and deception (Sebeok, 1986a: chapters 7 and 10).

Continuity between the nonhuman animal world and the human animal world does not exclude discontinuities and specificities, as expressly maintained by Charles Morris. We now know that anthroposemiosis is part of zoosemiosis, therefore that anthroposemiotics is a branch of the vaster zoosemiotics. To keep account of the relation of continuity, of similarity (homology), of the situation of evolutionary interconnectedness between these two spheres is a condition for the identification of otherness relations, of specificities, without reductionisms or separatisms. To reduce one sphere to another, or the opposite tendency to create barriers between them obstructs the possibility of understanding otherness, whether one's own or of others in the face of identities indifferent to differences, one's own and of others.

4.11 Totality and Otherness

As regards reductionism, some approaches aim to explain nonhuman animal behavior in light of human behavior. But the opposite approach tends to dominate as in the case of behaviorism where the tendency is to explain human behavior referring to nonhuman behavior as the model. Even worse, reference is often to animals studied in the laboratory and distant in evolutionary terms (rats and dogs as in Pavlov's case). Charles Morris himself is one of the main exponents of behaviorism with George Mead (according to an approach that was not distant from Peirce's pragmatism, as Morris knew well) and at once a major critic of behaviorism understood in reductionist terms. The latter claims to explain human semiosis leveling it onto nonhuman animal behavior, it too studied superficially.

Instead, an approach from the perspective of the logic of otherness helps avoid new misunderstandings of the biologicistic type that reductionist fallacies evitably entail. That the *semiosphere* and *biosphere* converge, that *global semiotics* (which studies semiosis of life) and *biosemiotics* converge can be demonstrated without implying any form of biologism. In fact, Morris first and Sebeok after him both proceeded in this direction, but neither fell into the trap of behavioral or biologicistic reductionisms. And yet Morris, whose *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938) was published as an issue of the *Encyclopedia of the Unified Sciences of Chicago*, was particularly exposed (though immune). He worked at a time when the "unification" of the sciences was the dominant concern and the tendency was to reconduct and reduce them all to the language of physics.

Here, too, the question of *otherness* emerges if the aim is to encourage communication among the multiplicity of sciences—human sciences, physical-natural sciences, logico-mathematical sciences—without any one of them overpowering any other. Interaction is most profound and efficient if “provoked” from a semiotic perspective, given that all sciences indifferently are involved with signs and their interpretations. Rather than a superscience or a philosophy with claims to omniscience, semiotics is a place of encounter where different sciences can dialogue with each other on the basis of their own specific interests and orientation: this is the condition for *real dialogue*. Each science participates with its specificity, its otherness with respect to the otherness of others. All sciences are involved in semiosis and semiosis presents a grand variety of aspects which call for identification in their materiality and objectivity. This is the condition for an approach to semiotics that is truly global, therefore capable of understanding semiosis in its different specifications.

The question of otherness is connected with the question of the totality. The otherness relation can only obtain on one condition: that no single part claims to be the totality. According to the Saussurean definition, semiology is the science of signs that studies signs in the sphere of (human) social life, limiting its attention to conventional signs, therefore to signs produced intentionally for communication purposes. When semiology claimed to be the general science of signs, it exchanged anthroposemiotics, that is, a part of zoosemiotics, for global semiotics; the part for the whole, thereby committing the *pars pro toto* fallacy. Moreover, the linguistic origin of semiology entailed that all other signs were studied and understood in the light of the verbal sign model, referring to linguistics as the model science. In other words, “semiology” is based on the verbal paradigm and is vitiated by the *pars pro toto* fallacy where human signs and in particular verbal signs are exchanged for all possible signs, human and nonhuman. But to establish an otherness relationship among research areas and their specific objects of analysis, requires a *detotalizing method* rather than such a totalizing approach. This means to redimension the imperialistic attitude of certain disciplines toward others and to reestablish the part with respect to the *whole which is far more extended*—a concept which also needs reconsideration.

Global semiotics frames each discipline in the study of semiosis in such a way as to avoid that any one of them should become absolute or misinterpret its own point of view as the only one possible. A *detotalizing method* in the study of signs and an *approach to semiotics that is*

truly global presuppose each other. Instead of favoring a totalizing gaze, *global semiotics* facilitates the process of *detotalization*. To identify semiosis with life is the condition for semiotics to avoid limiting itself to “parochial” views, as Sebeok would say, to the advantage of an approach that is as “ecumenical” as possible.

However, as anticipated, that life converges with semiosis does not mean that semiosis is exhausted in life. Sebeok declared this explicitly with which he made his global semiotics available to the processes of detotalization, as already prefigured by Peirce when he stated that the whole universe is perfused with signs, indeed consists of signs. Global semiotics is continuously exposed and open to its own detotalization to the point even of involving a *cosmosemiosis dimension*. If we fail to cultivate such a broad gaze (which can be described as “Lucretian” remembering the yet unsurpassed vision proposed in *De rerum natura*), the risk of shortsightedness (to varying degrees) does not only involve the destiny of a discipline (semiotics), but also of life and its signs. Conceived as global semiotics, semiotics eliminates boundaries and brings down barriers constructed by the parts when they claim to be the absolute totality. On the contrary, global semiotics reveals the relation of inevitable involvement, of inextricable mutual implication among parts, tracing the presence of communication that is not necessarily intentional, that is not decided by a subject, but rather is suffered, imposed and at once vital. Such a situation undermines, or at least ridicules, any form of arrogance or sense of self-importance (in Italian *boria*, a term used with polemical overtones by Giambattista Vico when he speaks of “la boria delle nazioni,” “the arrogance of the nations”), inducing each one of us to recognize our implications and responsibilities (with no possibility of alibis) toward life over the entire planet at least, if not toward the universe.

4.12 Otherness and Nomination

The problem of classifying an animal like the platypus (Eco, 1997) is rather insignificant by comparison to the problem of establishing criteria to define what “animal” means (Sebeok, 1991b: chapter 10). In all taxonomies distinctions are approximate, including that which distinguishes between the three great superkingdoms. The implication is that it is rather difficult to establish a net and precise distinction between that which may be understood by “animal” and all other living beings. Consequently, a fourth superkingdom has been postulated in which to place all that

is neither “animal,” nor “plant,” “nor fungus,” but “other.” This fourth superkingdom presents an immediate difficulty for denomination.

The problem of naming is always complex when a question of the other. With respect to the “same,” the “identical,” the other is the “not-same,” the “non-identical,” or the “extra-same,” “the extra-identical.” For example, given the primacy attributed to verbal signs on the basis of phonocentric prejudice, all signs which are other with respect to the verbal paradigm are classified rather superficially as “nonverbal” or “extra-verbal signs.” This also applies to animals which are other with respect to the human and which are indicated as “nonhuman animals.” In this case too, one part dominates over the other. All such denominations are clearly similar to the “unhappy” names for the other in the human world: “extracommunitarian,” “alien,” “foreigner,” “ethnic,” “Amerindian,” “red skin,” “illegal,” etc. Such expressions are now so much part of ordinary language that they seem normal, and yet that whales should be called “fish” is considered a scandal! As observed by Sebeok, popular taxonomies sometimes compensate for the rigidity and excessive abstractness of scientific taxonomies. And in the case of whales such a “popular” denomination for this cetacean is no less responsive to “reality” than is the expression “mammal.”

4.13 Semiosis with Language and Semiosis without Language

It is important to work on the *categories of general semiotics from the perspective of global semiotics*—sign, meaning, semiosis, communication, interpretation, etc. It is also important to avoid exchanging any of the special characteristics of these categories relative to specific and often privileged fields of semiosis, for general categories. Considering the dominant orientation in semiotics today, it is not redundant to repeat that a truly *general semiotics* is only possible from the perspective of a *global semiotics*.

To the semiotician accustomed to studying texts, social interactions, the cultural semiosphere in its different aspects, historical-natural languages, special languages, even such phenomena as marketing (a sign of the times!), to have to deal with bacteria can seem inappropriate. However, as Sebeok teaches us, if semiotics understood as the general science of signs is not ready to consider such basic life-forms as bacteria when defining general categories (communication, sign, interpretation and semiosis, etc.), inevitably it will end up exchanging the part for the totality.

Interpretation by a prokaryote, or a eukaryote, or by the immune system, or by the organism in gestation on the basis of a genetic code is no less important for human life (on both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic levels) than is interhuman verbal and nonverbal communication. Interpretive processes of this type are literally *vital* for communication in the human world. Consider that “intercellular” communication (that is, communication via cellularity) in technologically advanced human societies can only take place on the condition that intercellular communication (that is, communication among cells), endosemiosis, functions regularly in the organisms of the two people connected to the phone.

Even the expression chosen as the title of the 1998 Italian anthology of Sebeok’s writings, *Come comunicano gli animali che non parlano* (How animals communicate without speaking) is one of those “unhappy” expressions mentioned in the section above. Speech occupies a minimal place not only in the animal world, but even in that part which is the human world. So the fact of applying the expression “how animals communicate without speaking” or “how speechless animals communicate” to an enormous number of members in the animal kingdom is the result of privileging speech (unjustifiably) on the basis of a phonocentric prejudice. This bias is so deep-seated that the expression was accepted as the title of a book dedicated to nonhuman animal communication and actually sounds better than the more correct expression “how nonhuman animals communicate” or the equally correct “how animals without language communicate.” The volume in question is a collection of essays by Sebeok on zoosemiotics, selected and translated by myself and presented under a title which I proposed and Sebeok accepted.

The *capacity for language* understood as *modeling* and characterized by *syntax* (or, better, *syntactics*) endows human beings with the capacity to construct not only one world, like all other animal species, but numerous possible worlds. This species-specific modeling capacity appeared with hominids and determined their evolution during the whole course of development from *Homo habilis* to *Homo erectus* to *Homo sapiens* and now *Homo sapiens sapiens*. Syntax or *writing* (*ante litteram* writing, that is, writing before the letter, *avant la lettre*, to use an expression introduced by Emmanuel Levinas, writing before verbal transcription) involves the capacity to (mutely) construct multiple meanings and senses, multiple registers, that is, multiple meanings relative to different registers, with a finite number of elements. Oral verbal language can be discussed in terms of “writing” (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003a: 7–10, 11–26). Parallel to activation of the modeling capacity (language)

in the evolutionary development of *Homo*, nonverbal signs were also used for communication as in all other animals, but with the difference that in humans they were rooted in (mute) language (modeling). In this sense these nonverbal signs are linguistic nonverbal signs (Posner et al., 1997–2004, Art. 18, §5, §6).

When speech appeared in the hominization process, growing in complexity, expressive precision, and interpretive effectiveness, it did so as an instrument of communication alongside the different modalities of nonverbal communication. However, speech presupposes the capacity for language (understood as modeling). This means that with speech it is possible to produce an “infinite number of sentences” (to recall Chomsky), or, more exactly, “utterances,” with a finite number of distinctive traits, or phonemes, and a finite number of meaning elements, or monemes. Speech too is linguistic in the sense that it is rooted in language understood as a syntactic modeling capacity. Language is a primary modeling procedure, speech is a secondary modeling procedure, while writing understood as transcription, as mnemotechnics, is tertiary modeling (Sebeok, 1991b: chapter 5).

Only in the case of verbal and nonverbal human communication is it scientifically correct to speak of “language” and “languages,” or use the adjective “linguistics” (Petrilli, 1998a: chapter 2). Semiosis throughout the biosphere is endowed with a capacity for communication, but not with language understood as modeling, nor consequently with languages that are connected with this type of modeling which is specific to human beings. Languages belong uniquely to anthroposemiosis. But this does not exclude continuities and homologies: for example, homological relations can be traced between the syntactics of language and the genetic code. Nonhuman zoosemiosis is populated by sign systems, not languages; nonetheless, the same types of sign occur in both sign systems and languages, as demonstrated by Sebeok in his book on the doctrine of signs (see 4.5–4.7). This is why the correct title for Sebeok’s Italian collection of essays is not “how animals communicate without speaking,” but rather “how animals communicate without language.”

All the same, the tendency to privilege the verbal and to mistakenly characterize the human being as a speaking animal is so widespread that even if the expression “language” had been used in the title, it would have easily been read as “verbal language,” therefore as “how animals communicate without speaking,” neglecting the fact that human beings, too, are animals that can communicate without speech. But at that point, rather than make a straight out statement through a title, however

adequate, it made more sense to use the more attractive version and then proceed to explain the issues involved.

Notes

1. The expression “global semiotics” corresponds to the title of a plenary lecture delivered by Sebeok on 18 June 1994 as honorary president of the Fifth Congress of the International Association for Semiotics Studies, held at the University of California, Berkeley. This epochal paper was included in the 1998 Italian edition of Sebeok’s 1991 monograph, *A Sign is Just a Sign*, and was only published in the English original in a book by Sebeok with the same title, *Global Semiotics*, in the year 2001, being the last to appear before his death that same year.
2. But Tom L. Short, a major Peirce expert on the contemporary semiotic scene, identifies the lowest level of semiosis in animal life and consequently denies that there is such a thing as phytosemiosis (personal e-mail communication, 2002).
3. À propos Sebeok and the expression “biologist manqué” or “biologue manqué,” John Deely reports the following: On the second page of an undated manuscript among his posthumous papers, handwritten on stationery of the Washington, DC, Cosmos Club, after the heading “The Tradition I Stem From,” he lists as his principal influences the philosopher Charles Morris, the philologist Roman Jakobson, the theoretical and experimental biologist Jakob von Uexküll with his son the medical doctor Thure von Uexküll, and finally the animal psychologist Heini Hediger. Himself he describes as “a ‘Biologist Manqué’” (Deely, 2005: 2).

For further autobiographical details concerning Sebeok’s research interests, intellectual formation, and academic career, see my interview with him in Urbino, Italy, on 21 July 1987, first published in Italian and subsequently in English under the title “From Peirce (via Morris and Jakobson) to Sebeok” (Sebeok, 1987). In this interview, Sebeok refers to his essay “Vital Signs” (Sebeok, 1986a: 59–79) as his “most autobiographical piece” (see also Sebeok, 1991a: 95).

4. Concerning his role in the history of psycholinguistics, Sebeok contributed as (assistant) editor with Charles E. Osgood (one of the most renowned psycholinguists in the world for many years) to the milestone volume *Psycholinguistics: A Survey of Theory and Research Problems*, of 1954: “what many consider the initial foray into psycholinguistics [and] reads like a Who’s Who of the then emerging field,” as Frank Nuessel says (e-mail of 25 March 2010). This volume presents the proceedings of a summer seminar held in Bloomington (Indiana) in 1953, promoted by Sebeok and sponsored by the Committee on Linguistics and Psychology of the Social Science Research Council, set up in October 1952 (as John W. Gardiner reports in his Foreword to Osgood and Sebeok, 1954). Listed among the initial members of the Committee is Thomas A. Sebeok, presented as linguist, in the company of giants in the field of psychology, anthropology, and linguistics including Claude Lévi-Strauss and Roman Jakobson (see also Lévi-Strauss et al., 1953; Osgood and Sebeok, 1965; Sebeok, 1986a: 67–9).

The question of who started psycholinguistics, as virtually any discipline, is problematic, and to complicate matters, as Nuessel says in the same e-mail, “memories of an emerging discipline fade after a half century or more. Thus, many people recall that they were the prime movers.” On the problem of a discipline’s awareness of its history and difficulty to attribute the beginnings of psycholinguistics to any one person, which rather he describes as a collective effort, Nuessel quotes Konrad Koerner, historian of linguistics, and Roger Shuy, a sociolinguist:

Koerner (1991: 65) aptly observes that “[i]t is true that the appearance of a cover term for a particular field or research does not necessarily signal the beginning of a discipline, but it marks that point at which professional identification of a particular enterprise is regarded as desirable at least by some of its practitioners.” In his review of the history of sociolinguistics, Shuy (1997: 12) likewise states that “. . . a scientific field reaches some level of maturity when it begins to be aware of its history” (Nuessel to Petrilli, 25 March 2010).

In his own e-mail exchange with me, Donald Favareau makes the interesting conjecture that after the volume of 1954, Sebeok’s interests gradually started moving away from a linguistic approach to anthroposemiotics proper and toward what he famously called “the tulgey woods of semiotics”:

My guess is that the Chomskyan turn in linguistics, initiated in 1959, may have contributed to Tom’s disinterest, and by 1962 Tom has already adopted Margaret Mead’s suggestion to use the word “semiotics” as “a covering noun” designating the study of sign relations in all their variety (an investigation that most mainstream “linguists,” after Chomsky, were not particularly concerned with doing) (Favareau to Petrilli, 26 March 2010).

Be that as it may, as Paul Bouissac claims (e-mail of 25 March 2010), the term “psycholinguistics” certainly predates “biosemiotics” (see chapter 5) and as far as he knows was definitely not coined by Sebeok.

At this point, I would like to call attention to the fact that the expression “psycholinguistics” was common currency among representatives of the Significant Movement in the Netherlands during the first half of the twentieth century, as testified by writings collected in the volume *Signifying and Understanding* (Petrilli, 2009a), for example, “Today and Tomorrow,” by Gerrit Mannoury (1939), or “The Psycho-linguistic Movement in Holland,” by David Vuysje (1951).

5. I have translated most of Sebeok’s monographs into Italian some of which have appeared with publishers based in Puglia (Italy), such as *Adriatica (Il segno e i suoi maestri)*, 1985), Edizioni dal Sud (*Come comunicano gli animali che non parlano*, 1998), and Piero Manni Editori (*Basi. Significare, inventare, dialogare*, in collab. 1998). Sebeok was at my university in Bari (now Università di Bari—Aldo Moro), precisely at the Institute of Philosophy of Language (directed by Augusto Ponzio), where he was invited on numerous occasions during the 1980s and 1990s as visiting professor. He delivered lectures to undergraduate and graduate students in semiotics, philosophy of language, linguistics, anthropology and engaged in discussions concerning our research programs, never failing to fascinate us all.
6. Counting only books and leaving aside the long list of essays by authors across the world, monographic studies dedicated to Sebeok and his lifelong research include *The Body in the Sign*, by Marcel Danesi, 1998; *Thomas Sebeok and the Signs of Life*, coauthored by Susan Petrilli with Augusto Ponzio, 2001, and in Italian by the same authors, *I segni e la vita. La semiotica globale di Thomas Sebeok*, 2002. Furthermore, a series of collective volumes by various authors are now available. They include, in chronological order, the impressive collections *Iconicity. Essays on the Nature of Culture, Festschrift for Thomas A. Sebeok on his 65th birthday*, edited by Paul Bouissac, Michael Herzfeld and Roland Posner, 1986; and after almost ten years *Ensaïos em homenagen a/ Essays in Honor of Thomas A. Sebeok*, edited by Norma Tasca, 1995; after Sebeok’s death there followed the volumes, *The Invention of Global Semiotics*, edited

by Marcel Danesi, 2001; *Thomas Sebeok and the Biosemiotic Legacy*, edited by Soeren Brier, 2003; and most recently the memorial volume, *Semiotics Continues to Astonish. The Intellectual Heritage of Thomas A. Sebeok*, edited by Paul Copley, John Deely, Kalevi Kull and Susan Petrilli, 2011.

7. The original version of Sebeok's paper "Semiotics as a Bridge between Humanities and the Sciences" was delivered by him under the title "Semiotics and the Biological Sciences: Initial Conditions," at the first annual conference organized by the Semiotics Research Unit at the University of Toronto, in 1995. It was first published in Italian as "La semiotica e le scienze biologiche: condizioni di avvio" (from a typescript dated 16 April 1996), and included in Sebeok's 1998 Italian collection, *Come comunicano gli animali che non parlano* (see sections 4.8–4.13), and subsequently in English, in 2000, as "Semiotics as a Bridge between Humanities and the Sciences."
8. Though it makes no difference to Sebeok's meaning of "zoosemiotics," which was never restricted to the study of signs among animals kept in zoos, Deely uses the diaeresis as a way of signaling the difference between a zoo (where captive animals are kept) and zo-oh, which has nothing to do with zoos but with animals generally, captive or not. Therefore, the diaeresis simply wards off the unlikely possibility of someone thinking that zoosemiotics is the study of signs used by animals in captivity, animals in zoos (from a personal e-mail exchange with Deely, 4 August 2010).
9. Welby too discusses such issues in her correspondence at the end of the nineteenth century and into the twentieth with various eminent figures of her time (see Cust, 1929, 1931).

5

Otherness, Dialogism, and Interpretation

Otherness in its most abstract form is found only in the sheer multiplication of inorganic objects, whereas all organic life already shows variations and distinctions, even between specimens of the same species. But only man can express this distinction and distinguish himself, and only he can communicate himself and not merely something—thirst or hunger, affection or hostility or fear. In man, otherness, which he shares with everything that he is, and distinctness, which he shares with everything alive, become uniqueness, and human plurality is the paradoxical plurality of unique beings. Speech and action reveal his unique distinctness.

—(Hanna Arendt, *The Human Condition*, 1958: 176)

5.1 On Sign and Communication Models

The semiotics of Charles S. Peirce covers many aspects that orientate it dialogically, on the one hand, and contribute toward a more profound understanding of dialogic structure and practice, on the other. His thought-sign theory evidences the dialogic structure of the self imagined as developing in terms of dialogue between a thought acting as a sign and another sign acting as an interpretant of the previous sign. The Peircean sign model has now gained wide consensus in the sign sciences, especially general semiotics, philosophy of language, and related disciplines. This particular sign model is gradually supplanting the Saussurean model which because of the general success enjoyed by structuralism has spread from linguistics (and semiology) to other human sciences that refer to linguistics as their model, significantly influencing

them, as in the case of structural anthropology in the interpretation of Claude Lévi-Strauss.

We know that the Saussurean sign model is rooted in a series of dichotomies such as *langue* and *parole*, *signifiant* and *signifié*, *diachrony* and *synchrony*, the *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* axes of language (Saussure, 1916). These paradigms have been related to the mathematical theory of communication (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) and reformulated in such terms as *code* and *message*, *transmitter* and *receiver*. This explains why semiotics of Saussurean derivation has been described as “code” or “decodification semiotics” (Rossi-Landi, 1968, 1975a), “code and message” semiotics (Bonfantini, 1984, 1987; Eco, 1984, 1990), “equal exchange semiotics” (Ponzio, 1973, 1977, 1993). Despite their reductionist approach to expressive and interpretive processes, these concepts were thought to adequately describe all types of sign processes: not just the *signal* type relative to information transmission, but also complex sign processes, therefore the sign in *strictu sensu* relative to the different aspects of human communication in its globality (for the distinction between sign and signal, see Voloshinov, 1929).

In the framework of “decodification semiotics,” the sign is divided into two parts: the *signifier* and the *signified* (the sign vehicle and its content, respectively). These are related on the basis of the principle of *equal exchange* and *equivalence*—that is, of perfect correspondence between communicative intention (which involves codification) and interpretation (understood as mere decodification). In Italy, this sign model was early criticized by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1961), who described it ironically as a “postal package theory.” As Rossi-Landi pointed out, decodification semiotics proposes an oversimplified analysis of communication in terms of messages (the postal package) complete in themselves, which pass from a sender to a receiver (from one post office to another) ready for registration: all the receiver need do is decipher the content, decode the message.

Furthermore, as amply demonstrated by Rossi-Landi and subsequently by his collaborator, Augusto Ponzio, the Saussurean sign model is based on value theory as conceived by marginalistic economy from the School of Lausanne (Walras and Pareto). Assimilation of the study of language to the study of the marketplace in an ideal state of equilibrium gives rise to a static conception of the sign. In this framework, viewed synchronically the sign is dominated by the logic of perfect correspondence between that which is given and that which is received, that is, by the logic of

equal exchange that currently regulates all social relations in today's dominant economic system.

However, so-called interpretation semiotics evidences the inadequacy of the sign model subtending decodification semiotics. "Rediscovery" of interpretation semiotics no doubt has been favored by new orientations of a sociocultural order that arise from signifying practices intolerant of the polarization between code and message, *langue* and *parole*, language system and individual speech. Detotalizing and decentralized signifying practices tend to flourish as the centripetal forces in linguistic life and sociocultural life generally tend to weaken. These privilege the unitary system of the code over the effective "polylogism," "plurilingualism," "multiaccentuativity," and "pluri-availability" of signs and language. Moreover, by comparison with the claim to totalization implied by the dichotomies elaborated by decodification semiotics, the categories of interpretation semiotics keep account of the "irreducibly other," as theorized by both Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas.

That the instruments provided by decodification semiotics are inadequate for a convincing analysis of the distinguishing features of human communication had already been demonstrated by Valentin N. Voloshinov (therefore Bakhtin who spoke through Voloshinov among others) in his monograph of 1929, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Eng. trans. 1973). Reference is to such features as "plurilingualism" which includes "internal plurilingualism" (when a question of different languages internal to a single so-called national language) and "external plurilingualism" (the plurality of different languages beyond the boundaries of any one language), "plurivocality," "polylogism," "ambiguity," "polysemy," "dialogism," "otherness." Even if we limit our attention to the characteristics just listed, it is obvious that verbal communication cannot be contained within the two poles of *langue* and *parole*, as had been theorized instead by Saussure. Signs cannot be reduced to the mere status of signality: that which characterizes the sign in a strong sense by comparison to the signal is the fact that its interpretive potential is not exhausted in a single meaning. In other words, the signifier and the signified do not relate to each other on a one-to-one basis. As mentioned above, meaning cannot be reduced to the status of an intentional message formulated and exchanged according to a precise communicative will. Consequently, the work of the interpretant sign is not limited to the very basic operations of identification, mechanical substitution, or mere recognition of the object-interpreted sign. By contrast with signals, signs

at high levels of semioticity cannot be interpreted simply on the basis of a fixed and preestablished code. In other words, to interpret signs does not simply mean to decodify them.

Moreover, sign models are intimately related to our conception of the subject: in the perspective of decodification or equal exchange semiotics, the subject is rooted in the logic of identity at low degrees of otherness or dialogism. According to this approach, the subject coincides perfectly with consciousness and has full control over the sign processes in question; therefore, the subject is convinced that what a message communicates is completely determined by the intentional will of sender and encoder.

On the contrary, those trends in semiotics that somehow refer to “interpretation semiotics” (as distinct from “decodification semiotics”) and to the Peircean sign model describe the generation of meaning as an ongoing, dynamic, and open-ended process without the guarantees of a code regulating exchange relations between signifiers and signifieds (see Eco, 1984; Peirce, *CP* 5.284). In “Semiotics between Peirce and Bakhtin,” Ponzio associates categories developed for the study of signs by two epochal thinkers, Charles Peirce and Mikhail Bakhtin, and in this light demonstrates through detailed analysis how the sign model proposed by decodification or equal exchange semiotics is oversimplifying and naive (Ponzio, 1990a: 252–73). In fact, according to this model, the sign: (1) is at the service of meaning preestablished outside communication and interpretation processes; (2) is considered as a pre-constituted and passive instrument in the hands of a subject who is also given and preestablished antecedently to semiotic and communicative processes, therefore capable of controlling and dominating signs and sign processes at will; (3) can be decoded on the basis of a preexisting code shared by partners in the communicative process.

Instead, the sign model proposed by interpretation semiotics is triadic (at least) and is largely constructed with reference to Peirce’s astounding classification of signs, in particular his tripartite division of the interpretant into “immediate interpretant,” “dynamic interpretant,” and “final interpretant,” and his most renowned triad that distinguishes among “symbol,” “index,” and “icon,” etc. Peirce places the sign in the dynamic context of semiosis, open-ended, infinite semiosis, which also means in the context of the dialectic and dialogic relationship with the interpretant. Keeping account of such aspects, Ponzio’s association of Peirce and Bakhtin is highly relevant: Bakhtin places the sign in the context of dialogism and intercorporeity (in which alone can the sign fully

flourish as a sign), and describes signs and sign processes in the dynamic terms of “text,” “otherness,” “dialogism,” “responsive understanding,” “answerability,” “intertextuality,” “polyphony,” “extralocalization,” “multiaccentuativity,” “unfinalizability,” “plurilingualism,” “listening,” etc. (Bakhtin, 1970–71; Barthes, 1981, 1982). Though working independently of each other, and despite their different focus—Peirce worked mostly on questions of a cognitive order, Bakhtin on literary language, which he used as a kaleidoscope for his own philosophical work on signs and language—both scholars recognize the fundamental importance of the logic of dialogism and otherness for an adequate understanding of semiosis, of the pragmatic dimension of signifying processes, and of their implications from an ethical point of view. In fact, both also focus their attention on what we have identified as the “semioethical” dimension of semiosis (see Petrilli, 2010; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003b, 2005, 2010a).

5.2 The Dialogic Nature of Signs and Understanding

The word is structurally a dialogic word, a word born in relation to the other; as such the word is a response, an answer, a reply, and a question. The constitutive character of understanding is dialogic. Dialogue is an external or internal discourse where the word of the other, not necessarily of another person, interferes with one’s own word. More precisely, we may distinguish between “dialogism” and “dialogue,” where “dialogism” (or “dialogicality”) is understood as (passive) involvement with the other, participation with the other, which may or may not take the form of a dialogue, and is present in both interior and exterior discourse, but is not a prerogative of discourse (see 1.2), on the one hand, and “dialogue,” understood as “formal dialogue” (involving the exchange of rejoinders among interlocutors) or “substantial dialogue” (which does not necessarily involve the exchange of rejoinders), on the other. “Dialogue” may be dominated by the logic of identity or by the logic of alterity. If identity prevails, in the sense of “closed identity,” dialogue tends to reconfirm perspectives, interests, values without taking the other into consideration, and therefore is dialogue only in a formal sense. Instead, if the logic of alterity prevails, dialogue finds expression in the readiness to interrogate perspectives, interests and values, so that nothing is preconstituted, prefixed and guaranteed, once and for all. This is substantial dialogue. Form is not a determining factor for dialogue to obtain: we may well have dialogic form without substantial dialogism, and vice versa, substantial dialogism without dialogue (see Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 560).

Reading together Peirce and Bakhtin has led to the elaboration of a sign model that is dialectic or “dialogic” (i.e., the result of dialectics grounded in dialogism) according to which the sign and semiosis converge. Considered dialectically or, better, dialogically, the sign does not emerge as an autonomous unit endowed with a preconstituted and pre-defined meaning, with a value of its own determined in the relationship of mechanical opposition with the other units forming the sign system. Once the sign is no longer viewed as a single element or broken down into its component parts, it is difficult to say where it begins and where it ends. The sign in itself is not a thing, but a process, an open set of relations, an intersection of relations that are social relations (Ponzio, 2006a).

Bakhtin works on the concept of text which, like the sign, can only flourish and play the game of understanding and interpretation in the light of a still broader context: the intertextual context of dialectic/dialogic relationships among texts. The sense of a text develops through its interaction with other texts, along the borders of another text. Bakhtin’s approach to signs and language gives full play to the centrifugal forces of linguistic-cultural life, theorizing otherness, polysemy, and dialogism as constitutive factors of the sign’s identity. Says Bakhtin in his essay of 1959–61, “The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis”:

The text as utterance included in the speech communication (textual chain) of a given sphere. The text as a unique monad that in itself reflects all texts (within the bounds) of a given sphere. The interconnection of all ideas (since all are realized in utterances).

The dialogic relationships among texts and within the text. The special (not linguistic) nature. Dialogue and dialectics (Bakhtin, 1986: 104–5).

The categories developed by decodification semiotics are oversimplifying especially in their application to discourse analysis, writing, and ideology. On the contrary, interpretation semiotics with its theories of sense, significance, and interpretability (“interpretanza,” Eco, 1984: 43), with its broad, dynamic, and critical conception of the sign accounts more adequately for signification and communication, providing a far more comprehensive description of human interaction. As anticipated, the sign model developed by decodification semiotics is founded on the logic of equal exchange, on the notion of equivalence between one sign and another, between the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, the system of language and the utterance (*langue/parole*), etc. Instead, the sign

model developed by interpretation semiotics is grounded in the idea of deferral forming the open chain of signs, of *renvoi* among signs in a triadic progression whose minimal factors include the sign, object, and interpretant. However, it is important to underline that these factors only effectively emerge in semiotic processes and are connected by a relation of noncorrespondence according to the logic of excess and otherness. With reference to such logic, the interpretant sign never corresponds exactly to the previous sign, but says something more, developing and enriching it with new meanings.

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen. (CP 2.228)

The interpreter/interpretant responds to something and in so doing becomes a sign which in turn gives rise to another interpretive response, etc. From this perspective, the function of the interpretant sign is not limited to merely identifying the previous sign, but rather is taken to various levels of responsive understanding (or answering comprehension), which implies the existence of a concrete dialogic relationship among signs regulated by the principle of reciprocal otherness. As Bakhtin says (1986: 127): “Being heard as such is already a dialogic relation. The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response, and so forth ad infinitum.” Semiosis ensues from this live relation and certainly not from an abstract relation among the signs forming a sign system. Bakhtin’s concept of “responsive understanding” may be associated with Peirce’s “dynamic interpretant.” And like Peirce, Bakhtin believes that the human being is made of sign relations, sign activity. As explicitly analyzed by Voloshinov (1927), both the conscious and the unconscious are made of sign material, that is, dialogically structured verbal and nonverbal sign material.

In the situation of impasse characterizing decodification semiotics, Peirce’s approach represents a means of escape. His *Collected Papers*, which include studies on signs going back to the second half of the nineteenth century, only began appearing in 1931 and have the merit (among others) of recovering the forgotten connection with sign studies from the Middle Ages (e.g., Peter of Spain’s *Tractatus*¹ is cited frequently by Peirce). In his famous paper of 1867, “On a New List of Categories,”

Peirce describes the concepts he believed most suitable for a satisfactory analysis of the polyhedric nature of the sign. However, an even more articulate version of this description is generally considered to be his letter of 12 October 1904 to his correspondent Victoria Lady Welby, in which, with reference to the relationship between signs and knowledge, he maintains that

a sign is something by knowing which we know something more. With the exception of knowledge, in the present instant, of the contents of consciousness in that instant (the existence of which knowledge is open to doubt) all our thought & knowledge is by signs. A sign therefore is an object which is in relation to its object on the one hand and to an interpretant on the other in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object corresponding to its own relation to the object. I might say “similar to its own” for a correspondence consists in a similarity; but perhaps correspondence is narrower. (Peirce to Welby, in Hardwick, 1977: 31–2)

According to Peirce, a *sign* stands to someone for something in some respect or capacity. The sign stands to someone in the sense that it creates “an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign” in the *interpreter*; that is, it creates an *interpretant* sign (CP 2.228). Moreover, the sign stands for something in some respect or capacity in the sense that it does not refer to the *object* in its entirety (*dynamic object*), but only to some part of it (*immediate object*). A sign, therefore, subsists for Peirce according to the category of *thirdness*; it presupposes a triadic relation between itself, its object, and the interpretant thought, itself a sign. Given that it mediates between the interpretant sign and the object, a sign always plays the role of *third party*.

Peirce’s semiotics focuses on the concept of interpretation, identifying meaning (which Saussurean semiology leaves unexplained) in the interpretant—that is to say, in another sign that takes the place of the preceding sign. Insofar as it is a sign, the interpretant only subsists by virtue of another interpretant in an open-ended chain of deferrals forming the “semiosic flux” (for this expression, see Merrell, 1996), thanks to the potential creativity of interpretive processes. According to this perspective, semiosis is not guaranteed *a priori* by appealing to a code fixed antecedently to a specific semiosis, for not even the code subsists outside interpretive processes, but rather is established and maintained as a function of semiosis.

“Mediation,” which is closely interrelated with interpretation and infinite semiosis, is another fundamental concept in the architectonics of Peirce’s thought system. The sign is mediated by the interpretant,

without which it cannot express its meaning and, in turn, mediates the relationship with the object in any interpretive act whatsoever, from the simplest levels of perception to the most complex levels of knowledge. Meaning does not effectively reside in the sign, but in the relationship among signs.

Peirce's semiotics has been mostly read as cognitive semiotics in which logic and semiotics are related on the basis of the assumption that knowledge is mediated by signs, indeed is impossible without signs. Interpretation semiotics replaces the dichotomy between signifier and signified with the triadic relationship between sign, object, and interpretant, where the type of sign produced, in particular whether symbol, index, or icon, is a question of which relationship predominates (symbolic, indexical, or iconic) in the connection between sign, object, and interpretant—but whichever it is, the role of interpretant remains fundamental. Meanings evolve dynamically in open interpretive processes: the greater the degree of otherness in the relationship between interpretant sign and interpreted sign, therefore of dialogism, the more interpretation develops in terms of active dialogic response, creative reformulation, inventiveness, and critique rather than mere repetition, literal translation, synonymic substitution, identification.

5.3 Subjectivity and Interpretation

The description of signifying processes in terms of unending semiosis, of interpretive processes characterized by dialogic responsiveness, deferral or *renvoi* among signs, has consequences for a theory of subjectivity. In fact, by contrast to decodification semiotics interpretation, semiotics does not frame the concepts of identity and subject as coherent and unitary entities. Otherness is placed at the very heart of identity, is constitutive of identity which is described as developing in the dialectic and dialogic dynamics of the relation between the sign and its interpretants in thought processes forming the single conscious and in the relationship among the conscious of different subjects. Identity, the subject, consciousness develop in open-ended semiotic processes, evolving through the dynamics of responsive understanding, dialogism, and otherness in the interchange between the thought-sign and the interpretant.

We have claimed that for both Peirce and Bakhtin, the self is constructed dialogically in the translative/interpretive processes connecting thought-signs to interpretants in open chains of deferral: in this

framework alone, where the self is always other and is never definitively present to itself, can the self effectively subsist as self. Therefore, the self–other relationship not only concerns the more obvious case of the relationship among the “selves” of different subjects, among the conscious of different external selves, but it also applies to the multiple “selves” forming a single, “individual” conscious. The subject does not preexist with respect to interpretive processes which supposedly contain it, nor does the subject control these interpretive processes from the outside. From this point of view, the term “subject” is misleading, that is, when it implies the concept of identity understood as indicating a monologic and monolithic block, a well-defined and coherent entity, closed identity. Instead, the self converges with the chain of sign-interpretant relations in which it recognizes itself, to the point that experience of the self of another person is not a more complex problem than recognition of certain sign-interpretant relations as “mine,” those through which “I” become aware of myself. Consequently, says Peirce, “just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us (*CP* 5.289, n. 1).

Given that the relation with the other is the condition for the constitution of the “I,” the individual thought, the word, otherness is structural to the constitution of the subject, to identity, to the “I” which in fact is itself a dialogue, a relation between the same and the other. Therefore the “I” is constitutionally, structurally dialogic and testifies to the relation with otherness, whether the otherness of others or of self. Otherness is located inside and outside the subject. Philosophers like Peirce and Bakhtin describe dialogue as the modality of thought itself. This *substantial dialogism* of the word is connected with the capacity for otherness and is at the origin of the philosophical word.

An important distinction is that between “substantial dialogue” and “formal dialogue.” As anticipated above (5.2), substantial dialogue is not given by the dialogic form of the word or text (e.g., Socrates’s dialogues in texts written by Plato), but by the degree of dialogism operating in a word or text whether it takes the form of a dialogue or not. Substantial dialogism is determined by the (higher or lower) degree of otherness. Socratic dialogue as represented by *Menon* is a formal dialogue at low degrees of substantial dialogism (maybe the lowest of all Plato’s dialogues). Here dialogue is inquisitorial examination where the other (the slave boy) is induced to reach a conclusion that is predetermined by the person interrogating him (Socrates), who already knows the correct

answers. Instead, Plato's *Symposium* is an illustration of Socratic dialogue at relatively higher levels of substantial dialogism.

Dialogism as we are describing it implies a vital relation with others in the acquisition of experience and understanding. Human life is dialogic in the sense that human beings are inextricably interconnected with the world and with others, with the body of others in the species-specific terms of culture and civilization. The life of the individual and of the community is implied dialogically in otherness, in the intercorporeal relation, in the relation to the body of other living beings, whether human or nonhuman, as thematized by Bakhtin (1965) with his concept of the "grotesque body." From a Bakhtinian perspective, dialogism and intercorporeity are closely interconnected. Dialogue is not possible among disembodied minds. In fact, dialogism is more fully understood in the framework of a biosemiotic (though not reductively biologicistic) conception of sign. It is not a coincidence that, according to standard historical reconstruction, Greek philosophy and science began outside Greece proper, in one of its colonies, Ionia, precisely in the city of Miletus, a crossroad of commercial exchanges, a point of encounter among different ideas, traditions, customs, and languages from many countries of the East and of the West.

5.4 More Contributions to Symbolicity, Indexicality, and Iconicity

The sign subsists and develops in the dialectics among *symbolicity*, *indexicality*, and *iconicity*, according to different degrees of dialogism in the relationship among signs and interpretants, and among the premises and the conclusion of an argument. A sign is never a pure symbol, but contains traces of indexicality and iconicity; and as much as a sign is prevalently indexical or iconic, it will always maintain a certain margin of symbolicity. In other words, indices and icons, like symbols, also involve mediation by an interpretant and recourse to a convention. It follows that all signs share simultaneously in the character of symbolicity, indexicality, and iconicity to varying degrees: for example, verbal signs, though fundamentally conventional, also contain a certain degree of iconicity.

Symbolicity is an expression of the conventional character of the sign—that is, of the relation of *constriction by convention* between a sign and its object as established on the basis of a code, a law. The symbol is

not related to its object if not through the interpretant, without which it could not subsist as a symbol. However, even if the symbol is founded on a code, a convention, a law, the latter in turn is also founded on an open process of unending deferral and *renvoi* from one sign to the next: consequently, even in the case of symbols, the sign's relationship with the object is never completely univocal. Symbolicity is present in all signs to varying degrees, and not just in the symbol (which of course it characterizes). In the above-mentioned letter to Welby dated 12 October 1904, Peirce formulates the following definition:

I define a Symbol as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object only in the sense that it will be so interpreted. It thus depends either upon a convention, a habit, or a natural disposition of its interpretant, or of the field of its interpretant (that of which the interpretant is a determination). (Peirce to Welby, in Hardwick, 1977: 33)

Furthermore, according to Peirce, in signs of the conventional type where the relationship with the object is established by an external law and necessarily depends on the interpretant, the category of thirdness dominates. Thirdness is ultimately concerned with the sign in its relation to the interpretant.

Indexicality refers to the compulsory nature of signs, to the relationship of cause and effect, of *necessary contiguity*, of spatio-temporal contiguity between a sign and its object. As Peirce says, "I define an Index as a sign determined by its dynamic object by virtue of being in a real relation to it" (Ibid.). In the case of indices, unlike symbols, it is not the interpretant that decides the object. Rather, the relationship between the sign and the object preexists with respect to interpretation as an objective relationship, and in fact conditions interpretation. The sign and what it is a sign of are given together, independently of the interpretant. This does not exclude the inevitability of resorting to a convention, however, for the relationship between a sign and its object to become a sign relationship. The indexical character of signs prevails, for example, in traces, symptoms, and clues, in the relationship between fire and smoke, between the spots on the skin and a liver disease, between a knock at the door and the fact that someone is behind the door and wants to enter. Given that in this case, the relationship between sign and object is of cause and effect, of necessary contiguity (natural contiguity, inferential contiguity, etc.), and as such subsists independently of the interpretant, indexical signs are characterized by the category of secondness.

The icon is characterized by a relation of *similarity* between the sign and its object, which takes different forms as in the case of images,

metaphors, and graphs: "I define an Icon," says Peirce, "as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object by virtue of its own internal nature" (Ibid.). The determining factor in iconic signs is not a system of conventions and laws, natural causality or any other form of contiguity, but rather the force of attraction and affinity among parts. The iconic sign signifies without depending on a code, a convention, on conferral of sense by an interpretant. In this sense, the iconic sign is self-signifying, has meaning in itself, on its own account: the virtue of signifying is due to its quality. The iconic sign achieves a maximum degree of independence with respect to its object, which means to say that the interpretant can occur in a system that is altogether distant and seemingly unrelated, in extreme cases it may even be invented *ex novo*. Therefore, the interpretant is neither given through a relation of necessary contiguity or causality (index), nor of conventionality (symbol), but of hypothetical similarity. Though containing traces of symbolicity and indexicality, the iconic relation is characterized in terms of affinity, attraction, innovation, creativity, dialogism, and otherness. Given its relative signifying independence with respect to the object and the interpretant, it expresses the reality of firstness.

Iconicity and dialogism are intimately connected; moreover, the highest degrees of dialogism are reached in iconic signs. Not being the expression of a convention, the mechanical effect of a cause, etc., iconicity is connected with the concepts of responsive understanding, active participation, dialogic valuation, point of view, semiotic materiality, resistance in terms of signification, irreducibility to a situation of identity, absolute otherness. Indeed, on considering signs in terms of iconicity and dialogism, a useful expedient is to imagine them as rejoinders in a dialogue: in other words, the sign can be considered as a creative response to the verbal or nonverbal standpoint of another interlocutor, whether a provocation, prayer, threat, question, etc.

Necessity characterizes both conventional and indexical signs with the difference that in the case of the former, the relation of necessity ensues from accepting a law, while in the latter, it is passively endured as the result of an external effect. Consequently, in both symbols and indices, dialogism is at relatively low degrees. However, we also know that signs generally depend on their relationship with interpretants. But while dependency is a determining factor in symbols owing to the condition of arbitrariness, of dominating convention, the interpretant carries less weight in indices and icons. The latter are classified by Peirce as *degenerate* signs (a term taken from the language of mathematics) by contrast with symbols which are described as relatively *genuine* signs.

5.5 Firstness, Secondness, and Thirdness

“Firstness” (in-itselfness, originality) is one of Peirce’s three universal categories of phenomena in the universe, the other two being “secondness” (over-againstness, obsistence) and “thirdness” (in-betweenness, transuasion) (see Floyd Merrell’s essay, “Charles Sanders Peirce’s concept of the sign,” in Copley, 2001: 28–39). The categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness are universal phenomenological categories, the omnipresent categories of mind, sign, and reality (see *CP* 2.84–2.94).

Firstness (in-itselfness, originality) helps to explain logico-cognitive processes and therefore, at once, the formation of signs. Analyzed in terms of Peirce’s typology of signs, firstness coincides with the sphere of *iconicity*. Something which presents itself as firstness, presence, “suchness,” pure quality is characterized by the relation of similarity (see *CP* 1.356–1.358). Firstness is also foreseen by Edmund Husserl’s phenomenology of perception and predicative judgment, though his terminology is different.

In *Erfahrung und Urteil* (1948) Husserl analyzes “passive predata” as they originally present themselves to perception by abstracting from all qualifications of the known, of familiarity with what affects us. His analyses reveal that similarity plays an important role at the level of indeterminate perception as well. In fact, if by way of abstraction we leave aside reference to the already known object which produces the sensation (secondness, indexicality), and from familiarity through habit and convention, where what affects us exists as already given (thirdness, conventionality, symbolicality) and as already known in some respect, even though it is unknown to us, we end up in pure chaos, says Husserl, in a mere confusion of data. When color is not perceived as the color of a thing, of a surface, as a spot on an object, etc., but as pure quality, or, in Peirce’s terminology, when we are in the sphere of firstness where something refers to nothing but itself and is significant in itself, this something eventually emerges as a unit through processes of *homogeneity*. As such it contrasts with something else, that is, with the heterogeneity of other data: for example, red on white. Similarity at the level of primary iconism, that is, of the original, primitive phase in the formation of the sign as an icon determines homogeneity, which stands out against heterogeneity: “homogeneity or similarity,” says Husserl, is achieved to varying degrees through to complete homogeneity, to

equality without differences. We could state that similarity is what makes the synthetic unification of firstness or primary iconism possible.

Primary association has nothing psychological about it. Here Husserl's antipsychologism encounters Peirce's. Transcendental primary association is a condition of possibility for the constitution of the sign. By virtue of the dimension of firstness, the dynamical object is not exhausted in the identity of the immediate object, but, as the ground, that is, as the primary icon, it imposes itself on the interpretant over and over again (*immer wieder*, Husserl would say), as its irreducible otherness.

We may only reach this original level of firstness, of primary iconism, by way of abstraction. This involves either a *phenomenological reduction* of the *epoché*, according to Husserl; that is, bracketing the already given world and relative interpretive habits, or an artistic vision. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty shows in relation to Cézanne, painting is the search for the other which contrasts with customary attitudes toward familiar objects and conventions.

The painting of Cézanne returns to a perceptual relation where the category of firstness, as understood by Peirce, dominates almost completely, "à donner l'impression d'un ordre naissant, d'un objet en train d'apparaître, en train de s'agglomérer sous nos yeux" (Merleau-Ponty, 1966: 25). And agglomeration occurs through associative processes based on similarity.

Secondness (over-againstness, obsistence) is the category according to which something is considered relative to, or over against something else. It involves binarism, a relation of opposition or reaction. From the viewpoint of signs, secondness is connected with the index. The index is a sign that signifies its object by a relation of contiguity, causality, or by some other physical connection. However, this relation also depends on habit or convention, for example, the relation between hearing a knock at the door and someone on the other side of the door who wants to enter. Whereas the icon, which is governed by firstness, presents itself as an *original* sign, and the symbol, which is governed by *thirdness*, as a *transuasiational* sign, the index, which is governed by secondness, is an *obsistent* sign (see Peirce, *CP* 2.89–2.92).

From the viewpoint of logic, inference regulated by secondness corresponds to deduction. In fact, in the case of an obsistent argument or deduction, the conclusion is *compelled* to acknowledge that the facts stated in the premises, whether in one or both, are such as could not be if the fact stated in the conclusion were not there (see *CP* 2.96). From

the viewpoint of ontology, that is, of being, secondness is present in the law of “anancasm” or necessity which, on Peirce’s account, regulates the evolutionary development of the universe together with “agapasm” (creative love, which corresponds to firstness) and “tychasm” (casuality, which corresponds to thirdness) (see *CP* 6.287–6.317; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 59–79).

Therefore, the phenomenological categories firstness, secondness, and thirdness correspond, respectively: on the level of logic and inferential processes to abduction, deduction, and induction; on the level of semiotics and the typology of signs to icon, index, and symbol; and in terms of the evolutionary modes of development to the cenoscopic categories of agapasm, anancasm, and tychasm.

To secondness or obsistence, a binary category, there corresponds a relation of *relative otherness*, that is, where the terms of the relation depend on each other. Effective otherness, the possibility of something being-on-its-own-account, *absolute per se*, autonomously, presents itself under the category of firstness, or orience, or originality, according to which something “*is what it is without reference to anything else* within it or without it, regardless of all force and of all reason” (*CP* 2.85). An effective relation of otherness, *absolute otherness*, would not be possible on the sole basis of binarity, secondness, obsistence (Ponzio, 1990a: 197–214). Otherness relations in the sense of absolute otherness would not be possible in a system regulated exclusively by secondness and, therefore, by binarity, where an element exists only on the condition that it refers to another element and would not exist should this other element be negated. “Take, for example, a husband and wife. Here there is nothing but a real twoness; but it constitutes a reaction, in the sense that the husband makes the wife a wife in fact (not merely in some comparing thought); while the wife makes the husband a husband” (Peirce, *CP* 2.84).

Together with the universal categories firstness and secondness, thirdness (in-betweenness, transuasion) also guides and stimulates inquiry and, therefore, has a heuristic value. The inferential relation between premises and conclusion is based on mediation, that is, on thirdness. And since for Peirce all mental operations are sign operations, not only are his categories universal categories of the mind but also of the sign. Moreover, given that all of reality, being included, is perfused with signs, they are also ontological categories. Peirce says that a sign exemplifies the category of thirdness; it embodies a triadic relation among itself, its

object, and the interpretant. A sign always plays the role of third party, for it mediates between the interpretant and its object.

Any sign may be taken as something *in itself*, or in relation *to something else* (its object), or as a go-between (mediating between its object and interpretant). On the basis of this threefold consideration, Peirce establishes the following correspondences between his trichotomy of the categories which includes thirdness (but all his trichotomies contain thirdness insofar as they are trichotomies) and three other important trichotomies in his semiotic system:

firstness: qualisign, icon, rheme;

secondness: sinsign, index, dicisign (or dicent sign);

thirdness: legisign, symbol, argument (see *CP* 2.243).

Thirdness regulates continuity which, according to Peirce, subsists in the dialectic relation among symbolicality, indexicality, and iconicity. The symbol is never pure but contains varying degrees of indexicality and iconicity; similarly, as much as a sign may be characterized as an index or icon, it will always maintain the characteristics of symbolicality. In other words, a sign to subsist as such requires the mediation of an interpretant and recourse to a convention. Symbolicality is the dimension of sign most sharing in thirdness, it is characterized by mediation (or in-betweenness), while iconicity is characterized by firstness or immediacy (or in-itselfness), and indexicality by secondness (or over-againstness).

Peirce foresees the possibility of tracing signs in nature, intrinsically, that is, independently from the action of an external agent. From this viewpoint, the universe is perfused with signs antecedently to the action of an interpretive will. Genuine *mediation*—irreducible thirdness—is an inherent part of the reality we encounter in experience, which imposes itself on our attention as sign reality and reveals itself in interpretive processes. Thirdness characterizes the relation (of mediation) among signs throughout the whole universe. From this point of view, Peirce identifies a close relation between thirdness and “synechism,” his term for the doctrine of *continuity* (see *CP* 7.565, 7.570, 7.571), which while excluding all forms of separateness does not deny the discrete unit, secondness. Therefore, while recognizing the discrete unit, the principle of continuity does not allow for irreducible distinctions between the mental and the physical, between self and other (see *CP* 6.268). Such distinctions may be considered as specific units articulated in existential and phenomenological semiotic streams.²

5.6 Signs, Inference, and Evolutionary Forces in the Universe

The modalities of evolutionary development (i.e., the effects of chance, love, and necessity throughout the universe), semiotic processes (in which subjectivity and the conscious are generated), and inferential procedure, in other words the categories of cosmology, semiotics, and logic, are all closely interrelated in Peirce's universe of discourse in terms of mutual implication. Subjectivity, as Peirce in particular teaches us (and, as discussed, correspondences are strong with Welby's thought system), develops in signs according to the laws of inference (*CP* 5.313).

Each one of the three evolutionary modes described by Peirce—tychasm, anancasm, and agapasm—contains traces of the other two. In this sense, they are not pure, but rather mutually affect each other and share the same general elements (see *CP* 6.303).

In tychastic development (which in semiotic terms corresponds to symbolicity, and in argumentative terms to induction), chance determines new interpretive trajectories with unpredictable outcomes that in some cases are fixed in "habits." Paradoxically, chance generates order, that is, the fortuitous result generates the law, while the law itself finds an explanation (which would seem to be contradictory) in terms of the action of chance. This is the principle that informs Darwin's *The Origin of Species*. However, in Peirce's view, Darwin's success was largely determined by the values which informed his research, represented by the principle of the survival of the fittest. As anticipated above, these values (which responded to the dominant values of the times) are grounded in the logic of identity and in the last analysis can be summed up in the word "greed."

Anancastic development is connected with indexicality and deduction. New interpretive routes are determined by necessity—internal necessity (the logical development of ideas, of interpretants that have already been accepted) and external necessity with respect to consciousness (circumstance)—without the possibility of hazarding farsighted predictions concerning eventual results. Therefore inferential procedure regulated by the principle of necessary cause is connected with anancastic development. The limit of this type of development is that it only foresees the possibility of one type of logical procedure based on the presupposition that the conclusion deriving from the premises is obliged and cannot be different from what it is. Such procedure excludes all other argumentative modalities and consequently the possibility of free choice

(see *CP* 6.313). In anancastic development constriction, contingency and mechanical necessity effectively dominate the relation between interpreted sign and interpretant sign, that is, between the premises and the conclusion. However, this does not preclude the possibility of other types of interpretive procedure which in fact are always active even when the anancastic prevails. In semiotic terms, the relation between interpreted and interpretant is indexical; in argumentative terms, it is deductive. The conclusion relates to its premises on the basis of reciprocal constriction and as such is invested with low degrees of otherness and dialogism.

Instead, in his essay of 1893, “Evolutionary Love” (*CP* 6.287–6.317), Peirce maintains that in semiotic terms, the relation among signs in agapastic development is regulated by iconicity and in terms of logic by abductive inferential procedure. The evolution of anthroposemiosis, progress in linguistic and nonlinguistic learning, the generation of sense, value, significance at the highest degrees of dialogic otherness, creativity, innovation, imagination, play, and desire are articulated in semiotic processes regulated by abduction, iconicity, and agapasm. Agapasm, that is, the evolution of thought processes (or better semiosis) according to the law of creative love is neither regulated by chance nor by blind necessity, but rather, as Peirce says, “by an immediate attraction for the idea itself, whose nature is divined before the mind possesses it, by the power of sympathy, that is, by virtue of the continuity of mind” (*CP* 6.307). To exemplify, Peirce cites the *divination* of genius, the mind affected by the idea before that idea is comprehended or possessed, by virtue of the attraction it exercises upon him in the context of relational continuity among signs in the great semiotic network or semiosphere.

There is manifestly a close connection between the processes of agapasm, abduction, and desire. And Peirce explicitly established a relation between desire and meaning: both share in the semiotic and axiological spheres, both are connected with signs and values. Signifying processes in the human world occur through signs and are connected with value and desirability. Welby and Mary Everest Boole in fact dedicated a significant part of their correspondence to considerations on the laws of mind with a special focus on the interconnection between love, logic, passion, and power (Boole, 1931f, g, j; Cust, 1929: 86–92; Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 2).

The end of agapastic development is the evolutionary process itself (therefore the development of thought, language, subjectivity), continuity

of signifying processes, of semiosis. Creative evolution is beaten out at the rhythm of hypotheses, discoveries, and qualitative leaps through the combined effect of agapasticism (i.e., attraction among interpretants) and synechism, so that no idea or individual is conceivable in isolation; with Levinas, they are not conceivable outside original otherness logic (see 1.3, 7.4). From the viewpoint of subjectivity, far from being solitary, self is a communicating entity grounded in Agape, moved by desire. By virtue of the continuity of thought (synechism) and creative love (agapasm), *agapic or sympathetic comprehension and recognition* is the dominant force that regulates the continuous deferral among signs from an evolutionary perspective, and the simultaneous occurrence of a genial idea to a number of individuals not endowed with any particular powers and independently of each other (a consequence of belonging to the same great semiosphere) may well be considered as a demonstration of this. In Peirce's own words:

The agapastic development of thought should, if it exists, be distinguished by its purposive character, this purpose being the development of an idea. We should have a direct agapic or sympathetic comprehension and recognition of it by virtue of the continuity of thought. [. . .] I believe that all the greatest achievements of mind have been beyond the powers of unaided individuals; and I find, apart from the support this opinion receives from synechistic considerations, and from the purposive character of many great movements, direct reasons for so thinking in the sublimity of the ideas and in their occurring simultaneously and independently to a number of individuals of no extraordinary general powers. (CP 6.315)

5.7 Signs to Talk about Signs

To consider together Peirce's semiotics and Bakhtin's philosophy of language means to place the sign in the context of otherness, dialogism, and interpretation which evidences important aspects of the relationship among signs in signifying practices. In 1985, Augusto Ponzio published an important essay entitled "Signs to Talk about Signs" (now in Ponzio, 1990a: 15–62), motivated by the ambitious aim of setting up an adequate terminological apparatus for the task, continuing Charles Morris's own project as formulated in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938; see also Morris, 1948b, 1971).¹

In his effort to create a workable system in both theoretical and terminological terms, Ponzio describes verbal and nonverbal meaning as an "interpretive route" which has interesting implications: to understand meaning as an "interpretive route" means to place it in the context of dialogic relationships (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2005: 275–6). This is an original aspect of Ponzio's research while responding to both the

Peircean and Bakhtinian model of sign. Meaning is described as a possible interpretive route in the great sign network and develops as new interpretive routes arise and relate to each other. Multiple interpretive routes can branch out from the same sign or sign intersection. In this framework, meaning emerges as an interpretive route in an unbounded sign network and is enhanced as multiple interpretive routes meet and interconnect dialogically.

Meaning and interpretive routes converge and develop in the material of signs which are characterized by relations of dialogic otherness. These include (1) relations between the sign and its interpretant; which in argumentation are (2) relations characterized by a minor or major degree of dialogism between premises and conclusion, depending on whether the inference involved is a deduction, induction, or abduction (Peirce); (3) relations between verbal and nonverbal interpretants forming the open-ended interpretive route; and (4) among interpretants of different interpretive routes. Such relations are grounded in the logic of otherness and contribute to a better understanding of the dialogic nature of signs and human communication, of such features as the semantic indeterminacy and pluri-availability of language and expression, their potential ambiguity, polysemy, plurivocality, heteroglossia. "Semiotic materiality" is characterized by otherness and dialogism, thanks to which signs and interpretive routes are endowed with a capacity to resist, that is, a capacity for relative autonomy with respect to other signs and interpretants including the subject who produces, uses, and interprets them.

A sign is a factor in a process conceived either incompletely in dyadic terms (signifier/signified) in accord with Saussure and his followers or triadically (sign [representamen]/object/interpretant) in accord with Peirce and his own followers. Following Ponzio, we have introduced the expressions "interpreted sign" and "interpretant sign" or simply "interpreted" and "interpretant," but with the specification that this terminology in fact implies triadicity. According to this approach, the essential terms of a sign include the *interpreted* sign, in the relation with the object, and the *interpretant* sign in a relation where the interpretant makes the interpreted sign possible as such. The object-interpreted sign becomes a *sign* component because it receives an interpretation, and the interpretant in turn is also a sign component with the potential to engender a new sign: therefore, where there is a sign, there are immediately two, and given that the interpretant can engender a new sign, there are immediately three, and so forth as described by Peirce with his concept

of infinite semiosis (popularized by Umberto Eco as “unlimited semiosis”), the chain of deferrals from one interpretant to another (Petrilli, 1998a: 3–14).

To analyze the sign beginning from the object of interpretation, that is, the interpreted, means to begin from a secondary level. In other words, to begin from the object-interpreted means to begin from a point in the chain of deferrals, or semiotic chain, which cannot be considered as the starting point. Nor can it be privileged by way of abstraction at a theoretical level to explain the workings of sign processes (Ibid.: 3–4). An example: a spot on the skin is a sign insofar as it may be interpreted as a symptom of sickness of the liver: this is already a secondary level in the interpretation process. At a primary level, retrospectively, the skin disorder is an interpretation enacted by the organism itself in relation to an anomaly which is disturbing it and to which it responds. The skin disorder is already in itself an interpretant response.

To say that the sign is first an interpretant means that the sign is first a response. We can also say that the sign is a reaction: but only on the condition that by “reaction” we understand “interpretation” (similarly to Charles Morris’s behaviorism, but differently from the mechanistic approach) (see Petrilli, 1999d, 2001c, 2004c). The expression “solicitation–response” is preferable to “stimulus–reaction” in order to avoid superficial associations between the approaches that they recall. Even a “direct” response to a stimulus, or better solicitation, is never direct but “mediated” by an interpretation: unless it is a “reflex action,” formulation of a response involves identifying the solicitation, situating it in a context, and relating it to given behavioral parameters (whether a question of simple types of behavior, e.g., the prey–predator model, or more complex behaviors connected to cultural values, as in the human world). Therefore, the sign is first of all an interpretant, a response beginning from which something is considered as a sign and becomes its interpreted and is further able to generate an unlimited chain of other signs.

A sign presents varying degrees of plurivocality and univocality, varying degrees of otherness and distancing in the relation between interpreted sign and interpretant sign. A signal may be defined as a univocal sign, or better as a sign at a low degree of plurivocality. (As an aside, it is also interesting to note that “sign” is the usual shorthand term given to the formal sign language used by the deaf).

In the light of recent trends in the development of semiotic research today the term “semiotics” may be used to indicate (1) the specificity

of human semiosis, (2) the general science of signs. Concerning (1), human semiosis with respect to the life sphere (which converges with semiosis) is characterized as *metasemiosis*, the capacity to reflect on signs (see 1.2 and 1.3). This means to say that signs are the object of interpretation where interpretation is understood not only in terms of immediate response to signs, but also in terms of reflection on signs, therefore as the capacity to suspend immediate response and deliberate. This specific human capacity for metasemiosis is also designated with the term “semiotics.” Developing the observation made by Aristotle at the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, that is, that man tends by nature toward knowledge, we could say that man tends by nature toward semiotics. A distinctive feature of human semiosis (anthroposemiosis) is *semiotics* thus understood. As such, human semiosis can (a) venture as far as the entire universe in search of meaning and sense, and consider it therefore in terms of signness; or, (b) absolutize anthroposemiosis thereby limiting semiosis to the human world. Concerning (2), in case (a) semiotics as a discipline or science (Saussure) or theory (Morris) or doctrine (Sebeok) is “global semiotics” (Sebeok) which as such extends its gaze to the whole universe insofar as it is perfused with signs (Peirce); instead, in case (b) semiotics is shortsighted and anthropocentric.

The origins of semiotics as a field of knowledge are identified above all in the origins of “medical semeiotics,” or “symptomatology,” that is, the study of symptoms. In truth, since the human being is a “semiotic animal,” all human life has always been characterized by knowledge of a semiotic order. If, therefore, medical semeiotics (symptomatology) may be considered as the first branch of development in semiotics, this is only because by contrast with Hippocrates and Galen, hunters, farmers, navigators, fishermen, and women with their wisdom and sign practices relative to the production and reproduction of life have always been involved in semiotics, but without writing treatises.

Verbal signs (oral and written) are unique in that they carry out nothing other than a sign function, so that the study of verbal signs represents another pillar in the semiotic science which has strongly influenced the criteria for determining what may be considered as a sign. (Though oddly enough, prior to St. Augustine, in the Greek mainstream the tendency was to think of natural events rather than language as “signs”). In relatively recent times (beginning of the twentieth century), semiotics presented itself on the basis of its linguistic-verbal interests in the form of *sémiologie*, with the task, in Saussure’s vision, of studying the life of signs

dans le sein de la vie sociale. And though linguistics was included as a branch of *sémiologie*, the latter overall was profoundly influenced by linguistics. Saussure only recognized signs in entities which carry out an intentionally communicative function in a social context. However, from the limits of this approach commonly identified as *communication semiotics*, a transition occurred to *signification semiotics* which also recognizes signs in what is not produced with the intention of functioning as such, and finally to the phase which with Barthes may be designated as “third sense semiotics,” or “text semiotics,” or “significance semiotics” (Barthes, 1964, 1982, 1984), or what we also call “interpretation semiotics” (Peirce). However, parallel to such developments, other semiotic perspectives have emerged in different research areas. Without making claims to exhaustiveness, consider the following perspectives together with the names of their main representatives: the psychological (Freud, Bühler, Vygotskij), philosophical (Peirce, Welby, Ogden and Richards, Wittgenstein, Morris, Cassirer), literary critical (Bakhtin), biological (Romanes, Jakob and Thure von Uexküll, Jacob, Monod), and mathematical–topological (René Thom). On the basis of the axiom that the “semiosphere” (Lotman) and the “biosphere” converge, Sebeok’s “global semiotics” has offered a more exhaustive account of signs: in line with his critique of the *pars pro toto fallacy*, this perspective is the most capable of questioning the presumed totalities of semiotics and showing them up for what they are—its parts.

5.8 Speech, Language, and Modeling

The concept of “modeling” by contrast to “communication” is a major focus in Sebeok’s global semiotics. This concept is adapted from the so-called Moscow-Tartu school of semiotics (featuring A. A. Zaliznjak, V. V. Ivanov, V. N. Toporov and Jurij M. Lotman), where it was introduced to denote natural language (“primary modeling system”) as well as other human cultural systems (“secondary modeling systems”). But differently from this school, Sebeok extended the concept of modeling beyond anthroposemiotics. In the light of the concept of *Umwelt* as formulated by the biologist Jakob von Uexküll, Sebeok’s concept of model may be interpreted as an “outside world model.” And on the basis of recent research in biosemiotics, he avers that the modeling capacity is observable in all life-forms (Sebeok, 1991b: 49–58, 68–82, 1994: 117–27). According to Sebeok, the primary modeling system is the innate capacity for *simulative* modeling—in other words, it is a system

that allows organisms to simulate something in species-specific ways (Sebeok and Danesi, 2000: 44–5). Sebeok calls “language” the species-specific primary modeling system of the species called *Homo*. The secondary modeling system subtends both “indicational” and “extensional” modeling processes. The nonverbal form of indicational modeling has been documented in various species. Instead, extensional modeling is a uniquely human capacity and presupposes *language* understood as a primary modeling system distinct from *speech* (human secondary modeling system; *Ibid.*: 82–95). The tertiary modeling system is described as subtending highly abstract, symbol-based modeling processes. As such they are human cultural systems which the Tart-Moscow school had mistakenly dubbed “secondary” as a result of conflating “speech” and “language” (*Ibid.*: 120–9).

The distinction established by Sebeok between *language* and *speech* is not only a response to wrong conclusions regarding animal communication, but it also constitutes a general critique of phonocentrism and of the general tendency to base scientific investigation on anthropocentric principles. Language is not a communicative device (a point on which Sebeok is in accord with Noam Chomsky whom, however, does not make the same distinction between *language* and *speech*); that is to say, for Sebeok, the primary function of language is not to transmit messages or to give information.

Language in Sebeok’s description is a *primary modeling device*. Every species is endowed with a model that “produces” its own world, and “language” is the name of the model that belongs to human beings. However, as a modeling device, human language is completely different from the modeling devices of other life-forms. Its distinctive feature is what the linguists call *syntax* (the better term in this context because it is broader is *syntactics* as understood by Charles Morris author of *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, 1938), that is, the capacity to order single elements on the basis of operational rules. But while for linguists, these elements are the words, phrases, and sentences, of historical-natural languages, Sebeok’s reference was to mute syntax. Thanks to syntax (syntactics), human language, understood not as a historical-natural language but as a modeling device, is similar to Lego building blocks. It can reassemble a limited number of construction pieces in an infinite number of different ways. As a modeling device, language can produce an indefinite number of models; in other words, the same pieces can be taken apart and put together to construct an infinite number of different models. Therefore,

the human primary modeling system, that is, language, can produce an indefinite number of models and worlds (see 1.2, 1.3).

5.9 Semiotic Materiality, Sign Typologies, and Inference

Whether a question of verbal or nonverbal sign processes, the expression “semiotic materiality” refers to the fact that signs can enter more than one interpretive trajectory formed by signs that defer to each other in open-ended semiotic fluxes (Petrilli, 1990b, 2010: 137–58). Signs which act as interpretant signs of each other generate interpretive trajectories which converge with meaning. Each sign in a specific interpretive trajectory can become a sign object of interpretation (sign-interpreted) or sign interpreting the previous sign (sign-interpretant), in other interpretive trajectories. Therefore, each sign can act as an intersection in the great sign network. The object that receives meaning is the interpreted and the object that confers meaning is the interpretant in a relation among parts where the minimal terms are always triadic (sign–object–interpretant). The meaning of a sign is always in another sign, or better, in the relation among signs. Each interpretive trajectory, thanks to which something carries out the function of sign, constitutes one of many possible meanings. Therefore, meaning is an interpretive trajectory that links an originating sign-interpreted to an open series of interpretants. And given that several interpretive routes branch out from a single sign-interpreted, every sign is always more or less multivoiced.

The concept of “multivoicedness” may be connected to the concept of “ambiguity” understood positively as the capacity for producing a broad range of different interpretive trajectories and applies equally to words and things. “Meaning” as an interpretive route formed by interconnections among signs, by relations of deferral and *renvoi* from one interpretant to the next, must be distinguished from the logical class or set named “concept” with which meaning converges only in part. A sign has meaning in another sign forming any one possible interpretive trajectory, but it also retains an “uninterpreted residue” with respect to this other sign or interpretant. The uninterpreted residue gives rise to the possibility of engendering other interpretive routes. These different interpretive possibilities will eventually be compared to previous interpretations, especially when a question of choosing from interpretations that cannot coexist. Thanks to “semiotic materiality” the interpreted sign is endowed with its own consistency and resistance, that is, with its own

otherness which the interpretant sign must address and adjust to (see also 4.5, 4.11). That which is interpreted and consequently becomes part of a sign relation (whether an utterance or nonverbal behavior, a written text or a dream, etc.) is not entrusted to a single interpretant, but rather as the intersection of several interpretive routes is open to different interpretations or interpretive routes.

Semiotic materiality is determined in signs and in the relation among signs: as such it is not an a priori with respect to meaning and interpretation; it does not preexist outside interpretive trajectories, but rather is wholly determined in the latter. Semiotic materiality is produced in the sign network, where the sign residue of one interpretive trajectory is taken up and developed in another. The uninterpreted semiotic residue of a sign, which may also be called “signifier” is endowed with an irreducible degree of otherness with respect to a given interpretive trajectory, for it may also occur in another interpretive trajectory. In other words, the so-called signifier or uninterpreted semiotic residue is the sign considered from the point of view of its autonomy and otherness in regards to a specific meaning, because it can also have another meaning in relation to which again it retains autonomy and continues to present a certain degree of otherness and can still have yet another meaning, and so forth *ad infinitum*. Thus described, the signifier does not relate to the signified according to the logic of equal exchange, but in fact presents an excess, a signifying surplus with respect to a given interpretive trajectory, giving without a counterpart. This margin of escape and distancing with respect to any single interpretive trajectory is a shift margin that subtends the logic of deferral and *renvoi* among signs to varying degrees. Signs with a minimal shift margin are endowed with “signification”; those with a maximum shift margin, that is, high degrees of autonomy and otherness, are endowed with “significance.”

To consider sign processes as open chains formed by the unending deferral of interpretants leads to the need to reconsider the terms and sense of this opening; or, as Eco says in the title of his 1990 monograph, it leads to the need to examine the question of “the limits of interpretation.” Eco singles out two conceptions of interpretation: on the one hand, to interpret means to highlight the objective nature of a text, its essence independent of interpretation, on the other, the text is described as subject to infinite interpretation. He criticizes the latter as “hermetic semiosis” and maintains that (contrary to appearances and to the opinion of certain scholars) what he calls the Peircean theory of “unlimited semiosis” is altogether

different, the main object of his critique being Jacques Derrida's notion of "infinite drift" as developed by representatives of "deconstructionism." Eco argues that in the form proposed by the deconstructionists, the idea of "infinite drift" is something different from Peirce's concept of infinite semiosis which he interprets on the basis of the latter's notion of *habit*. This is connected to the intersubjective character of interpretation, given that it is fixed by community convention: "from the moment in which the community is pulled to agree with a given interpretation, there is, if not an objective, at least an *intersubjective* meaning which acquires a privilege over any other possible interpretation spelled out without the agreement of the community" (Eco, 1990: 40). Eco's specifications concerning the Peircean notion of infinite semiosis would seem to point to the dialogic character of interpretation.

As stated, the relationship among interpretants is dialogic; in other words, the logic of interpretants is dialogic in the sense that an interpretant sign cannot impose itself arbitrarily, authoritatively, or unconditionally upon the interpreted sign: understood in terms of a dialogic chain, the Peircean chain of interpretants escapes the risk of being considered as the equivalent to a free reading in which the will of the interpretants (and with them of the interpreters) beats the interpreted "into a shape which will serve their own purposes" (Ibid.: 42). This makes the connection established by Ponzio between Peirce and Bakhtin even more interesting, for as we have seen, the latter too places particular emphasis on the dialogic aspect of signs. Ponzio demonstrates how the three different types of argumentation (induction, deduction, and abduction), considered by Peirce in terms of the relationship among interpretants, are obtained, thanks to a differentiation in the degree of dialogism between the premises and conclusion, or between the interpreted sign and the interpretant sign. From this point of view, proceeding from the highest to the lowest degrees of dialogism and otherness, abduction classifies first, followed in order by induction and deduction.

A fundamental characteristic of "interpretation semiotics" by contrast with "decodification semiotics" is the light shed on inferential processes. Inferences are developed in the shift from a sign to its interpretant which are related *dialogically*. The three types of inference (or as Peirce also calls them, arguments), that is, deduction, induction, and abduction, are each characterized, as anticipated above, by the respective predominance of either indexicality, symbolicity, or iconicity. In deduction, the relationship between the sign and the interpretant is dominated by indexicality, in induction by symbolicity, in abduction by iconicity, according to a

rising scale in the degree of otherness and semiotic materiality (see Ponzio, 1985: 183–200).

In deduction, as in the index, the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is regulated by necessity, more precisely by necessary contiguity: the facts asserted in the premises oblige us to accept the interpretant-conclusion. Such a relation of constriction is necessarily characterized by an extremely low level of dialogism and otherness.

In induction the conclusion is not imposed unconditionally by the premises: on the contrary, what we have is an *inclination* to accept the conclusion once the premises have been accepted, the conclusion neither depending on nor deriving from the premises. That the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is of a symbolic order means that in this case inference is largely determined by interpretation and by convention. In other words, given that symbolicity is characterized by a margin of free consensus, the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is conventional or arbitrary. One part of the argument is not predetermined by the other, as instead occurs in deduction. In inductive reasoning, the parts in question are dialogically interconnected with a certain degree of autonomy. However, the distancing between premises and conclusion is only quantitative: induction allows for a quantitative increase in cognition. Like deduction, the inductive process is unilinear and develops according to a precise succession of interpretants that defer to each other without discontinuities or retroaction from beginning to end.

Instead, when a question of abduction, or what Peirce also calls “retroduction,” inference proceeds backward from the “consequent” to the “antecedent”; in other words, from observation of the phenomenon—whether an idea, an event, a habit, a fact, an action of some sort, etc.—we search for the explanation on the basis of a law that explains that phenomenon. Said differently, on witnessing an event of some sort, most often something surprising, we search for the law that explains it and hypothesize an implied connection (to be verified) between that phenomenon and the law, which means to say that in abductive reasoning we risk an hypothesis that may or may not be correct. In other words, the law underlying abduction is searched for *a posteriori* with respect to observation and interpretation; and this renders the law confutable given that which law is relevant will vary according to the context of argumentation (see Bonfantini, 1987, and his introductions in Peirce 1984 and 2005). In some cases, the law refers to an existing cognitive encyclopedia, in others it is invented *ex novo*. This implies the possibility of passing from the highest levels of novelty and abductive creativity to

the lowest. In abduction the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is neither determined by the obligation of contiguity nor by the arbitrariness of conventionality. Instead, the premises *suggest* the conclusion, and simply on the basis of a relation of relative similarity: we start from a result which evokes a given law through which it is possible to explain the case in question. In this kind of inference, the relationship between the premises and the conclusion is only probable: it is dominated by conjecture, by the inclination to guessing, and is variously risky. The interpretant-conclusion is relatively autonomous with respect to the premises: the higher the level of creative abductivity, the higher the degree of dialogism and otherness and whatever the degree of innovation, novelty, and creativity, the terms of the argument in abduction are always connected dialogically and characterized by high degrees of otherness. Moreover, given the role played by similarity, abduction is predominantly associated with iconicity. By contrast with trends in communication analysis where the task of the linguistic worker is viewed simplistically as consisting in the effort of decodification and recognition, where signs are largely reduced to the status of signals, interpretation semiotics inevitably problematizes the interconnection between semiotics and logic (see Queiroz and Merrell, 2005).

Peirce's two main typologies—the triad symbol, index, icon—and the inferential triad—deduction, induction, and abduction—are not separate and unrelated or mutually indifferent to each other. On the contrary, the different types of signs and inferences are variously interconnected at different degrees of dialogism, depending on the relation installed between signs, their objects, and interpretants. This relation is similar to that between rejoinders in a dialogue. The connection between Peirce's semiotics and his logic (i.e., between his typology of signs and of inferences) is effectively the connection between semiotics and what we may designate as “dia-logic,” an expression intended to indicate how dialogism is structural to logic (see Petrilli, 2004a).

Notes

1. The *Tractatus* or *Summule logicales* was written by Peter of Spain (born in 1205c, elected Pope in 1276 under the name of John XXI, died in 1277) around the year 1230. This work is now available in Italian translation by Augusto Ponzio, being the first complete translation worldwide, published in a critical bilingual edition with publishers Bompiani (Milan) in 2004, revised edition 2010.
2. French philosopher and Peirce expert Gérard Deledalle (1921–2003) also established a series of correspondences between the categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness, on the one hand, and transcendentalism, methodological pragmatism, and metaphysical pragmatism, on the other (see Deledalle, 1987, 2000).

6

Linguistic Production, Ideology, and Otherness: Contributions from Philosophy of Language

... if industry is conceived as an exoteric form of the realisation of the essential human faculties, one is able to grasp also the human essence of Nature or the natural essence of man. The natural sciences will then abandon their abstract materialist, or rather, idealist, orientation, and will become the basis of a human science, just as they have already become—though in an alienated form—the basis of a really human life. One basis for life and another for science is a priori a falsehood. Nature as it develops in human history, in the genesis of human society, is the real nature of man; thus Nature, as it develops through industry, though in an alienated form, is truly anthropological Nature.

— Karl Marx (1988: 88)

6.1 Philosophy of Language: Scope, Method, and Itineraries

This chapter investigates problems at the intersection between philosophy of language, semiotics and linguistics, with a special focus on contributions made by the contemporary Italian scholar Augusto Ponzio beginning from the initial phases of his ongoing research. Ponzio advances in a spiral-like fashion revisiting the same authors and problematics, rereading and reinterpreting them in a new light, constantly (re-)viewing them from new perspectives, thereby rendering the familiar unfamiliar and revealing the seemingly stable and reassuring in all its problematic ambiguity. In this context, return is not mere repetition,

ultimate appropriation of a given truth, final definition of theoretical horizons but, on the contrary, interrogation and renewal: not monologic reiteration of ideas and viewpoints, but dialectical-dialogical interrogation, listening, and critique.

A core topic is the otherness relationship that is described as no less than constitutive of the properly human. Dialogue and otherness, the word of the other, the word that is other are constant leitmotifs in this research itinerary to the point of obsession: obsession in the sense that the logic of otherness is the constant object of reflection—opening to the other, listening to the other, responsiveness to the other, to the word of the other, *autrui*, as Emmanuel Levinas would say, and also in the sense that the logic of otherness constitutes the very point of view and necessary condition for reflection. As he develops his research from the perspective of otherness logic, Ponzio experiments the word of the other in the light of new (real or ideal) encounters and intellectual horizons, in dialogue with the other (see Ponzio 2009d, 2010, 2010-11). His first monograph *La relazione interpersonale*, written between 1964 and 1966 and published in 1967, is dedicated to the philosophy of Levinas, and since then has been reworked across various editions (see Ponzio, 1989, 1994, 1995a,b, 2006b, 2008a). But Ponzio has authored over a hundred monographs to date on different topics, which, together with his continuous return to Levinas, to the origin of his research trajectories, is an expression of his constantly renewed interest in problems of language, communication, and the interpersonal relation.

Levinas denies that he is a religious thinker if this means to build his philosophical conception on a revealed truth. And, in fact, Ponzio highlights the exotopic movement of Levinas's writing, his search for the absolute other, for the infinite beyond the sacred, for meaning beyond the code. According to Levinas, the verse opens to philosophical sense when a meaning is captured beyond it, in the relation with the other, the "absolutely other," *autrui*, in which the infinite appears inside the finite, in the ethical experience of the infinitely other. This orientation characterizes Ponzio's own writing as he too, like Levinas, works on the problem of sense with reference to subjectivity and the interpersonal relation. The properly human is characterized by a capacity for sense which escapes the limits of its own formulation and emerges in terms of the critique of the logic of identity. According to this orientation, the subject is grounded in the logic of otherness. In terms of sign theory (with which subject theory is inextricably interconnected), this means

to take a critical stance against the logic of equal exchange and biunivocal correspondences between the *signifié* and the *signifiant*. The logic of otherness implies profanation of the code and fixed meaning and favors materialization of sense in the gap between intentional meaning and excess. According to the logic of otherness, sense signifies a caesura, opening on the infinite in the finite, unlimited interpretation in the continuous deferral among interpretants, dialogic responsiveness in the signifying plurality of a “detotalized totality.” Levinas supersedes the limits of Husserl’s phenomenology which, instead, grounds the relation to the other in the “transcendental self” and privileges the concepts of consciousness and being.

Ponzio demonstrates the inadequacy of those trends that reduce the (verbal and nonverbal) sign and subjectivity (which is made of signs) to exchange value, viewing them separately from the historico-social relations of the processes that produce them. He covers critical groundwork in this direction during 1970s with such books as *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale*, 1973, *Filosofia del linguaggio e prassi sociale*, 1974, *Dialettica e verità. Scienza e materialismo storico-dialettico*, 1975, and *Marxismo, scienza e problema dell’uomo*, 1977: in these writings, Ponzio deals with specific problematics along the borders of different human sciences including philosophy, semiotics, linguistics, philosophy of language, political economy, anthropology, literature, along the borders of discourse. The categories and methods he uses as a philosopher of language can be related to those theorized by Mikhail M. Bakhtin as early as 1929 in a book signed by Valentin N. Voloshinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (Eng. trans. 1973), but most probably written with Bakhtin or under his influence. Having discovered Bakhtin in the second half of the 1970s, Ponzio published his first monograph on him in 1980 (the first worldwide), followed by several others (see References). Ponzio has also constantly promoted and edited several Italian collections of writings by Bakhtin and his circle (for Ponzio’s complete bibliography updated to 2007, see Petrilli, 2007d).

This (ideal) encounter between Ponzio and Bakhtin is emblematic of the relation between philosophy of language and semiotics in the double sense of identification and differentiation among the two disciplines: identification insofar as philosophy of language and semiotics both cover the territory of verbal and nonverbal signs; differentiation because philosophy of language enquires into the foundations and conditions of possibility of semiotics considered as one among the numerous human

sciences, investigating its limits, potential, function, and significance for man. In accordance with Edmund Husserl (1965) semiotics may be defined as an “exact science” and philosophy of language as a “rigorous science”; with Bakhtin, in relation to linguistics (understood as the official science of verbal language) and to semiotics (the general science of signs), philosophy of language practices, respectively, a “metalinguistic” or a “metasemiotic” approach to the study of verbal and nonverbal languages.

Thus understood the expression “philosophy of language” describes the scope and orientation of Ponzio’s research for two main reasons. First, in terms of methodology because it promotes philosophical investigation into the sciences of verbal and nonverbal languages and does so enhancing the condition of heteroglossia, polylogism, reciprocal otherness, and dialogism by contrast with recourse to unquestioning authority and monologism. “Philosophy of (verbal) language” because as a metascience the interpretant of philosophical investigation is ultimately verbal: investigation takes place in verbal reality, its materials and instruments are verbal, the specific object of investigation is necessarily mediated by verbal signs, and is pronounced verbally in a specific sphere of discourse. The pervasiveness of sign reality is illustrated by Ponzio in his epochal essay “Signs to Talk about Signs,” originally published in *Per parlare dei segni / Talking about Signs*, a collective bilingual volume of 1985, subsequently repropounded in his 1990 monograph, *Man as a Sign. Essays on the Philosophy of Language*, and since then again in a sequence of new revised and enlarged Italian editions. In this essay, Ponzio elaborates his conception of meaning as a network, an open system of “interpretive routes,” outside of which meanings cannot subsist: signs correspond to the nodes and intersections in this network, and like nodes and intersections, once the pieces, that is, the interpretive routes joining these signs, disappear, the signs themselves also disappear.

The second reason why the expression “philosophy of language” applies to Ponzio’s work is that philosophy as a science presupposes the philosophical dimension immanent in language, therefore it presupposes the logic of otherness structural to language. This means to say that philosophy of language as practiced by Ponzio (and Bakhtin before him) presupposes the orientation inherent in language toward “dialogic plurilingualism,” “multivoicedness,” “heteroglossia,” and otherness interrelating different languages, cultures, and ideologies: the expression “philosophy of language” implies the capacity for philosophizing structural to language, philosophizing by and in language, and not just about

language. Even when research conducted in the sciences of language, linguistics, and institutionalized philosophy of language (commonly understood as philosophical studies on language) is oriented monologically, according to the centripetal and unifying forces of linguistic life, the original philosophical capacity of language, its constitutional dialogic heteroglossia will never be completely suppressed. Had this not been the case, the very objectification of language and consequent flourishing of numerous philosophical and linguistic disciplines would never have been possible. This means to say that from the perspective of philosophy, dialogic heteroglossia has a methodological function in the study of language and models philosophy of language as a discipline. Philosophy in general (and not just philosophy immediately concerned with language) operates in the framework of dialogic heteroglossia which is inherent in language and acts as a sort of a priori and transcendental condition in philosophical reflection as in all forms of critical consciousness.

6.2 Linguistic Production, Ideology, and Creativity

In *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (1973) and subsequently in *Filosofia del linguaggio 2* (1991), Ponzio critiques Noam Chomsky's approach to language analysis, and to critique Chomskyian linguistics in 1973 meant to critique dominant trends in the language sciences given Chomsky's influence at the time. Ponzio's main contention is that Chomsky mistakes linguistic usage in a specific language—English (his sentence examples are often untranslatable in other languages)—for the essential or universal in language generally. Moreover, as observed by Sebastian K. Shaumjan, Chomsky confuses different levels of analysis, exchanging the level of description of the objects of analysis for the construction of models of analysis. By contrast with Chomsky's unigradual linguistic theory, Shaumjan proposes a bigradual theory of generative grammar articulated into two levels, the genotypical and the phenotypical.

What Chomsky calls "linguistic creativity" refers to a situation which in reality is characterized by rules, codes, and programs which the unaware speaker does not control. This is so not only at the phonologic, syntactic, and semantic levels of language, but also at the level of ideology. But the truth is that ultimate control, possession, and command of the word is an illusion. Chomsky commits to questions of ideology on a theoretical level with the publication of such titles as *Deterring Democracy*, 1991, *Chronicles of Dissent*, 1992, *Year 501. The Conquest Continues*, 1993, etc., and on a pragmatic level as he denounces abuse,

violence, and injustice across the world, with particular reference to USA foreign policy. Nevertheless, his theoretical work on linguistics, on the one hand, and his critique of ideology and political commitment, on the other, are kept separate. In Ponzio's interpretation, Chomsky's speaker is not invested with "linguistic creativity," but is an alienated subject, a subject that accepts rules, codes, and programs passively, submits to them as given and natural, when in reality they are determined socially and historically, though described by the linguist as "extrahistorical" and universal. The Chomskyan speaking subject is an uncritical, passive, alienated subject incapable of intervening actively on codes and transforming them.

In 1973, Ponzio's critique was in line with the work of Emmanuel Levinas, Karl Marx, Adam Schaff, and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi—his encounter with Bakhtin took place later, in 1976. Though their approaches, methods, and specific research topics were different, these scholars share a common quest: they interrogate surface appearance, a stereotype vision of reality, the subject's identity, sense of integrity, and focus, instead, on such issues as social reproduction and social planning, underlying production processes, dialectic contradictions, ideology, the question of otherness, and the relevance of all this to subjectivity. The biological entity becomes properly human in the material dialectic-dialogic relationship with the other, in sociality. Subjectivity is modeled in the relation with the outside, external reality, the social, that is, historical-social-economic-ideological reality, and with nature and its cultural transformations, with that which is other in regard to self. Ultimately, subjectivity, "identity" for lack of a better expression, is modeled in the materiality of signs, in verbal and nonverbal semiotic processes and as such is the open expression of the dialectic and dialogic interrelation between singularity and sociality. Reading Marx:

Even when I carry out *scientific work*, etc.—an activity which I can seldom conduct in direct association with other men—I perform a *social*, because *human*, act. It is not only the material of my activity—like the language itself which the thinker uses—which is given to me as a social product. My *own* existence is a social activity. For this reason, what I myself produce, I produce for society and with the consciousness of acting like a social being. [. . .] Though man is a *unique* individual—and it is just his particularity which makes him an individual, a really *individual* social being—he is equally the *whole*, the ideal whole, the subjective existence of society as thought and experienced. He exists, in reality, as the representation and the real mind of social existence, and as the sum of human manifestation of life. (1988: 91–2)

A central category used by Ponzio's in his critique of Chomsky is "linguistic work" which he adapts from Rossi-Landi's important book

of 1968, *Language as Work and Trade*. The concept of “linguistic work” results from interconnecting political economy and linguistics, keeping account of the homological relation between the production of artifacts and the production of signs. The Chomskyan categories of “competence” and “performance” repropose traditional problems, terminologies, and mechanistic oppositions (e.g., consciousness versus experience, behaviorism versus mentalism, physical versus psychic, internal versus external, empiricism versus rationalism); instead, dialectic materialism in Ponzio’s interpretation draws attention to the dialectic relation between the subject, the social and natural environments, to language conceived in terms of work and the social relations of production, to the different languages conceived as the product of work, that is, of linguistic production processes. Other key concepts adapted from Rossi-Landi include “common speech” and “common semiosis” (Rossi-Landi, 1961, 1992).

Linguistic competence according to Chomsky consists of the speaker’s ability to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences on the basis of a finite number of elements, which he explains in terms of an innate, universal generative grammar whose structures are biologically inscribed in the human mind and are activated by experience. In this framework, experience is described as a passive condition. On the contrary, modern conceptions after Kant describe experience as acquired actively through interpretive operations which also involve inferential processes of the abductive type. Through such operations the subject completes, organizes, and associates data that is otherwise more or less fragmentary, partial, and discrete. According to this approach, experience converges with such operations and consequently is endowed with a capacity for innovation with respect to input. In Ponzio’s view, experience and competence converge and do not call for integration with an innate supplement.

The problem of linguistic competence and knowledge acquisition is an important focus in Chomsky’s research. In 1985, he introduced the happy expression “Plato’s problem” to signal the problem of how a finite number of entities can generate knowledge that extends beyond these entities, both quantitatively and qualitatively. According to Ponzio (1991: 87–104), that the speaker recognizes, knows how to use, and understands a linguistic expression without previous experience of that expression (though constructed according to the rules of a language familiar to that speaker) is no more surprising than the fact that a person recognizes and uses a hammer (constructed according to the rules and

functions that model a hammer), though never having seen one before. Ponzio evidences the relation between language acquisition (which is never ending) and the performance of inferential-abductive operations, which he describes as a relation of mutual support: language learning occurs through abductive processes which in turn benefit from the acquisition of language. Moreover, inferential procedure is necessarily grounded in the linguistic-interpretive work of preceding generations that hand down the linguistic materials and instruments forming the language experienced by the speaker.

In “Signs to Talk about Signs,” Ponzio formulates an interpretive linguistic theory which supersedes the dualism of competence and experience, deep structures and surface structures, the theory of different levels, of antecedents and derivations. With his interpretive linguistic theory (which applies to both verbal and nonverbal signs), he dismisses the Chomskyian concept of deep structure. Interpretive linguistic theory explains the human capacity to understand an utterance (or verbal sign generally) in terms of the relation with another utterance that interprets it, that is, with another utterance acting as interpretant. All utterances are recognized and developed by their interpretants. According to this approach, the interpretant is not a deep structure grounded in underlying elementary sequences, but simply another sign. An interpretant that somehow responds to an utterance (or any verbal sign whatever) is simply “unexpressed” until the conditions are met for its expression and explication. An interpretant is either an “identifying interpretant” with the function of recognizing the sign in terms of phonemic or graphic configuration, semantic content, morphological-syntactic structure, or it is an “answering comprehension (or responsive understanding) interpretant” focused on the pragmatic dimension of signs where the relation to the “interpreted sign” is oriented by the logic of dialogism, active participation, and otherness (Ponzio, 1990a: 54–61). Sign interpretation is related to the ideological level of discourse and should be the starting point for a theory of ideology (Ponzio, 1977, 1993, 2004b,c).

A good linguistic theory must be explicative and critical. In other words, it must transcend the limits of a descriptive and taxonomic approach to language analysis and reckon with the social processes of linguistic production in conjunction with a critical theory of ideology. A weak point in Chomsky’s research is his failure to theorize the relation between language and ideology, which leads to ignoring the problem of the determining influence of ideological structures in linguistic

production processes. This separation impedes Chomsky's language theory from becoming a critique of language and his critique of ideology from developing a theoretical grounding in his language studies, and despite such limits, his approach to language analysis continues to be representative of main trends in linguistics today.

With such concepts as language as work and language as historico-socio-ideological reality, Ponzio criticizes reduction of linguistic use to the status of behavior or activity, and thematizes the human capacity for creative (abductive) and critical intervention on language and behavior. His response to Chomsky and his own special approach to philosophy of language is largely influenced by the Marxian critique of political economy. Reading Marx, Ponzio focuses on the problem of the critical grounding of scientific knowledge, on the production processes of knowledge which converge with the processes of social reproduction.

6.3 "The End of Ideology!"

In addition to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* by Voloshinov (-Bakhtin), another determining influence on Ponzio's Marxian critique of language was Rossi-Landi's book *Language as Work and Trade*. This revealed to Ponzio the importance of the connection between political economy and the language sciences (especially linguistics, at the time a model not only for the language sciences but for the human sciences generally), which he realized was far stronger than commonly recognized. Ponzio has published two monographs on Rossi-Landi, one titled *Rossi-Landi e la filosofia del linguaggio*, 1988, and the other, *Linguaggio, lavoro e mercato globale*, 2008, in addition to numerous essays.

Models and categories proposed by Ferdinand de Saussure and his synchronic linguistics also continue dominating over language studies today. Saussure carried out the extraordinary operation of relating sign theory to political economy, but he chose to model his linguistic categories on the marginalistic approach to economics as developed by Léon Walras and Vilfredo Pareto. This led him to focus on exchange relations, that is, relations at the level of the market, while losing sight of the social relations of production, which presented a serious limit in his approach. Saussure focused on relations among things (commodities), the elements of language, or, at best (in his attempt at overcoming reification), among individual speakers, but failed to examine relations between individual speakers, on the one hand, and the historico-socio-ideological system to

which they belong and in which they are constituted as speaking subjects, on the other. Consequently, his speakers remain abstract.

The social subtending the distinction between *langue* and *parole* as understood by Saussure needs to be reexamined. In Saussure's conception, the social ensues from, is the result, the average product of behavior viewed as individual behavior, instead of being considered as the basis of individual behavior, the sphere within which the individual comes to existence. To claim that language is social means to recognize that language is the place where individual experiences are formed and not only exchanged as though they were preconstituted with respect to language and communication. In other words, language is not only the instrument and product, but also the material out of which the *parole* is formed (Ponzio, 1973: 159).

Saussure formulated his conception of linguistic value in terms of exchange value as conceived by marginalism. Instead, Rossi-Landi and Ponzio reformulate the concept of linguistic value in terms of the Marxian critique of exchange value, that is, in the framework of Marx's critique of political economy and theory of commodities. Adam Schaff too demonstrated that interesting results can be achieved in research on sense and value, the human person, ideology, on such issues as social and linguistic alienation, on problems of communication with categories from the sign sciences developed in a Marxist perspective (Schaff, 1960, 1980). For example, with reference to the linguistic level, the Marxian critique of commodities can be translated into the critique of stereotypes, of meanings that are assumed dogmatically and passively. It also evidences the relation of reciprocal implication between ideology theory and sign theory. From this perspective, the task of semiotics is to reveal historically specified social relations among human beings where it was thought that there only existed relations among things and mechanistic relations among reified signs.

The verbal sign is not only the instrument which transmits ideologies, but also the place where ideologies are formed, the material out of which ideologies are produced. Ideological reality is (verbal and nonverbal) sign reality; signs in the human cultural world are mediated by social programs and are inevitably ideological. Where there are signs in the human world, there are ideologies to a greater or lesser degree; and ideology is endowed with semiotic value. Contrary to a mechanistic interpretation of the relation between base and superstructure in terms of unilinear causality, and thanks to contributions from the sign sciences, in particular

semiotics and the philosophy of language in the framework of historical dialectic materialism, we now know that the social, from the level of the social relations of production to the level of ideologies, is made of signs and sign systems. The acquisition of language and knowledge can only take place within a specific sign-ideological context, that is, as part of the sign mediated and dialectic relation between base, superstructure, and ideologies that constitute social communication.

In the global communication world today, the sign-mediated nature of the social reproduction system has become particularly obvious with the extensive influence of mass media. Moreover, the “crisis” or the “end of ideology” has been proclaimed, but the truth is that this very proclamation is a strong ideological act in itself resulting from a combination of false consciousness, false thought, and false praxis which, as such, is difficult to demystify. A constant focus in Ponzio’s research is the relation between signs, values, and ideologies which he develops in terms of a *critique* of signs and ideology. Following Rossi-Landi who uses the Marxian critique of political economy and value theory to critique “sign fetishism,” Ponzio too shifts attention from the “point de vue statique” of Saussurean linguistics, from the relation of equal exchange between *signifiant* and *signifié* abstracted from the relations that effectively regulate semiosis, from the “linguistic system,” to the dynamics of “social linguistic production,” “linguistic work,” “common speech,” and to a linguistic value theory developed in relation to a linguistic work theory which is interpretive and dialogic.

6.4 From Decodification to Interpretation

“Decodification” or “code” or “equal exchange” semiotics can be dated back to Saussure’s *Cours de linguistique générale* of 1916, or, rather, to a distorted interpretation of Saussure and his categories, above all to reformulation of the *langue* and *parole* dichotomy in terms of information theory (following Claude E. Shannon and Warren Weaver, 1949). The Saussurean model of sign has the merit of evidencing the connection between *signifiant* and *signifié*; its shortcoming lies in the risk of reifying the sign totality thus understood. In the Saussurean perspective, the sign is viewed as an entity detached from the processes of production (in which alone signs function as signs), therefore from the relation among signs and among speakers using signs. Coherently with the combination of marginalistic economics and information theory, decodification semiotics develops a general sign model which analyzes signification

in terms of messages formulated and exchanged on the basis of a code, that is, of biunivocal correspondences between the *signifiant* and *signifié*, established independently from the interpretive work effectively involved in communication. Thus conceived the code guarantees communicative and interpretive processes which are passed off as being immune from the risks of answering comprehension and creative abduction, so that communication is reduced to the status of codification, and interpretation to the status of decodification. By comparison with the dichotomous and mechanistic logic of equal exchange semiotics, interpretation semiotics is better able to account for the irreducibly other, for the properly human as expressed in language.

Theorizing such values as the logic of otherness, dialogic heteroglossia, and extralocalization as immanent in language, Ponzio too transcends the limits of structural linguistics and equal exchange semiotics. In his studies on signifying practices in the symbolic universe, he aims to recover that which is generally ignored by trends that simply stop at the level of reproduction of the same, so that he too actively participates in the transition from decodification semiotics to interpretation semiotics as it begins taking place in Italy during the early 1970s. His essay “Signs to Talk about Signs” is an expression of his (apparently humble but in reality ambitious) project to propose signs to talk about signs, that is, to elaborate an adequate terminological apparatus for the general science of signs. From this point of view, his project can be related to Morris’s as formulated in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*. In line with interpretation semiotics, Ponzio describes verbal and nonverbal meaning in terms of the original concept of “interpretive route” and in this light he deals with a series of fundamental issues at the center of philosophico-semiotic debate such as the concepts of heteroglossia and ambiguity, the relation between meaning and referent, the intersemiotic relation among signs and sign systems versus their description as separate and autonomous codes, the problem of the relation between *signifier* (or sign vehicle, *signans*) and *signified* (*designatum*, *significatum*, *signification*, *signatum*), the concept of signifier otherness and excess in relation to meaning as it develops in the process of interpretation.

In line with the Peircean and Bakhtinian conceptions of sign, as seen in the previous chapter, Ponzio places meaning in the context of dialogic relations. As part of an interpretive route in a sign network, meaning is clearly delineated and at once susceptible to continuous variation and amplification through dialogic interconnections with other interpretive

routes. This original thematization of meaning contributes to a better understanding of such concepts as signifying instability, plurivocality, internal plurilingualism, semiotic materiality, signifying otherness, and autonomy of the sign which resists the interpretive will, even of the subject who produces it (Petrilli, 2010: 137–58). As anticipated in the preceding chapter, the dialogic relation develops at various levels including in the relation between sign and interpretant, between premises and conclusion in argumentation, between verbal and nonverbal interpretants forming a single interpretive route, or among interpretants forming different interpretive routes.

The Peircean–Morrisian sign model referred to by interpretation semiotics is a dynamic sign model grounded in the logic of infinite semiosis and deferral from one interpretant to another. Contrary to sign models based on equal exchange logic, this model is subtended by the logic of noncorrespondence, excess, and otherness in the relation among interpretants forming the sign network. The interpretant says something more in regards to the interpreted which in turn is endowed with its own semiotic consistency that resists and is never exhausted in any one “interpretive route,” in a single interpretation (Ponzio, 1990a: 17–32). In the framework of interpretation semiotics the sign is always part of a sign situation in which all components of semiosis—the sign vehicle (*signifiant*), meaning (*signifié*), referent, interpreter, interpretant, and codes regulating sign systems—are considered as different interrelated aspects of complex and articulate semiotic processes, and not separately from one another.

The sign model proposed by interpretation semiotics is the heterogeneous product of dialogically related results achieved in different contexts: theory of knowledge (Peirce), theory of literature (Bakhtin), of *signifiance* (Barthes), axiology (Morris). Research on the relation between semiotics and ideology (Rossi-Landi, Schaff) led to greater attention during the 1980s on the relation between signs and (socio-ethical) values. In this connection, as already mentioned, an important contribution is represented by Morris and his explicit theorization of the relation between signs and values in *Signification and Significance*, 1964. And by contrast to approaches that describe and practice semiotics as a cognitive, descriptive, and ideologically neutral science, Ponzio’s semiotic research takes its place with trends that focus on the relation between signs and values and work on recovering the axiological dimension of semiosis for a global reconnaissance of man and his signs.

An important contribution in this direction is also represented by Victoria Welby's "significs." "Semioethics" is the term chosen by Ponzio (with myself) to indicate this new approach to the study of signs, previously to this indicated with the terms "ethosemiotics," "telosemiotics," and "teleosemiotics" (Petrilli, 1998a; Petrilli and Ponzio, 2003b, 2005, 2010; see 1.3–1.4, 2.1).

6.5 For a Dialogic Approach to Sign and Subjectivity

In the framework of interpretation semiotics and with special reference to studies in psychoanalysis by Sigmund Freud ("Konstruktionen in der Analyse," 1937), and on the sign by Peirce (*Collected Papers* 1931–66), Ponzio analyzes memory in terms of interpretation and construction processes. In particular, he focuses on the problem of continuity and on the relation between continuity and memory. With Peirce he draws attention to the signifying materiality of the percept which "cannot be dismissed at will, even from memory" (*CP* 4.541). Nonetheless, that the percept resists does not make it a fact, an entity in itself, fixed and defined once and for all because the percept is a sign, therefore an interpreted for an interpretant, in turn a sign and therefore an interpreted for another interpretant. What gives itself in perception and in memory gives itself as an interpreted, not for a subject that is given outside the interpretation process in turn, but for a subject that is itself a sign, inserted in the chain of interpreted–interpretants. Memory may be understood as the continuous chain of interpretant–interpreted relations that constitute a subject's story which is an open story, that is, open to continuous reinterpretation according to different interpretive trajectories. In support of this hypothesis, Ponzio refers to Peirce's reflections on the identification between thought and semiosis in his important essay "Consequences of Four Incapacities," 1868 (*CP* 5.264–5.317).

At the basis of analytical practice is recognition of the need for distancing between interpretant and interpreted, for a relation of extralocalization achieved by relating to an outsider, in this case the psychoanalyst, thereby favoring the dialogic character of interpretation. By transforming "facts" to be reconstructed and "loss of memory" into signs, that is, into interpreted–interpretant relations, Peirce's semiotics frees interpretation from positivist residues still traceable in Freudian psychoanalysis. From this perspective, the analytical work of deconstruction and construction cannot be separated from the interpreted–interpretant relationship impersonated by two signs as distant and different as possible from each

other, in a disymmetric relation that obstructs elimination of reciprocal otherness as instead occurs in relations regulated by equal exchange logic between interpreted and interpretant.

In *Konstruktionen in der Analyse* Freud distinguishes between “interpretation” and “construction” in terms of extension: interpretation refers to a single element such as a sudden idea, a lapsus or misperformance; instead, construction involves elaborating a whole piece of a story forgotten by the person under analysis. However, Freud conceives construction in terms of reconstruction, like the work of the archeologist or philologist. But analytical construction, according to Ponzio, should not be conceived in terms of restitution, of restoring the preexistent, whether a building or a text. Instead, construction means to establish a relation of otherness as a condition for interpretation where the relation between interpretant and interpreted does not present itself in terms of duplication, paraphrase, or faithful translation, but rather of critical reading, innovative elaboration, answering comprehension (Ponzio, 1990a: 48–50).

The thought-sign relation is continuously broken down into the relation between an interpreted sign object of interpretation and the interpreting sign or interpretant that interprets the preceding sign. This relation is open to the other, to the outside, to inferential processes that cannot be reduced to logical relations with previous experience. In this context, memory is associated with otherness in the double sense of otherness constitutive of the self’s identity and otherness of the other from self. In other words, the other is not only the biological and biographical other external to self, the other from self, but also the other constitutive of identity, the other self, the other of self. Conceived in such a theoretical context it becomes clear that memory is not only a question of reconstructing texts that have already been written, experiences that have already been lived, but is also a question of writing and constructing new texts, of living new experiences. Analytical interpretation is possible thanks to the construction of a relation of otherness which interrupts the univocity of sense and deconstructs the compact identity of self. From this point of view, the otherness relation is open to the “passion of signs” as understood by Julia Kristeva (1983).

A critical and dialectic approach to the problem of subjectivity and its signs evidences the continuous sacrifice of otherness on the altar of identity and aims, instead, to recover sense in the direction of otherness and extralocality. Following Bakhtin, Ponzio theorizes the “detotalizing method,” that is, evasion from the limits of identity, fragmentation of

false but concrete totalities (e.g., ontology, politics, equal exchange, individual, society, state, nation, Western world, Europe, Orient, language, truth, knowledge, equality, justice, freedom, limited responsibility, need). He critiques totalizing closure and thematizes a situation of detotalized totalities, that is, of smaller interconnected totalities that interact with each other dialogically in a global and detotalized sign network. The present-day social reproduction system is regulated by the logic of identity which means to say it is ready to segregate or even eliminate the other. Such a system is based on concrete abstractions, including the concrete abstraction “Individual” that is forced to sacrifice otherness in the name of identity. A critique of this system with any claim to adequacy presupposes *the point of view of otherness, absolute otherness, and not just the relative otherness of biunivocal relations of opposition*. The critique of identity presupposes recognition of the other, that is, recognition of the fact that the other cannot be ignored or eliminated and is a constant focus in Ponzio’s research (as in his sociopolitical essays in which he deals specifically with the problem of identity in present-day Europe, see Ponzio, 2008g).

The condition of “outsideness,” “extralocalization,” “exotopy” (Bakhtin), of absolute otherness (Levinas), “intransivity” (Barthes) best describes the properly human free from the constraints of closed identity. This condition is manifest in literary discourse where the degree of extralocalization, distance, and otherness constitutes the measure of literary value and characterizes the different literary genres. This does not mean to subscribe to the theory of “art for art’s sake,” which Levinas describes as false and immoral given that it places art outside reality and unburdens the artist of all responsibility. The freedom of absolute otherness involves absolute answerability, a condition of responsivity without barriers, of responsibility without alibis. As early as 1919, in the first essay he ever wrote that we know of, “Art and Answerability,” Bakhtin had already insisted on the intimate interrelation between art and life, art and otherness, art and unlimited responsibility, which is to say, responsibility unrestricted by contracts or official roles (Bakhtin, 1990: 1–3). In this framework, the subject is understood in terms of plurality, fragmentation, dialogue, absolute otherness, and unlimited answerability as opposed to the integral subject of traditional philosophy and to the associated conception of meaning understood in terms of coherence and unilinear development, as preestablished and monologic meaning. Contrary to the blind responsibility of a single point of view, the voice of authority, the stability of a compact word, the reassurance of identity,

of static systems and codes, Ponzio too describes the properly human in terms of answerability/responsibility toward the other, and of the capacity for dialogism, listening, and otherness. The subject relates to the other in the open spaces of the “great time” (Bakhtin). Freedom cannot evade the relation with the other, vulnerability toward the other, responsibility for the other. The properly human involves responsibility without alibis toward the other. In the words of Levinas:

L’homme libre est voué au prochain, personne ne peut se sauver sans les autres. Le domaine réservé de l’âme ne se ferme pas de l’intérieur. [. . .] La voilè l’intériorité impossible qui désoriente et réoriente les sciences humaines de nos jours. Impossibilité que nous n’apprenons ni par la métaphysique ni par la fin de la métaphysique. [. . .] Personne ne peut rester en soi: l’humanité de l’homme, la subjectivité, est une responsabilité pour les autres, une vulnérabilité extrême. Le retour à soi se fait détour interminable. [. . .] l’homme se rapproche de l’homme. Il est cousu de responsabilités ou se dérochant aux responsabilités, d’un sujet constitué, posé en soi et pour soi comme un libre identité. Il s’agit de la subjectivité du sujet—de sa non-indifférence à autrui dans la responsabilité illimitée [. . .] Il s’agit de la responsabilité pour les autres vers lesquels se trouve détourné, dans les “entrailles émues” de la subjectivité qu’il déchire, le mouvement de la récurrence, étranger à soi, obsédé par les autres, inquiet, le Moi est ôtage, ôtage dans sa récurrence même d’un moi ne cessant de faillir à soi (Levinas, 1972: 98).

6.6 Philosophizing about Language from the Viewpoint of Literature

On the level of philosophical discourse, Ponzio’s interlocutors include such figures as Aristotle, Giordano Bruno, Galileo Galilei, Emmanuel Levinas, Maurice Blanchot, Mikhail Bakhtin, Immanuel Kant, Søren Kierkegaard, Charles Peirce, Karl Marx, Adam Schaff, Ferruccio Rossilandini, Peter of Spain, Plato, Socrates, Giovanni Vailati, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and many more; on the level of literary discourse, Jorge Luis Borges, Italo Calvino, Giacomo Leopardi, Alessandro Manzoni, Ugo Foscolo, Johann W. Goethe, Laurence Sterne, George Orwell, Pier Paolo Pasolini, Edgar Allan Poe, Marcel Proust, Italo Svevo, Paul Valéry, and many others not only from the modern and contemporary era but also from the Latin and Greek classical period. In addition to essays, Ponzio develops his theory of sign and language through different discourse genres, including the literary, in particular short stories, as a researcher in the laboratory experimenting the expressive potential of the word and of human signifying practices generally.

With Claude Gandelman (1936–96, Haifa University, Israel), in 1990 he founded the book series *Athanor*—this Arabic word evokes the alchemist in the laboratory mixing and transforming the elements. To the

elements, in the double sense of the natural elements and the elements of the alphabet (two meanings which the ancient Greek philosophers had already associated), is also dedicated the collective volume, *La scrittura degli elementi* (Ponzio, 1988b).

Ponzio thematizes the point of view of literature as a general methodological principle. In other words, literary writing is not only thematized as the object of study to which models and categories from the sign sciences are applied, but it also provides the point of view for elaboration of these models and categories. "Of literature" in the expression "the viewpoint of literature" means to use given models and concepts characteristic of the language of literature as the general perspective for the study of signs in general. Reference is precisely to such concepts as "excess," "otherness," "dialogism," "indirect word," "digression," "extralocalization," "unfinalizability," "multivoicedness," "responsiveness," "polylogism," etc. As clearly emerges from the writings of Levinas and Bakhtin, literary writing is the place *par excellence* for the full realization of the condition of "extralocalization" which is oriented by the logic of "absolute otherness" rather than by "egocentric identity." Here time and space do not belong to the order of productive accumulation, to the logic of functionality, competitiveness and productivity, but rather are experienced in terms of such values as creative dispersion, digression, expenditure, dialogic heteroglossia, listening, and hospitality toward the other, toward the word of the other.

In *Il filosofo e la tartaruga*, which is emblematic of his research of the 1980s, Ponzio reelaborates such concepts as "otherness," "discontinuity," "discretion," "passion," "expenditure," "waste," "transience," "drift," "shift," "ephemeral" (1990b: 19–28). "Eternity of great artworks" and "vanity of the passions": this is a difference he questions. He maintains that the vanity of the passions, that is, the logic of excess is what makes the great work of art; that all narrations, all projects caught in the drift movement characteristic of the passions belong to the realm of the artwork; that the ethics of narrativity is achieved in the vanity of passion. The ethics of narrativity is the ethics of passion. If the artwork, the project are the content, the meaning of action, and if passion is the form, then the vanity of the great artwork testifies to its otherness, to the ethics of dissipation over economy, of excess and expenditure over calculation, to resistance of the signifier. Immanuel Kant, the philosopher of reason and expert of the passions, claims that different from emotion which is impetuous and unreflecting, passion takes time and reflects to reach its goal.

As an expression of the logic of excess, the word “passion” indicates that which evades equal exchange logic and critiques bourgeois economy, the logic of accumulation, functionality, efficiency, and productivity. The subject affected by passion is a passive subject. As such this subject is considered negatively by those conceptions that, instead, exalt such values as authority, capacity for initiative, activity, consciousness. But the properly human subject, “*subiectum*,” is constitutively passive, subject to . . . , dependent on . . . , interested in . . . , oriented toward . . . In other words, the subject thus described is characterized by opening to the other, by a capacity for listening to the other, for tuning in with the other. This means to say that beyond the “passive subject” understood as the subject that fails to be a controlling subject, to answer for itself and achieve its own personal aims despite any intentions in this sense, there exists another modality of being “subject to . . .” In this case, the passive subject is not measured in terms of intention, volition, the capacity to plan and control, but, on the contrary, implies availability toward the other, a capacity for dialogism, excess, and listening (see 3.4). Thus understood, passivity does not indicate the condition of alienation, the unquestioning subject that passively submits to external constriction; on the contrary, passivity refers to the capacity to surpass the limits of closed identity and private individual interest, to a conception of subject as a totality open to unlimited interrogation, with a propensity for creativity and critique.

The frenetic rhythm of the production-exchange-consumption cycle dominates over today’s capitalist society. Paradoxically, a condition for continuity of the production cycle is production of the ephemeral—the discontinuous, the superfluous, the private, the “addomesticated” ephemeral. Here “ephemeral” is not understood as part of consumerist equal exchange logic programmed by capitalist reproduction cycles, but rather is disruption of the latter. In her analysis of subjectivity, Victoria Welby too theorized an open subject evolving in the relation with the other and in this theoretical context introduced the expression “*ephemeron*” for self which she contrasted to the concept of “*Ident*” (Petrilli, 2009a: 606–70). As we are describing it, the ephemeral is refractory to the logic of accumulation and consumption, to the logic of productivity and functionality and as such alludes to the non-alienated self. The ephemeral is the place of creativity, difference, freedom, of the properly human. Thus conceived, the ephemeral denotes the body’s capacity for resistance (with its pulsional economy, demands, experiences, disorders, even death) to the logic of programming, productivity, efficiency, and functionality

as established by a precise plan with a specific aim regulated by equal exchange value and self-interested identity logic.

The ephemeral alludes to the absolute otherness of subjectivity, to the right to be dysfunctional with respect to social programs and dominant ideology; the right to be other with respect to identity fixed in roles, contracts, programs, with respect to commitments connected with the order of discourse, to officialdom; the ephemeral is the right to the time of sickness, aging, and death, to the time of friendship and love. In the context of the bourgeois system of values in capitalist society, the ephemeral represents excess and loss; with respect to the time of (Hi)story, to the logic of accumulation, edification, it is the place of irreducible discontinuity, fragmentation, digression, of the discrete in the mathematical sense of the term. From this perspective, the discrete is time which resists time as it is commonly experienced, the time of History. Discrete, discontinuous time is the time of separation and otherness: time which is my own and different from yours, which cannot be accumulated with your time, time experienced as irreducible discontinuity. The discrete is an interval, an interruption, the place of otherness and resistance with respect to the official order. The discrete can also be understood in the sense of discretion, that is, reserve, secrecy, privacy, intimacy. The ephemeral is this as well, the place of discrete time, of time that is mine understood as other, the time of otherness, incommensurable time. The ephemeral denotes the condition of otherness and difference with respect to anyone else.

Anthropologists teach us that societies do not exist at the mere subsistence level: social reproduction always includes the logic of excess. Levinas indicates this phenomenon with the expression “*œuvre*” in the sense of artwork. (Bakhtin also makes a significant contribution to this question.) Artistic value is only truly achieved when based on otherness, opening toward the other beyond the limits of identity, contemporaneity, the totality. Extralocalization, outsideness, exotopy, the logic of excess are the condition for artistic value.

The metaphor of automatism in relation to subjectivity is mostly considered in the negative sense of the mechanical. It embraces apparently contradictory concepts such as necessity, on the one hand, and spontaneity, chance, and autonomy with respect to external constriction, on the other. Ponzio develops such contradictions in dialectical terms and proposes what would seem to be another paradox: automatism as the process through which human action becomes autonomous. Insofar as it

combines the programmed and the spontaneous, necessity and chance, the natural and the artifact, the automaton characterizes human subjectivity more than the machine. As autonomous determinism automatism is free from external conditioning. Automatism opens to the unconscious: the automatism of thoughtlessness, forgetfulness, of the Freudian slip, the automatism of dreams, desires, passions.

What appear to be separate automatisms are in reality dialectically related to each other. This is even more obvious when we break down or “detotalize” the larger categories commonly used to analyze human beings and their behavior: individual subject, society, culture, class, *langue* and *parole*. On closer examination, it becomes clear that these categories are built on a series of automatons in a system of ever-changing relations, so that what seems programmed, automatic from a given point of view in fact results self-propelled and spontaneous from another (Barthes, 1978; Rossi-Landi, 1972). Ponzio explores the possibility of constructing open automatons capable of responding to external stimuli, therefore of modification and reorganization in response to the other, capable therefore of heterogeneity with respect to the pseudo automaton-totality. He connects this constructive interpretation of human automatism to Antonio Gramsci and his interpretation which is just as positive. Gramsci analyzes the relation between freedom and automatism and claims that automatism does not clash with freedom but with the arbitrary. Automatism is freedom of the group and contradicts arbitrary will, which is individualistic. If the arbitrary is generalized it is no longer arbitrary, but a shift in the direction of “automatism,” new rationality. Automatism is rationality stripped of any speculative aura (Gramsci, 1932–35).

The limit of approaches that conceive the automaton as a self-sufficient and separate entity clearly emerge in the light of Charles Peirce’s triadic categories of tychism (chance), agapism (love understood in terms of the otherness relationship), and ananchism (necessity) associated to his interpretation theory and most renown sign triad, index, icon, and symbol (see 5.5, 5.6). In reality, the automaton is open to relations with larger automatic entities, to mechanisms and programs it does not control. As sign reality, the interpretive practices regulating automata are not only regulated by necessity (index) or chance (symbol), therefore by the inferential practices of deduction and induction, which account for repetition and predictability. They are also regulated by the automatisms of free association, similarity and analogy (icon), therefore by inferences

of the abductive type which account for the creative, inventive, and unpredictable aspects of signifying processes.

6.7 Binarism, Triadism, and Dialogism

By contrast with the image of the rhizome as perspected by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari (1976), which despite their critique of binary logic is still dichotomous, Ponzio proposes a triadic automatism, the automatism of “thirdness” (Peirce), the automatism of opening toward the other, agapastic automatism, the automatism of creative abduction. However, psychoanalysis, structural linguistics (including Chomsky’s transformational generative grammar), the human sciences modeled on linguistics (structural anthropology, etc.), mathematical information theory, in the last analysis, all tend to follow binary logic, that is, the closed logic of biunivocal relations. Moreover, binary logic regulates dominant ideology and, therefore, social reality subject to dominant ideology. Dominant ideology can be described in terms of automata endowed with a capacity for self-regulation and self-production, for regulation and reproduction of other automatisms which depend on the former and at once support them. But the condition for the realization of extended and open totalities, which is the condition for social change, is that totalities made of biunivocal relations be detotalized according to the logic of dialogism and otherness, including the closed totalities forming today’s social reproduction circuits.

The scope of semiotic enquiry as it results from the grand vision represented by the volumes forming *Semiotik/Semiotics (S/S)*, edited by Roland Posner, Klaus Robering and Thomas Sebeok, from the *Encyclopedia of Semiotics (ES)*, edited by Paul Boussic, and ultimately from Sebeok’s “global semiotics” (see 4.1), transcends the opposition between followers of the Saussurean/Hjelmslevian/Greimasian approach (see articles 117, “Hjelmslev and Glossematics,” by Jørgen D. Johansen, and 119, “Greimas and his School,” by Hermann Parret, in *S/S*, 2: 2272–89, 2300–11), on the one hand, and followers of the Peircean approach, on the other. These two approaches in semiotics would seem to converge, respectively, with the opposition between *binarism* and *triadism*. However, the central question in semiotics considered theoretically and from the perspective of the history of schools and trends is not the alternative between binarism and triadism (Ponzio, 2007: 34–5).

Instead, the significant opposition is that between a sign model which tends to oversimplification with respect to the complex process of semiosis, on one hand, and a sign model (like that proposed by Peirce) which

does justice to the different aspects and factors of the process according to which something becomes a sign, on the other. The latter's validity is not simply determined by an empty triadic form, but rather depends on the specific contents constituting Peirce's triadism, that is, the categories forming his triadism, his sign typologies, and on the dynamic nature of his model according to which signs as engendered in the motion of deferral and *renvoi* from one interpretant to another. These categories include "firstness," "secondness," and "thirdness," the triad "representamen," "interpretant," and "object," "symbolicity," "indexicality," and "iconicity," and others still. All such factors support a conception of semiosis where *otherness* and *dialogism* are decisive.

Peircean logic is dialogic and polylogic though the merit is not in the triadic formula in itself. In fact, Hegelian dialectic abstracts triadism from the constitutive dialogism of sign life, giving rise to a form of dialectic that is unilinear and monological. Oddly enough the entry "Binarism" in *ES* proposes Hegelian philosophy as a means of overcoming the theory of binary opposition in Lévi-Strauss's structuralism (*ES*: 81). In his 1970–71 notebooks, Bakhtin analyzes the formation processes of Hegelian monologic dialectic, showing how it originates from the live context of dialogic semiosis. The process consists in taking out the voices (division of voices) from dialogue, eliminating any (personal/emotional) intonations, thereby transforming live words and dialogic relations into abstract concepts and judgments, so that dialectic is obtained in the form of a single abstract consciousness. Peirce himself took a stand against the systemic skeleton of Hegelian analysis, against dialectic understood as a kind of hypochondriac search for the conclusion, unilaterally oriented toward a synthesis instead of being open and contradictory (on the relation between dialogue and dialectic, see Ponzio, 2004c).

The real alternative in semiotics is not between binarism and triadism, but between *monologism* and *polylogism* (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2002b: 263–4). The limit of the sign model proposed by the semiology of Saussurean matrix is not determined by binarism, but, on the contrary, by the fact that binarism finds expression in the concept of equal exchange logic between signifier and signified, and in the reduction of complex sign life to the dichotomous paradigm formed by code and message.

6.8 To Lie, To Deceive, and To Simulate

The expression "the dialogue of lying" translates the Italian expression "*il dialogo della menzogna*," which corresponds to the title of an essay coauthored by Ponzio with Massimo A. Bonfantini, first published as an

independent booklet in 1993, and subsequently as a chapter in a volume (Ponzio and Bonfantini, 2006). The ambiguous meaning of this title is oriented in a dual sense to signify a dialogue on lying between Bonfantini and Ponzio, a metalinguistic performance which places the problem of lying as the object of discourse, but also the dialogic character of lying, the relation of lying to dialogism.¹ Ponzio and Bonfantini elaborate an original critique of lying, that is, of the art of deception through lying, with the instruments of pragmatic semiotics and semiotics of dialogue; not only do they describe the structure, articulation, and functioning of lying behavior, but they also attempt an understanding and evaluation of lying beyond the commonplace and oversimplifying distinction between “good lies” and “bad lies” according to the ends that inspire them—an intriguing task given the ambiguous nature of lying which does not have an opposite in the same way as stating a falsehood as opposed to a truth. Lying is morally and pragmatically ambiguous signifying behavior.

“Signs make mistakes possible” as Vincent Colapietro says in his essay, “Translating Signs Otherwise” (2003), a statement that can be further translated to resound as “signs make deception possible” exactly because the sign is a sign to the extent that it carries itself over to what is other than itself, translates itself into another sign. Semiosis places the condition for lying. Reflecting on the relation between semiosis and translation as perspected in the framework of Peircean semiotics, and precisely on the statement that “a sign is not a sign unless it translates itself into another sign in which it is more fully developed” (*CP* 5.594; 1898), Colapietro comments:

nothing should be accorded the status of a sign unless it has the potentiality or power *to translate itself* into another sign. That which has the dynamism to carry itself over into what is other than itself, in such a way as to shape this other in a manner congruent with the way it itself has been shaped, counts as a sign. In this *very* broad sense, a sign delimits an array of possibilities sufficiently to define an arena in which error or, more generally, ineptitude is possible. Signs make mistakes possible. There is, for a truly contrite fallibilist, perhaps no better characterization of signs. (Colapietro, 2003: 195)

To lie involves dialogue across different levels of discourse, which implies the condition of plurality, distancing, and otherness. At the very least, lying discourse involves the sign-object of discourse, that is, the lying referent, on the one hand, and the metalinguistic sign declaring that the antecedent sign is lying, on the other. But for there to be an effective act of lying, discourse levels multiply with the appearance of different interpretant roles (a single subject may perform more than one

role): in addition to the referent and liar, to lying discourse, these include the discourse or sign considered to be true and with respect to which the referent is considered to be a lie, the “victim” of lying discourse (whether a group of people, a single individual, oneself as another, etc.), the discourse unmasking the lie, the addressee.

Given that dialogism implies opening to the other and that the structure of lying is dialogic, from this point of view lying behavior could be judged positively. In reality, lying classifies as dialogue that aims to achieve something, a preestablished goal, and is organized on the basis of set beliefs and intentions. When the truth is hidden deceptively to the end of reaching a given end, dialogue is characterized by a low degree of dialogism and otherness. Lying is achieved by producing messages intended to deceive, which points to the relation between lying and intentionality. Contrary to “substantial dialogism,” lying is essentially monologic given that it focuses on identity-related selfish interest. Therefore, one of the limits of lying, certainly from the perspective of dialogism, is that the liar’s goal is preestablished by contrast with dialogue that is open to verification and modification, as in scientific research. Truly dialogic discourse allows for participation of the other in its narrative project: it gives “otherness” thematic status and is open to verification. This means to say that truly dialogic discourse is incapable of lying. By contrast, the dialectics of lying is monologic in spite of its dialogic structure. In lying discourse, the logic of otherness and the acquisition of new knowledge are not an end in themselves, but are used deceptively as a means to achieve a given end.

Only the person who knows the truth can lie, otherwise it is a question of error or falsehood due to ignorance of the truth. However, falsehood and lying share the fact that they both require a second level of discourse to establish that something is a lie or an untruth. In the case of intentional lying, deceptive messages are formulated and conveyed through verbal or nonverbal signs, or a mixture of both, unless we are dealing with nonhuman animals. Indeed, given that both human and nonhuman animals use signs and that using signs implies the capacity for lying, an interesting question is whether or not nonhuman animals lie. Thomas Sebeok addresses this question in a series of studies in which he maintains that as a semiotic process the capacity for lying is structural to both human and nonhuman animal behavior at different degrees of “intentionality” (Sebeok, 1986a: chapter 10, “Can Animals Lie?”).

Umberto Eco describes semiotics as that discipline which studies how to lie given that it studies signs. Giovanni Vailati before him had

already registered the fact that signs serve to deviate and deceive as a consequence of their nonisomorphic relation with reality. In 1907, Vailati entitled his review of a book by Giuseppe Prezzolini, *L'arte di persuadere*, "Un manuale per i bugiardi" (A handbook for liars). Deception and lying, the ability to cheat, deviate, disguise, pretend, make-believe is a fascinating dimension of semiosis. The mere fact that a sign can refer to an absence, to a referent that does not exist in a given universe of discourse (Morris's *designatum*) already implies that the open-ended chain of deferrals among signs is endowed with a potential capacity for deception and lying, even if not manifest. Semiosis allows for deception and lying.

With reference to the distinction between "signifying simulation" and "signified simulation," Bonfantini and Ponzio classify lying as an example of "bad signified simulation" by contrast with fiction which is "good signified simulation." The connection between simulation and lying is associated with the distinction between simulation and modeling, simulation and knowledge acquisition, in particular scientific knowledge. As a simulation mechanism, lying relates to other forms of simulative behavior such as keeping secrets, making errors, uttering unintentional falsehoods, pretence and fiction, in addition to ideology understood as false consciousness and distorted worldview. These different forms of simulative behavior resemble truth on the basis of an iconic relation among signs in Peirce's sense. Apart from this type of resemblance, Bonfantini and Ponzio also focus on difference, for example, on the difference between lying and ideology, where the latter is understood negatively as false thought, false consciousness, false praxis. Lying and ideology thus described are two forms of deceptive behavior at different degrees of consciousness in regard to their goals. Behaving or speaking according to a given ideology is one thing, pretending to behave or speak according to a given ideology, that is, lying, is another.

In Italy, President Cossiga became famous for his ostentatious behavior as he denounced the country's innumerable social, political, and economic faults, thereby offering a significant example of how to deviate public attention and hide the truth. The addressee's awareness, the Italian population, was obscured by the deceiver's behavior which was ostentatious and had the function of obstructing action. In fact, lying and deception can no longer count on secrecy given the power and all pervasiveness of mass media in present-day society, so that recourse to ostentation as a strategy for deceptive discourse is in line with the times.

A world teeming with redundant and mystifying messages serves to dull the consciousness. Ostentation is a means for revealing the truth, but without *thematizing*, without allowing it to enter consciousness, as repeatedly demonstrated so tragically by the scandals connected with Piazza Fontana, Brescia, Bologna, Aldo Moro, Ustica, Gladio, the Gulf War, Somalia, the Balkans, Palestine, and so forth. As the condition of interdependency between politics, power, and lying has made all too obvious, far from serving to denounce and reveal the truth, ostentation is yet another device at the service of deception. The politics of transparency in Italy, “glasnost” in ex-USSR, PC (political correctness) in the USA all do the same work—that of avoiding thematization and hiding the truth, exchanging the transparency of surfaces, the apparent, for the complex and tormented depths of reality.

As intellectuals like Günter Anders, Pier Paolo Pasolini, and Karl Marx before them have all pointed out, certain discourse strategies for hiding the truth simply make the effort to lie unnecessary, superfluous. Ponzio and Bonfantini underline the monological character of lying, the deceptive nature of transparency, the silence of ostentation, and instead signal the importance of *dialogic participation* for critical awareness and social change (Bonfantini, 1984; Ponzio, 1993). Without making impossible claims to objectivity, dialogic participation means to involve a far broader community platform in decisions about problems to thematize, truths to make public, priorities for collective behavior: instead of dulling the awareness, whether individual or collective, authentic dialogism involves listening to the other, therefore critical and responsible participation with the other.

6.9 Ideology, Logic, and Dialogue

A special issue of the journal *Semiotica. Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies* (IASS), entitled *Ideology, Logic and Dialogue in Semioethical Perspective*, presents a series of papers occasioned by the International Colloquium on “Logic, Dialogic, Ideologic: Signs between Functionality and Excess,” held at the University of Bari (now University of Bari—Aldo Moro), Italy, from 13 to 16 February 2002, to celebrate Augusto Ponzio (San Pietro Vernotico, Brindisi, 17 February 1942), Full Professor of Philosophy of Language and General Linguistics, on his sixtieth birthday. These titles signal problems that have been at the center of Ponzio’s research for well over forty years now, also reread in light of Thomas Sebeok’s “global semiotics.”

Ponzio, too, is convinced that in the era of globalization, the sign sciences more than ever before must account for the signs of biological life as much as for the signs of cultural life. Therefore, he turns his attention to semiosis, modeling, and communication not only in verbal and non-verbal cultural sign systems, but in the semiobiosphere generally over the entire planet. Moreover, a global semiotic perspective is inevitably interdisciplinary as it crosses over different research areas, interconnecting the human sciences (including the logical-mathematical) with the natural sciences, without any need to build bridges among specific semiotic spheres given that, as part of the same global semiotic network, they were never separate.

Ponzio evidences the relational character of signs both internally to sign systems in terms of logical, syntactical, and paradigmatic relations, and externally given that signs relate to referents on a semantic level and to interpreters on a pragmatic level. The relational character of signs also concerns their dialogical structure and projectual capacity. From this perspective as well signs are necessarily oriented in a global sense: they operate in relation to the present and its needs, according to the contextual pragmatics of programs and programming determined by dominant ideology; and thanks to their projectual capacity, they also operate according to ideological programs involving the future. Logic and dialogue in signs, by signs, among signs, modeling worldviews through signs presuppose the human capacity for excess and transcendence with respect to the ideology of productivity and functionality. Excess renders signs independent from need, from the limits of necessity, opening them to desire, inventiveness, creativity, nonfunctional planning. According to this approach, the subject is an end in itself, a value that cannot be reduced to the status of means. The Colloquium subtitle, "Signs between Functionality and Excess," signals precisely this, the irreducibility of signs to the logic of production and equal exchange. The terms "logic," "dialogic," and "ideologic" indicate a triple dimension of semiosis evidenced by the human sciences as well as by the natural sciences. Ponzio addresses problems relating to these concepts from the perspective of philosophy of language, updated in the light of recent developments in the sign sciences, from linguistics to biosemiotics. As such his approach may be more properly described as pertaining to general semiotics, but practiced in terms of critique and the search for foundations which derives from his work in philosophy of language.

General semiotics conceived in the framework of global semiotics presents itself as a metascience which overcomes artificial separations

established between the human sciences and the natural sciences, and, instead, favors a transversal and interdisciplinary approach which evidences the condition of interconnectedness among the sciences. (From a diachronic perspective, the origins of general semiotics understood as global semiotics can be traced back at least to the rise of the medical sciences and specifically to symptomatology, see 4.1 and 4.4). As practiced by Ponzio, general semiotics in a global semiotic framework also continues its philosophical search for sense, an approach he develops from an education in phenomenology, particularly in the interpretation of Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The question of the sense for man of scientific research in general and of semiotics in particular is oriented by Husserl's distinction between the "exact sciences" and the "rigorous sciences," thematized by the latter in his essay on "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science" and in his monograph, *The Crisis of the European Sciences* (1954). Husserl interrogates the sense for man of scientific knowledge, avoiding all forms of scientism and technicalism, all forms of separation between means and conscious awareness of ends, by contrast to the alienated subject and false consciousness. From this point of view, semiotics is also "semioethics."

That the genesis of semiotics be identified, following Sebeok, in medical semeiotics or symptomatology, according to the tradition that leads from Hippocrates to Galen, is not only a question of agnition, that is, knowledge about origins. To relate semiotics to the medical sciences, therefore to the study of symptoms also means to recover the ethical instance of studies on signs. In other words, it means to recover the ancient vocation of "semeiotics" for the health of life which is an immediate concern for semiotics given that, as Sebeok posits, semiosis and life, that is, life globally over the entire planet, are coextensive. Semiotics is semioethics in this sense too. However, the ethical instance of Ponzio's approach to semiotics has also developed in relation to the two authors who have been at the center of his attention from the very beginning of his studies—Levinas and Bakhtin. Semioethics is not a discipline in its own right, but rather a perspective in the study of signs, which inherits the critical instance of philosophy of language, the quest for sense.

Responding to John Deely's query *à propos* the term "semioethics," in an e-mail exchange between 4 and 5 January 2010, Ponzio explains as follows:

Semioethics was born in the early 1980s in connection with the introductions (written by Susan Petrilli) to the Italian translations of works by Thomas Sebeok, Charles Morris, Victoria Welby and my own introduction and interpretation of works

by Mikhail Bakhtin, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Giovanni Vailati, and Peirce (see my Bibliography). The problem was to find, with Susan, a term which indicates the study of the relation between signs and values, ancient semeiotics and semiotics, meaning and significance, and which somehow translates Welby's "Significs" into Italian: we coined terms and expressions such as "teleosemiotica" "etosemiotica," "semiotica etica" in contrast with "semiotica cognitiva" (see the Italian edition by Massimo Bonfantini of Peirce, *La semiotica cognitiva*, 1980, Einaudi, Torino).

The beginning of semioethics is in the introductions by myself and Susan to the Italian editions (translation by Susan) of Sebeok, *Il segno e i suoi maestri*, Bari, Adriatica, 1985, of Welby, *Significato, metafora e interpretazione*, Adriatica, 1985, in the essays by Susan and myself published in H. Walter Schmitz (ed.), *Essays in Significs*, Amsterdam, John Benjamins, 1990, in Susan's books of the 1980s, such as *Significs, semiotica, significazione*, Pref. by Thomas Sebeok, Adriatica, 1988, and Ponzio's, such as *Filosofia del linguaggio*, Adriatica, 1985.

In a private note written in the context of the International Colloquium, "Refractions. Literary Criticism, Philosophy and the Human Sciences in Contemporary Italy in the 1970s and the 1980s," held at the Department of Comparative Literature, Carleton University, Ottawa, 27–29 September 1990 (in the discussion following delivery of my paper "Rossi-Landi tra *Ideologie e Scienze umane*"), I used the Italian term "Semioetica" playing on the displacement of "e" in the Italian word "semeiotica": indicating in Semiotics the ancient vocation of Semeiotics (as conceived by Hippocrates and Galenus) for improving life, bettering it.

But in the title of 3 lessons delivered with Susan at Curtin University of Technology, Perth in Australia, we still used the term "teleosemiotica": "Teleosemiotics and global semiotics" (July–September, 1999, Australian lecture tour: Adelaide University, Monash University, in Melbourne, Sydney University, Curtin University, in Perth, Northern Territory University, Darwin).

The book *Semioetica*, co-authored by Susan and myself, was published in 2003 and is the landing achievement of this long crossing of texts, conceptions, and words, as results from our bibliographic references [. . .].

It is very difficult to say exactly when an idea is born with its name: "universal gravitation" was born when an apple fell from a tree on Newton's head: is that so?

The different forms of logical inference, the dialogical dimension of semiosis, and the critique of ideology all inevitably call for analysis in a semiotical key. Logic, dialogue, and ideology can only be fully understood by keeping account of their sign nature. This means to distinguish between the different functions of the sign, remembering, however, that signs cannot be reduced to function, for this would mean to lose sight of the constitutively innovative, inventive, and creative dimension of semiosis, inferential processes, dialogue and ideology: the life of signs foresees a broad margin of nonfunctionality. To lose sight of this dimension of semiosis means to lose sight of otherness which is no less that constitutive of signs. Functional semiosis is regulated by the logic of identity. And signs functional to the logic of identity, closed identity, are signs of difference, signs that differ from other signs, but in the

sense that they fix difference and reduce signs to the status of signals. However, the essential characteristic of semiosis is that it implies difference in terms of deferral, *renvoi*, openness to alterity, with Jacques Derrida, *différance*.

Nonfunctionality and otherness, absolute otherness, are structural to semiosical processes and stops them from being reduced to the condition of biunivocal, two-way sign processes, as established by binary, equal exchange logic. On the contrary, semiosis involves an irreversible movement toward the other, which transcends equal exchange logic between a signifier and a signified, and finds its specificity in the logic of excess, expenditure without a counterpart, without return. Otherness is an irrevocable vocation of the sign. Consequently, though signs can be used as signals in given semiotic contexts, they cannot be reduced to the status of signality. When a question of signals, to interpret simply means to identify and to decodify. But to interpret signs in their specificity also means to recognize their capacity for nonfunctionality and otherness, to situate them in the open and dialogical chain of deferrals from one sign to the next. Logic understood as “dia-logic”—a term used by Ponzio to underline that dialogism is structural to logic and inferential processes—acknowledges that signs and sign relations do not merely belong to the order of identification, but far more radically to the critical, creative, and dialogical order of responsive understanding where the logic of otherness has full play.

Communication today in a globalized world is based on the logic of identity and equal exchange (i.e., greedy, self-interested exchange). It is obsessed with defending the rights of identity, understood as the rights of shortsighted self-interest. The present-day situation of global communication calls for a critique of identity on the basis of the logic of otherness and excess. The dimension of otherness and excess is refractory to the logic of identity, which is always ready to sacrifice otherness, one’s own otherness as much as the otherness of others. Instead, for the health of semiosis, therefore of life globally, it is now urgent more than ever before to recognize the “dia-logic” of otherness, therefore the nonfunctional, the unproductive, gift logic, as structural to semiosis. Otherness is an irrevocable vocation of the sign and to recognize as much is a necessary condition for a critique of communication today with any claim to adequacy (see chapters 1–4). The logic of excess and otherness as thematized in the present volume, of giving without return, may also be associated with “gift logic” as theorized by Genevieve Vaughan in her

own research on signs, language, and communication (Petrilli, 2004e, 2007a; Vaughan, 1997, 2004, 2007).

As anticipated in chapter 1, communication in the present day and age is communication-production, that is, communication that complies with dominant ideology, with the ideo-logic that regulates capitalist social reproduction in this extreme phase of development known as globalization. Communication in the era of globalization is world communication not only in the sense that it extends over the whole planet, but also in the sense that it accommodates the world as it is. Global communication today is a function of the globalized world, and, as such, is not open to critique. The expression “world” here is understood as referring to the time-space of ontology, to being, to individual and collective identity, to things as they are, to the realism of politics which goes so far as to accept the “*extrema ratio*” of war. Ponzio’s research overall is a critique of the logic of identity. Following Levinas and his phenomenological approach to signs, language, and subjectivity, he evidences the connection inscribed in Western culture between World, Narration, History, Duration, Identity, Subject, Liberty, Donation of Sense by Intentional Consciousness, Individuality, Difference–Indifference, Interest, Well-Being, Ontology, Truth, Force, Reason, Power, Work, Productivity, Politics, and War. No doubt this connection has always been exploited and exasperated by capitalism, but now more so than ever before in the era of globalization.

In the face of a world that exploits and functionalizes the other to its own egocentric ends, that defends the rights of identity, of self-interest, that is ready to sacrifice alterity for the sake of identity, a world in which politics is functional to persistence in being and identity to the very point of acknowledging the reasons of war, a world where peace is no more than momentary repose, respite functional to war, just as the night, free-time, rest is functional to return to work, to the necessities of the day, we must interrogate the possibility of establishing relations that are not of this world, but that all the same are of the material, earthly order.

The properly human can only be traced outside the space and time of ontology. The properly human is a dimension where interhuman relations cannot be reduced to the category of identity, to relations between subjects and objects predefined outside communication processes, or to relations of exchange, equalization, functionality, productivity, selfish interest. Ponzio explores the possibility of response in a dimension beyond being, a dimension indicated by Levinas as *otherwise than being*.

By contrast with “being otherwise,” “otherwise than being” is outside ontology, outside the world as it is. “Otherwise than being” is the condition of earthly transcendence with respect to the world, to this world as it is, and alludes to a dimension of sense that is other with respect to sense as wanted by *this* world. By contrast to the humanism of identity, another form of humanism is possible, *the humanism of otherness*, of otherwise than being (Levinas, 1972, 1978).

Ponzio relates the Levinasian concept of *otherwise than being* to the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue. The reference here is not to formal dialogue, dialogue understood as the place of encounter and exchange of ideas, nor dialogue intended to overcome contradiction and synthesis. Instead, in Bakhtin’s sense, dialogue alludes to the condition of exposition to the other, intercorporeity, involvement with the other, where differences are not indifferent to each other, but relate to each other according to the logic of unindifferent difference. Ponzio proposes a *critique of language and communication with the instruments of dialogic reason*. He critiques the present-day social reproduction system, that is, the globalized communication-production system, on the basis of the Levinasian existential dimension of *otherwise than being* associated with the extralocalized dimension of Bakhtin’s *great time*.

What can be described as the *semioethic turn in semiotics* is a development on Sebeok’s global semiotics in terms of a special interest for the relation between signs and values and for the question of responsibility which invests the human being as a semiotic animal. To focus on the relation between signs and values means to focus on the ethical-pragmatic-critical dimension of semiosis. This is connected to the propositional and projectual orientation of semiotics as practiced by the Bari-Lecce School, which is headed by Ponzio and inspired by the originality of his intellectual work and overwhelming commitment to the quality of scientific research and of life.

Notes

1. *Il dialogo della menzogna* is the title of a dialogue between Massimo A. Bonfantini and Augusto Ponzio originally performed at a Conference on lying, deception, and simulation held in Naples, February 1992, and published that same year as a booklet (31 pp.) with “Millelire, Stampa Alternativa.” At the time this editorial initiative was rather extraordinary for it proposed a philosophical and critical dialogue on lying in the form of low cost alternative literature available at the newsagent, therefore easily accessible not only to academic circles, but also to the wide reading public.

7

Meaning, Metaphor, Interpretation: Modeling New Worlds

. . . Man is the one not merely who thinks, or speaks, or writes, or looks upwards, but the one who means, the one who is the meaning of much, and makes the meaning of all; the one who will not tolerate the unmeaning anywhere in experience.

—Victoria Lady Welby (2009a [1893]: 429)

And he told them many things in parables, saying: "Listen! A sower went out to sow. And as he sowed, some seeds fell on the path, and the birds came and ate them up. Other seeds fell on rocky ground, where they did not have much soil, and they sprang up quickly, since they had no depth of soil. But when the sun rose, they were scorched; and since they had no root, they withered away. Other seeds fell among thorns, and the thorns grew up and choked them. Other seeds fell on good soil and brought forth grain, some a hundredfold, some sixty, some thirty. Let anyone with ears listen.

Then the disciples came and asked him, "Why do you speak to them in parables?" He answered, "To you it has been given to know the secrets of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it has not been given. For to those who have, more will be given, and they will have an abundance; but from those who have nothing, even what they have will be taken away. The reason I speak to them in parables is that "seeing they do not perceive, and hearing they do not listen, nor do they understand."

—Matthew (13: 1.13)

7.1 Otherness and Metaphor

Otherness logic is an original and originating condition for the generation of signifying processes, language and communication generally,

which the processes of metaphorization evidence and develop. Metaphors enhance the polylogic and plastic nature of meaning which is never fixed once and for all, but rather migrates across boundaries set up by the logic of identity: on the basis of the dynamics of otherness and excess, metaphor implies perpetual displacement of sense outside the sphere of the same, the common place, plain meaning. Metaphor borders on the impalpable allowing the invisible to emerge from the visible, the unknown from the known, by approximation (given the sign nature of knowledge).

Metaphorization develops meaning across the sign network without limitations of the systemic or typological orders. To metaphorize is to associate and recompose semantic fields, to rethink sense, to enhance the dynamic and live nature of meaning and not just to transfer from one section of the sign network to another. In other words, metaphor involves interpretive-translative processes among signs, relating signifying trajectories that are even distant from each other, alien to each other beyond what could have seemed any possibility of association. But metaphor is connected with the capacity to create iconic relations, as these are understood by Charles Peirce. As such it involves relations of likeness based on otherness, attraction, and affinity among terms that are different from each other: *elective likeness*, *agapastic likeness*, *likeness based on the logic of otherness by contrast to likeness based on the logic of identity*, of the same, on assemblative logic which, instead, characterizes the *concept* by contrast to the *metaphor*. Likeness is complex and takes various forms; it can also be either analogical or homological.

Insofar as it is oriented by the logic of otherness, by the relation of attraction and affinity among dissimilar terms, metaphor favors innovation and creativity. As an expressive modality that invests verbal language in its totality and connects it to nonverbal language, metaphorization represents an ubiquitous dimension of human signifying processes. Therefore, to consider metaphor as a mere rhetorical device is an oversimplification: metaphor cannot be reduced to the status of ornamentation, decoration with respect to the illusion of a preconstituted nucleus of meaning, “plain and literal meaning,” nor is it simply instrumental to research and knowledge. Metaphor is this and much more: it is structural to signifying processes, the acquisition of knowledge, inventive inferential procedure, progress in scientific research (see Nuessell, 2006).

The signifying value and significance of the word, as in the case of correlate subjectivity, cannot be reduced to identity logic, therefore to “literal meaning”—a category which in reality is no more than an

abstraction with respect to the semiotic nature of meaning and the cultural processes of its production. As Levinas says:

Déjà les mots n'auraient pas de significations isolables, telles qu'elles figurent dans les dictionnaires et que l'on pourrait réduire à des contenus et à des données quelconques. Ils ne seraient pas figés dans un sens littéral. Il n'y aurait d'ailleurs pas de sens littéral. Les mots ne renverraient pas à des contenus qu'ils désigneraient mais en premier lieu, latéralement, à d'autres mots. (Levinas, 1972: 20)

The word's meaning develops in relation to the meaning of other words in semiotic processes that render language plurivocal, polylogic. Even the signal (where the relation between interpreted and interpretant is univocal) signifies through deferral to the other. In her essays "Meaning and Metaphor," 1893 and "Sense, Meaning and Interpretation," 1896 (now both in Petrilli, 2009a), Victoria Welby formulates a critique of univocality and monologism and signals the "plain meaning fallacy," a constant concern in her critique of language. As she claims in her monograph of 1903, *What is Meaning?*: "For one thing meaning is not, and that is 'plain' in the sense of being the same at all times, in all places and to all" (Welby, 1983 [1903]: 143). Instead, she evidences the "plasticity" of language, the polysemy of signs, the metaphorization of meaning which presuppose the otherness logic essential to expression (see also her monograph of 1911, *Significs and Language*).

As the place of elaboration and amplification of meaning, metaphor reaches high degrees in dialogic interaction and responsive understanding among interpretants in an open-ended sequence of signs that interpret and amplify the preceding sign. The more signs in transit through the semiotic network are characterized by dialogism and responsive understanding, the more metaphorization enhances innovation and the creation of new worlds. On the basis of the relation of similarity among terms apparently distant from each other, the meaning of the primary subject is enriched with implications associated with the terms of comparison, in a dialogical relation of reciprocal involvement among interpretant signs. Metaphorization is related to the interpretant of responsive understanding (Bakhtin, Peirce), significance (Barthes, Derrida, Kristeva), saying (Levinas); it is the place of dialogic encounter with the other. The expression "non place" (*non lieu*) is more appropriate given that metaphor implies the unbounded space of extralocalization, of shifts, deviations and deferrals of sense in ongoing semiotic fluxes. As the expression of interconnections and interactions among different types and systems of signs, among different semantic fields, contexts, experiences, events,

states of consciousness and behaviors, metaphor evades the boundaries of identity logic. As signification through allusion and approximation, association and likeness among differences generated by otherness logic, metaphor enhances the nonfinite character of signifying processes (Petrilli and Ponzio, 2008a: 119–22).

Meaning develops in the relation of reciprocal implication among signs which is neither a relation of transfer or forced cohabitation of different senses in a single sign, nor of substitution among signs where the other is reduced to the same, nor of simple confrontation among likenesses (Aristotle). Instead, when a question of metaphor the relation among signs is a relation of interanimation (Richards, 1936), reciprocal interaction (Black, 1962: 25–47), “complementarity” (Richards, 1976), that is, attraction and affinity (Peirce). Complementarity alludes to the relation of affinity and accord among signs and perspectives that would seem to be dissimilar and discordant; it involves the homological method beyond simple analogy, the need for multiple viewpoints which make of interpretation-signification processes an endless dialogue (Richards, 1991: 206–15).¹

According to Peirce, metaphor belongs to one of three orders of signs, the icon (as distinct from the index and symbol) with images and diagrams. As an iconic sign, or more specifically a “hypoiconic” sign (see CP 2.276–2.279), metaphor presents a relation of similarity between the object-interpreted sign and the interpretant sign, and carries out an important role in the transmission and engenderment of knowledge and innovation. As Peirce says, “The only way of directly communicating an idea is by means of an icon; and every indirect method of communicating an idea must depend for its establishment upon the use of an icon” (CP 2.278). And again, “For a great distinguishing property of the icon is that by the direct observation of it other truths concerning its object can be discovered than those which suffice to determine its construction” (CP 2.279). This position also resounds in Welby when she observes in her monograph of 1903, *What is Meaning?*, that “while language itself is a symbolic system its method is mainly pictorial” (Welby, 1983 [1903]: 38). While recognizing the conventional and arbitrary nature of language, she too underlines the importance of iconicity in expression, communication, and understanding through verbal language, therefore of recourse to such expedients as imagery, metaphor, and simile as in other sociocultural expressive systems. Iconicity plays a major role not only in communicating but also in engendering sense, knowledge, and experience.

Any type of writing whether literary, philosophical, or scientific, largely depends on metaphor for the generation of sense and knowledge. The etymology itself of the word “metaphor,” formed from the Greek “*meta*” (trans, beyond) and “*pherein*” (carry), indicates shift among senses and meanings in semiotic fluxes that empower the sign in terms of plurivocality, polylogism, and signifying implication. As a modality of discourse, metaphorization actually abounds in the essay writing of both Welby and Peirce providing direct witness to its role in the construction of theoretical discourse, to its cognitive value beyond the aesthetic (examples are numerous as in the writings of Marx or Freud). Moreover, given that metaphorization presupposes otherness as a necessary condition, and that the otherness relation constitutes the ethical foundation of expressive processes, it also contributes to developing the ethical dimension of language beyond the cognitive and the aesthetic.

The processes of metaphorization and symbolization cross over systemic or typological boundaries and spread through the whole sign network, sometimes forming interpretive trajectories that are so deep-rooted that their figurative dimension is not obvious and seems, instead, to be a question of “plain meaning.” But metaphor operates even when we are not aware of it: therefore, a distinction can be made between metaphorical interpretive trajectories that are deeply rooted in speaker consciousness (and would seem to be a question of plain, simple meaning fixed and defined once and for all), on the one hand, and metaphorical trajectories, on the other, which are easily recognized for what they are because of their capacity for inventiveness, creativity, and innovation achieved by associating interpretants that are distant from each other in relations that are altogether new and unexpected, as takes place in inferential procedure of the abductive type. In programmatic terms we may choose between the “literal” and the “metaphorical.” But the truth is that this is a pseudo-choice with the sole effect of producing artificial, awkward, and even ridiculous exaggerations in one sense or the other. As Ferruccio Rossi-Landi says, it leads to the “false asceticism of the literal” or to the “orgy of the metaphorical” with its mystifying, pseudo-liberating and even terroristic impact on the speaking masses. The allusion here is to a discriminating, even intimidating use of metaphorization with the effect of dumbfounding the other person’s consciousness in situations where communicability is only apparent (Rossi-Landi, 1985: 117).

According to Emmanuel Levinas metaphor defers to absence which does not indicate a lack, a void *tout court*, but is associated with the logic of absolute otherness, the condition of possibility of signification.

Otherness is at the origin of signification, an a priori which at once animates and directs the processes of signification:

Mais la métaphore—le renvoi à l'absence—peut être considéré comme un excellence relevant d'un ordre tout différent de la réceptivité pure. L'absence vers laquelle conduit la méta-phore, ne serait pas un autre donné, mais encore future ou déjà passé. La signification ne consolerait pas une perception déçue, mais *rendrait seulement la perception possible*. La réceptivité pure comme un pur sensible sans signification, se serait qu'un mythe ou qu'une abstraction. Des contenus sonores "dépourvus de sens" comme les voyelles, ont une "naissance latente" dans des significations—c'est là déjà l'enseignement philosophique du célèbre sonnet de Rimbaud. Aucune donnée ne serait d'emblée munie d'identité et ne saurait entrer dans la pensée par l'effet d'un simple choc contre la paroi d'une réceptivité. Se donner à la conscience, scintiller pour elle, se manderait que la donnée, au préalable, se place à un horizon éclairé; semblablement au mot qui reçoit le don d'être entendu à partir d'un contexte auquel il se réfère. La signification serait l'illumination même de cet horizon. Mais cet horizon ne résulte pas d'une addition de données absentes, puisque chaque donnée aurait déjà besoin d'un horizon pour se définir et se donner. C'est cette notion d'horizon ou de *monde*, conçue sur le modèle d'un contexte et, finalement, sur le modèle d'un langage et d'une culture—avec toute la part et d'aventure et du "déjà fait" historiques qu'ils comportent—qui est le lieu où la signification se situe dès lors.

Déjà les mots n'auraient pas de significations isolables, telles qu'elles figurent dans les dictionnaires et que l'on pourrait réduire à des contenus et à des données quelconques. Ils ne seraient pas figés dans un sens littéral. Il n'y aurait d'ailleurs pas de sens littéral. Les mots ne renverraient pas à des contenus qu'ils désigneraient mais en premier lieu, latéralement, à d'autres mots. Malgré la méfiance que montre Platon à l'endroit du langage écrit (et même, dans la 7^e lettre, de tout langage), il enseigne dans le *Cratyle* que même les noms donnés aux dieux—les noms propres attachés, conventionnellement, comme des signes, à des êtres individuels,—renvoient, à travers leur étymologie, à d'autres mots qui ne sont pas des noms propres.—De plus, le langage se réfère à la position de celui qui écoute et de celui qui parle, c'est-à-dire à la contingence de leur histoire. Saisir, par inventaire, tous les contextes du langage et des positions où peuvent se trouver les interlocuteurs, est une entreprise insensée. Chaque signification verbale est au confluent de flueves sémantiques innombrables.

Tout comme le langage, l'expérience n'apparaît plus faite d'éléments isolés, logés, en quelque façon, dans un espace euclidien où ils pourraient s'exposer, chacun pour son compte, directement visibles, signifiant à partir de soi. Il signifiant à partir du "monde" et de la position de celui qui regarde. (Levinas, 1972: 19–21)

7.2 Metaphor, Modeling, and Linguistic Creativity

The metaphorical-associative capacity of thought and language are grounded in "modeling" specific to human beings, that is, "primary modeling" or "language" (and a priori with respect to verbal language which instead arises for "communication"). Human cognitive processes, the acquisition of knowledge and creativity are possible on the basis of primary modeling (see 1.2 and 5.8). Thanks to language understood as

modeling, human beings are endowed with a capacity for fantasizing, for the “play of musement” (the expression is Peirce’s), for associative inferential procedure of the homological order, which is dominated by otherness and iconicity. In all discourse, everyday and scientific discourse, metaphorical-associative processes enhance understanding, interpretation, and invention either by identifying relations among signs that already exist but had not yet been detected, or by creating relations in the sign network that are altogether new.

In “The Purloined Letter” by Edgar Allan Poe, Dupin reveals that his investigations are mostly successful, thanks to his capacity for association, in our terminology, for inferential procedure of the abductive type which is dominated by iconicity and makes abundant use of such devices as analogy, homology, simile, and metaphor. In fact, Dupin solves the enigma put to his attention by the Prefect on the basis of the premise that “The material world abounds with very strict analogies to the immaterial; and thus some color of truth has been given to the rhetorical dogma, that metaphor, or simile, may be made to strengthen an argument as well as to embellish a description” (Poe, 1978: 604). Because of the associative capacity of thought and language, human beings (differently from the Cartesian model of the thinking subject) have been described as “guessers” more than rational thinkers (Bonfantini and Proni, 1980; Danesi, 2005; Eco, 1981; Peirce, “A Guess at the Riddle,” 1890, *CP* 1.354–1.414). As observed by Peirce, guessing is a characteristic of human reasoning. And the more the terms associated are distant from each other in the cultural network, therefore the more these associations are risky, the more they are characterized by inventiveness and creativity.

Welby identifies various types of likeness relations relatively to both verbal and nonverbal language, which must be continuously verified and experimented for validity (Welby, 2009a [1893]: 422–3). In *What is Meaning?* she states her view in the following terms with specific reference to analogy: “But in the case of analogy, its claim in any given case to be valid has to be established by evidence; it has endless degrees of presumable validity. It has to vindicate its claim to be more than a casual illustration, however brilliant and forcible” (1983 [1903]: 156). Applying her studies in the sphere of the life sciences to language and meaning, she also makes the important distinction between superficial likeness, *analogy*, and genetical-structural likeness, *homology*, or “stronger” type of analogy as she also says, recognizing the special value of the latter for progress in knowledge and development of signifying processes

at large. Association among terms takes various forms—comparison, confrontation, equation, differentiation, allusion, metaphor, simile, etc.—and may either be regulated by the logic of otherness, as in the case of metaphor, or of identity, as in the case of assemblages such as the categories class, species, genus, concept, genre, etc. In chapter two of *What is Meaning?*, Welby urges that we examine all suggested reforms or extensions of language to the end of improving expressiveness through a more critical use of the resources, actual and possible of language, in the first place of tested and valid analogy and metaphor:

In another direction a searching reform is needed. If we were seriously to set to work to distinguish by some recognised sign, the untested from the tested and “passed” simile, we should simply gain in comparison a new world.

We should have—

1. Casual likeness, two ideas or things comparable or similar in one point, in one context, on one occasion, to one audience, etc., only.
2. General likeness of the whole, with unlikeness of constituents; results analogous but differently arrived at or constructed.
3. Likeness in all but one point or feature. This may be (a) important (i.) to the original figurate, (ii.) to the metaphorical use; (b) indifferent.
4. Valid analogy ringing true in character throughout, bearing pressure to the limit of knowledge, and yet remaining analogy and never becoming equivalence, or identity in varying senses.
5. Equivalence: as when we say that so-and-so applies in both cases—(a) wholly; (b) partially. (In these cases it is often difficult to say which is metaphorical and which is literal. There is often borrowing backwards and forwards, and sometimes both are neither metaphorical nor literal and yet equally “actual”).
6. Correspondence in each point and in mass or whole. In this case the “figure” is a reflection as in a mirror. Or it may be question of concomitance, of correlation, of parallel, of object and its shadow, seal and its stamp, etc.

Now, however, it may be said that we have to leave the field of analogy and enter that of homology. In a criticism of Mr. Spencer’s comparison of society to an organism Mr. Lester Ward urges that “the nervous system, instead of being the last to be considered in a comparison of society with an organism, is the first and only proper term of comparison. All the other terms, those upon which Mr. Spencer has laid the principal stress, furnish only ‘analogies,’ as he properly calls them. This, on the contrary, furnishes true *homologies*. Analogies are of little use except in arousing and satisfying curiosity, but homologies are valuable aids to the sociologist. The nervous

system, as the reservoir of protoplasm and seat of life, sensibility, will, and ideas, is a fundamental factor" (*Outlines of Sociology*, 1898: 60–1). And further on he adds that "the same principles do not apply to human and animal sociology. . . The facts of animal association therefore—the remarkable resemblances to man's ways displayed by insects and the curious imitations of human customs in various departments of the animal world—prove to be only *analogies* and not true homologies, and as such have much less value to the sociologist than they appeal at first view to possess" (Ibid.: 92–3). Here at least we touch upon one cause of present confusion and one hope for its cure. All manner of comparisons, from the most absurdly inapplicable to the truest and most complete, are lumped together as "analogies"; and then we are gravely told that no argument can rest upon analogy. But some comparisons vaguely called analogies are really homologies; some again really equations; and from these an argument can of course properly start.

If we had a classification of this kind we should come with fresh light to the question of "pressing" or working out analogy. Some comparisons bear this throughout, others partially, others not at all. Then we have what may be called temporary and local analogies. Some may have borne pressure fifty years ago and cannot bear it now; some may bear it here and not there. The crucial point must always be to see that the main thoughts and their inferences do really fit. (1983 [1903]: 19–22)

Mind, language, and world are associated on the basis of likeness and comparison of the genetical-structural type, or homology. Different types of likeness come into play in different types of inference—deduction, induction, and abduction (or retroduction, as Peirce also says) which in this order foresee an increasing degree in the capacity for creativity, inventiveness, and innovation in everyday life as much as in scientific research. Association among terms on the basis of likeness (whether analogical or homological) is structural to the development and articulation of thought and language and is an essential condition not only in the dynamics of learning but also of teaching. In Welby's view, "language itself has long decided that whether we will or no we shall use it [analogy] or be content to forgo speech entirely" (1983 [1903]: 34); and again "We strangely ignore the fact that *comparison* is our one way of acquiring or imparting knowledge; that no perception has its full 'sense,' much less meaning, until we have started from its likeness to or correspondence with some other perception already ours" (Ibid.: 43). Welby too maintains that figurative language largely arises from the dynamics of association, confrontation, and comparison among ideas, facts, and events from different areas of experience: "For the very virtue of analogy lies in its supposed or professed ability to relate modes of experience apparently divergent, even discrepant, but certainly discrete and disparate, and to relate these in such a manner as to increase our productive command over the two apparently incompatible or unrelated lines of thought or work" (Ibid.: 156).

The iconic dimension of signifying processes, including the relation of likeness among “minds” and “universes of discourse,” is the condition for interpersonal communication, mutual understanding, dialogic interaction, for the (oral and written) transmission of an idea from one semiotic body to another. Likeness is structural to the dialogical act of communication: when I set about communicating with another, I begin from the initial assumption that my mind is similar to the mind of the person I speak to. Welby finds verification of this theoretical assumption in the effect it produces on a practical level in human relations and in verbal and nonverbal behavior among interlocutors generally—mutual understanding, the possibility of modifying plans, objectives, points of view. Instead, erroneous inferences, false premises, and unfounded assumptions generate negative consequences—confusion, false problems, and fallacies of various sorts.

The metaphor is a special type of icon and plays an important role in the workings of the human mind. One of the main tasks of “cognitive linguistics” today is to understand such workings as avers Marcel Danesi (2001a, 2005) interpreter of Giambattista Vico and his “new science.” Vico’s relevance to twentieth-century semiotic research has also been signaled by Thomas Sebeok (2000d) and Max Fisch (1986). Vico makes an important contribution toward a more adequate analysis of the associative-metaphorical dynamics of thought and language presenting an alternative to the Chomskyan generative-transformational model and to Cartesian linguistics. Vico’s concept of “poetic logic” describes the human mind as predisposed for synthetic and holistic understanding and is in line with current research in cognitive linguistics, neuro-psychology, semiotics, and modeling theory.

However, dominant trends in the linguistic sciences today do not always explain metaphor adequately in theoretical terms, nor sufficiently evidence its workings in language. Metaphorical interconnections characterize human thought processes generally and play a pivotal role in both verbal and nonverbal expression. But how do we explain these processes theoretically? Important contributions in this sense come from semiotics in the tradition of such thinkers as John Locke and Peirce, and more recently Charles Morris, Roman Jakobson, and Thomas A. Sebeok. Metaphorization is an associative modality of discourse characteristic of figurative language, of the capacity for “figuration” or “picturing” as opposed to “representation” (Petrilli and Ponzio, 1999). As stated above, beyond serving as a rhetorical expedient or for poetic embellishment, metaphorization activates thought-language processes and is structural

to them. Metaphor does not simply represent objects on the basis of indicational modeling, but figurates them on the basis of modeling proper to language and modeling systems based on language (understood as a primary modeling device), therefore, on secondary modeling systems which concern verbal language, and on tertiary modeling systems which involve cultural systems capable of symbolically structured and highly abstract inferential procedure. Interdisciplinary research on associative-metaphorical inferential processes has revealed that metaphor is developed in that part of the cerebral hemisphere which has control over creative acts and synthetic-global meanings (Ponzio, 2004a: 83–7).

Human thought and communication evolve through a network of interpretive trajectories formed of associative connections, which, in turn, are part of a complex system or macro-web commonly recognized as “culture.” From this perspective neither the concepts of “linguistic competence” (Chomsky), nor “communicative competence” (used either to contradict or to complement Chomskyian theory) can sufficiently explain thinking and speaking (the capacity for verbalization). Instead, thinking and speaking are organic “conceptual competencies” that consist in the ability to convert thought schemes from different conceptual domains into linguistic and communicative structures. Conceptual competence allows for the creation of messages that are conceptually appropriate and culturally relevant, and includes three subcompetencies: (1) metaphorical competence, that is, the capacity to metaphorize a concept appropriately, (2) reflexive competency, that is, the capacity to select linguistic structures and categories which appropriately reflect conceptual domains inherent in the message, and (3) cultural competence, the capacity to navigate through different fields of discourse and conceptual domains relevant to the message.

“Linguistic creativity” is the capacity to form new metaphorical associations, propose new cognitive combinations, and invent new figurations. This is the capacity for musement, ingeniousness, and memory which is not a prerogative of poets, scientists, and writers, as Vico says, but involves all human beings insofar as they are capable of metaphorical association. In reality, linguistic creativity is possible because human beings are endowed with the species-specific primary modeling device called “language,” which forms the preliminary basis of human symbolic behavior including verbal languages connected with secondary modeling systems, and all other cultural symbolic systems generally connected with tertiary modeling systems (Danesi et al., 2004; Sebeok and Danesi, 2000).

7.3 Meaning and Truth

The relation between meaning and truth has generally been studied by trends in semantics that isolate the semantic dimension from the pragmatic, or a given sign system (as the only one capable of conferring meaning) from others, or that isolate a given expression as significant in itself. Such approaches conceive meaning in terms of possession which implies to reify meaning and with meaning the concept of truth. In other words, something is described as “possessing” or not possessing truth-value. According to this approach meaning is understood as a “property” of the sign, an “objective property,” content internal to the sign, independent from interpretation, ultimately dependent on reference to things, on correspondence to the referent (conceived as something that exists physically). A reified conception of meaning is inevitably connected with a reified conception of truth: in this conceptual framework, truth is also hypostatized and considered as an “objective property,” separately from interpretive processes. The problem of the criterion for identifying utterance meaning becomes the problem of the criterion for identifying truth such that whether or not an utterance has meaning, that is, is meaningful, depends on whether or not the parts that compose it are directly referential, that is, true. To reify meaning is to place the problem of truth-value as preliminary to determining the criterion for being “meaningful.” On the contrary, nonreferential semantics (which has mostly maintained the concept of referent as something that really exists) excludes the referent from the problem of meaning as semantically irrelevant, and separates the problem of meaning from the problem of truth-value. Symptomatically, to consider the referent as irrelevant to the problem of meaning implies that the problem of truth is also irrelevant. Just as symptomatically, in Charles Ogden and Ivor Richards’ (1923) meaning triangle, the word “truth” appears on the side connecting the apex named *reference* (or thought) to the apex named *referent*. “Non-referential semantics” eliminates this side of the triangle and posits that the problem of truth does not need to be addressed.

But if meaning is described as an interpretive trajectory in an open sign network, it becomes obvious that it cannot be restricted to the boundaries of a single sign, that is, to the relation between object-interpreted-interpretant forming the sign considered as an isolated cell; nor can it be limited to the boundaries of a given type of sign, or sign system. Nor does meaning concern the semantic dimension alone. This is because (1) meaning always involves interpretive processes both at the level of

“first articulation” where elements can be deconstructed as described by André Martinet, and at the level of syntax; and (2) the degree of “sign materiality” in signifying processes depends on the interpretant of responsive understanding (therefore on the pragmatological component).

Traditional approaches to the meaning–truth relation need to be addressed critically and in a semiotic framework, despite approaches that delegate it to the spheres of theoretical philosophy, knowledge theory, and epistemology. The relation between meaning and truth has mostly been formulated in terms of the logic of identity instead of the logic of otherness. To consider the relation between interpreted and interpretant in terms of otherness logic, to consider the varying degrees of dialogism in this relation, the axiological dimension implied by the interpretant of responsive understanding, therefore to consider signification from the perspective of *significance*, and to connect the problem of truth–value to the problem of meaning thus conceived, means to evidence the *dialogic character of truth* on the theoretical level as well as the pragmatic and axiological. With the shift in perspective from identity logic to otherness logic, from a monological to a dialogical view of meaning, the criteria of verification and the conception of truth conditions relatively to sense and nonsense change.

That meaning cannot be limited to a single sign system, or single type of sign or interpretive route, implies that truth is traced in a situation of dialogized pluridiscursivity, in confrontation among different verbal and nonverbal modeling procedures, in translative processes from one sign system to another, from one model to another, from one type of sign to another (see chapter 8). Truth–value develops in terms of multiplicity and complementarity among different points of view in dialogic confrontation. As evidenced by otherness logic, to identify truth with the interpretive possibilities of a single point of view, modeling procedure, or language means that truth may not only transform into its opposite, but even become violence, negation, segregation, elimination of anything that is not reducible to identity. On the contrary, an extralocalized and dialogic gaze oriented by the logic of otherness is the necessary condition for a correct interpretation and evaluation of signs as signs (and not just as signals), of meaning production processes and truth (Petrilli, 2004a). Extralocality, dialogism, translation–interpretation, comparison and confrontation (analogical and homological) founded in the logic of otherness are all necessary characteristics of a method for the verification of certainty, truth, and belief with any claim to scientificity. Truth theory is necessarily connected with a theory of meaning. Therefore, a reified

and ossified conception of meaning (even if not consciously recognized as such) gives rise to a hypostatized, monological conception of truth.

Against the temptation of reassuring monologism, already in *Links and Clues* (1881), Victoria Welby—whose approach to meaning and truth may be described as oriented by the logic of otherness and dialogism—advises that we “survey the same expanse of truth from as many ‘points’ as possible” (Welby, 2009a [1881]: 95–6), for the truth value of an assertion cannot be measured in terms of precision or formal clarity, but can only be established on the basis of different points of view—ethic, aesthetic, philosophical, scientific, mathematical, religious, etc. “Things, in order to unite in central truth, must come from many quarters, each the opposite of some other—the line of which, if carried through the centre, would join and run into its opposite. The unity of truth to which all must converge involves the diversity and thus apparent contradiction of converging paths to it” (Ibid.: 96).

According to Welby, “truth-value” is inseparable from “expression value” (Welby, 1985 [1911]: 4) where a determining factor is the “figurative” dimension of signifying processes and inferential procedure beyond reference to context, circumstance, to a precise referent. By contrast to the tendency toward univocality and “literal meaning,” Welby highlights the importance of extralocalization and shift among signs, dialogic interconnection, intralingual, interlingual, and intersemiotic experimentation in the generation of meaning and its stratifications. Meaning and truth inevitably involve deferral among signs and are not separate from the processes of metaphorization: which the more they are developed in terms of homology, experiment and verification, the more they open to new interpretive possibilities and creation of new worlds (Welby, 1983 [1903]: 22, n. 1). The search for truth cannot be separated from the processes of dialogic extralocalization in modeling procedures, worldviews, sign systems, universes of discourse and discourse genres, etc. Truth-value is not determined by the logic of identity and requires much more than an act of recognition. Instead, it implies the work of construction and deconstruction across different discourse fields, according to different perspectives and points of view, on the basis of different value systems and modeling procedures in confrontation. Keeping account of such aspects, Welby develops her theory of meaning, “significs,” in terms of her interpretive-translative method (Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 5). Significs does not add one more thought system to those already existent, but rather implies the assimilation and translation of all methods of reaching truth;

significs aims to be a way which is the interpretation and coordination of all other ways (Welby, 1983 [1903]: 99).

In a letter to the pragmatist Ferdinand C. S. Schiller, Welby claims that the real alternative is not between accepting or refusing the truth (22 June 1900, in Petrilli, 2009a: 618). A third way is possible and consists in verifying whether a given truth can be reformulated in different terms from the original, in a different language, from a different point of view. Schiller keeps account of Welby's conception of meaning and truth in his contribution to an important public debate on the "meaning of meaning"² which took place in Oxford in 1920 (echoed by Ogden and Richards in the title of their epochal book of 1923, *The Meaning of Meaning. A Study of the Influence of Language upon Thought and of the Science of Symbolism*). In his discussion of Bertand Russell's position,³ Schiller thematizes the connection between meaning and value and criticizes recourse to definition as a criterion for the interpretation of meaning, or to precision as a criterion for truth.⁴

7.4 "Man Is a Word"

*But man, proud man,
Drest in a little brief authority,
Most ignorant of what he's most assur'd,
His glassy essence, like an angry ape,
Plays such fantastic tricks before high heaven
As make the angels weep.*

—William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure, Act II, Scene 2*

In *Collected Papers*, Peirce rarely theorizes metaphor explicitly under this name.⁵ Nonetheless, he mentions metaphor in his early writings, between 1866 and 1867,⁶ relatively to his reflections on the nature of man, consciousness, subjectivity, and the analogical (or better homological) relation between man and word. The broader context is the application to metaphysics of distinctions made in logic to demonstrate the advantages of studying logic, on the one hand, and the scientific validity of metaphysics, on the other.⁷ To the question "What is man?" (*CP* 7.580), Peirce responds with a series of metaphors: man is a sequence of inferences, a chain of thoughts, a symbol, a sign, a word:

We have already seen that every state of consciousness [is] an inference; so that life is but a sequence of inferences or a train of thought. At any instant then man is a thought, and as thought is a species of symbol, the general answer to the question what is man? is that he is a symbol. To find a more specific answer we should compare man with some other symbol. (*CP* 7.583)

Peirce describes metaphor as a relation of similitude and broad comparison among things that are different. He distinguishes between metaphor taken literally, where similitude is expressed through the sign of predication, for example, “this man *is* a fox,” instead of through the sign of likeness, “this man *is like* a fox”; and metaphor understood as broad comparison on the basis of formal and highly abstract characters (*CP* 7.590). Associating worlds that seem remote, Peirce shows how man and word reciprocally empower each other in terms of meaning and significance. The relation of identification between the terms of the predication “Man is a word” is grounded in the logic of otherness and is metaphorical. Expressing himself in organismic language typical of a century dominated by evolutionary theory, Peirce identified an analogical relation between the word and procreation in the animal world. Like the relation between father and son, the sentence “Let *Kax* denote a gas furnace” is a symbol which creates another within itself (*Ibid.*). Paternity and the sentence “Let *Kax* denote a gas furnace” share a common capacity for procreation. In a paper of 1903 on the ethics of philosophical and scientific terminology, Peirce makes the following statement: “The body of the symbol changes slowly, but its meaning inevitably grows, incorporates new elements and throws off old ones”; and continues: “Every symbol is, in its origin, either an image of the idea signified, or a reminiscence of some individual occurrence, person or thing, connected with its meaning, or is a metaphor” (*CP* 2.222).

Man is recreated and flourishes in the word in a relation that evidences the corporeal consistency of the word generated in the relation among subjects, on one hand, and the plurality, the otherness of the subject understood as a word, on the other. Peirce had already theorized the corporeal dimension of language and communication in his early writings, recognizing the homological relation between subject and word, consciousness and body, where the body is posited as the very condition for the development of consciousness (*CP* 7.585). The word acquires semiotic consistency in the materiality of the body, indeed the word is corporeity (at the most obvious level, it materializes as voice or writing), while the body in turn acquires signifying value in the word. This approach is similar to Welby’s who also recognizes the relation between the physical materiality of verbal language, its corporeity, and the specificity of signifying materiality. Beyond the physical materiality of graphemes and phonemes, to communicate verbally means to enter another subject through the word, to transfer one’s thoughts and feelings into the other,

to experience the other's thoughts and feelings, to live and to regenerate oneself in the relation between one's own word and the word of others, between one's own body and the body of the other. Through language, the word, the human body becomes part of the community, the social, in dialogue with other words, with other bodies.

The relation established by Peirce between man and word emphasizes how the subject cannot be reduced to identification with the body understood as physiological material. The body is a semiotic body, a body in semiosis and as such resists reduction to the status of thing, of object (*CP* 7.591). But physical materiality, even when not immediately present, is a necessary condition for the signifying subject, for the word. Man and words involve both physical and semiotic materiality. In the metaphor "man is a word," the relation between man and the word is of reciprocal implication, an iconic relation of similarity of the genetic-structural order. Peirce lists a series of similarities: men and words alike grow in experience, information, and signifying power; both possess the power of denotation and even share a moral nature, in fact like human behavior and consciousness, words too (the material of behavior and consciousness) must adequately conform to laws and a good grammar. Peirce maintains that "men and words reciprocally educate each other" (*CP* 7.587; see 3.2) and that man is a chain of interpretants—future memory, the future self, another person, a sentence, a son—which are always other with respect to the self's identity: "If this be not so, a man is not a word, it is true, but is something much poorer" (*CP* 7.591). This position was developed in a subsequent essay of 1868, "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities," in which Peirce states that

there is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word; and the reason is obvious. It is that the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an *external* sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words *homo* and *man* are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought. (*CP* 5.314)

Thanks to its semiotic consistency, to the use of language, of the word, the subject resides simultaneously in more than one place at a time and signifying potential is enhanced by the capacity to transcend the limits of identity and respond to the other. But not only is otherness external to identity, it is also internal, structural to identity, at the very heart of

identity. Identity develops in the relation to the outside, as “meaning” and “essential significance.” Like the word, it is “outreaching identity” oriented by the logic of otherness, understood as disinterested, unselfish, nonegotistic logic, sign of the properly human. Man is conscious that his own interpretants, his own thoughts are present in the thoughts and interpretants of others (*CP* 7.591). On the problem of the relation between man and sign, in a letter to Welby dated 9 March 1906, Peirce states the following: “But a thought, to gain any active mode of being must be embodied in a Sign. A thought is a special variety of sign. All thinking is necessarily a sort of dialogue, an appeal from the momentary self to the better considered self of the immediate and of the general future” (in Hardwick, 1977: 195). Peirce’s conception of subjectivity as much as Welby’s is grounded in his theory of sign and in the logic of otherness and dialogism that subtends it (see 3.2–3.4).

Beyond surface differences between man and word, Peirce maintains that there is no substantial difference such that to claim that man is a word loses its paradoxical overtones and sounds like a truism (a position which resounds in the title of Thomas Sebeok’s 1986 monograph *I Think I Am a Verb*). Man and word are interrelated by a series of homological similarities (Peirce says “analogical”), which may be summarized in the following ten points—listed as a possible starting point for critical reflection in this direction, and with no claim to exhaustiveness:

(1) Differently from the word, man is endowed with consciousness which is connected to our animal life and presupposes a physiological body. However, man and the word do not differ if by “consciousness” is understood awareness of what we know, “the knowledge which we have of what is in our minds; the fact that our thought is an index for itself of itself on the ground of a complete identity with itself” (*CP* 7.585).

(2) Consciousness denotes the “*I think*, the unity of thought” which corresponds to the “unity of symbolization,” and this too constitutes the characteristic of any word whatsoever (*Ibid.*).

(3) Consciousness also denotes feeling, and feeling is cognitive: “Every feeling is cognitive—is a sensation, and a sensation is a mental sign or word. Now the word has a word; it has itself; and so if man is an animal feeling, the word is just as much a written feeling” (*CP* 7.586).

(4) Feeling, sensations are perceptions, these too connected to the physiological organism. But if perception is the possibility of acquiring new information, of signifying more, words too have perceptions. Since man creates words and there is no meaning that is not conferred

upon them by man, “men and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of a man’s information is at the same time the increase of a word’s information and vice versa. So that there is no difference even here” (*CP* 7.587).

(5) Both man and the word have a moral nature. If by morals we understand conformity to a law of fitness of things, we have something similar in a good grammar: “Good grammar is that excellence of a word by which it comes to have a good conscience, to be satisfactory not merely [with] reference being had to the actual state of things which it denotes, not merely to the consequences of the act, but to it in its own internal determinations. Beauty and truth belong to the mind and word alike. The third excellence is morality on the one hand, Grammar on the other” (*CP* 7.588).

(6) Thanks to the power of generating signs and meanings in semi-otic processes, both man and the word are endowed with the power of denotation: “Man has the power of effort or attention; but as we have seen that this is nothing but the power of denotation, it is possessed by the word also” (*CP* 7.589).

(7) Both man and the word are endowed with a capacity for procreation, where reference is not to the physiological phenomenon but to the production of a new human soul. “Has the word any such relation as that of father and son? If I write ‘Let Kax denote a gas furnace,’ this sentence is a symbol which is creating another within itself. Here we have a certain analogy with paternity; just as much and no more as when an author speaks of his writings as his offspring” (*CP* 7.590).

(8) Alterity is at the very heart of identity, whether a question of man or the word. As such, identity is transcendental, multiple, ubiquitous. Similarly to the word, “A man denotes whatever is the object of his attention at the moment; he connotes whatever he knows or feels of this object, and is the incarnation of this form or intelligible species; his interpretant is the future memory of this cognition, his future self, or another person he addresses, or a sentence he writes, or a child he gets” (*CP* 7.591).

(9) Since the essence of the symbol is formal and not material, and since truth of the symbol is eternal, it follows that the necessary and true symbol is immortal. Truth always requires an interpretant; consequently, the true symbol as such requires an interpretant, and given its relation to the interpretant, “the necessary and true symbol is immortal. And man must also be so, provided he is vivified by the truth. This is

an immortality very different indeed from what most people hope for, although it does not conflict with the latter” (Ibid.). Insofar as he is a true symbol, man too is immortal.

(10) Experience, knowledge, and value grow in the relation with the other, in the movement toward the outside, in the condition of extralocality: signifying value increases in the relation among signs—which is not a relation of identification, assimilation. Peirce explains that the subject does not transfer entirely with all its feelings, intentions, and thoughts into another subject. The interpretant is only a partial expression of the preceding sign which, thanks to its signifying materiality, evades the totalizing grasp of any single interpretant. Subjectivity develops as an open process of deferral among signs in continuous evolution. Moreover: “When I, that is my thoughts, enter into another man, I do not necessarily carry my whole self, but what I do carry is the seed of [the] part that I do not carry—and if I carry the seed of my whole essence, then of my whole self actual and potential” (CP 7.592). The individual subject is a special determination of the general—family, class, nation, race—to which it belongs; and the more information and experience grows, the more singularity increases (Ibid.). Communicability of self is constructed on the outside, in the community, in sociality, and does not exclude singularity, uniqueness, semiotic materiality understood as the irreducible otherness of sign and subject. Like the word, self projects itself toward the outside, toward the other, reveals itself and develops in the relation with the other, the other of one’s own past, actual and future self, as much as the other of the other person. Keeping account of the semiotic structure of self, singularity of the individual is given in the relation of irreducibility to self, to the same, to compact and monological identity.

Thirdness and synechism are of pivotal importance in the Peircean conception of subjectivity and communication (see 5.6). The theory of synechism thematizes the concept of continuity, the absence of interruptions between body and consciousness, self and other, sleep and waking, life and death, carnal consciousness, social consciousness, spiritual consciousness, and immortality (CP 7.565; 7.573–7.576; ca. 1892). With reference to human subjectivity synechism does not deny singularity or firstness, the signifying otherness of semiotic materiality. It implies a relation not only to the *human other*, but also to the *divine other*, that is, to infinity, immortality, in Levinas’s terminology deferral to an absence. The fascination of alterity seduces the subject who participates in the nature of God understood as the exotopic principle of creation:

All communication from mind to mind is through continuity of being. A man is capable of having assigned to him a *rôle* in the drama of creation, and so far as he loses himself in that *role*,—no matter how humble it may be,—so far he identifies himself with its Author. (*CP* 7.572)

The concept of continuity is also thematized by Victoria Welby throughout her writings as in her essay “Metaphor and Meaning” where, in the context of her reflections on the nature of meaning and use of imagery in expression, she too identifies a relation of continuity between mind and physical reality, therefore between the body and the conscious:

“Mind,” as Mr. Shadworth Hodgson tells us (*Brain*, June 1891: 13), “is a fiction of the fancy.” Of course this is open to the retort that so is fancy a fiction of the mind, or fiction a fancy of the mind.

Psychology is full of these see-saws of paradox, depending on vicissitudes of linguistic usage or context. But mind is indeed a fiction of the fancy when we endow it with a fanciful freedom from all ties with what we call physical reality. For this, however plainly we recognize its genesis in our own sequences of sense-impression, does practically through them rule us with an undeviating severity which neither fiction nor fancy can temper with. Therefore, if we think it absurd to suppose that there may possibly be an undiscovered vein of authentic and really indicative symbol or metaphor running through the arbitrary meshes of fanciful custom or mythical term, we are in fact implying that all clues from the original interactions of physical energy were entirely lost when what we call “mind” issued first in language. But at all events we may be sure that links between the “physical” and the “psychical” are everywhere drawing closer and emerging clearer, however buried as yet in a mass of the fantastic or the arbitrary. (Welby, 1985 [1893]: 520)

To describe subjectivity in semiotical-cognitive terms, as does Peirce, does not exclude the problematics of responsibility and immortality which, on the contrary, from a Peircean perspective go together. (Peirce presents his theory of immortality for the first time in a lesson of 1866–67, *CP* 7.596.) Coherently with the principle of synechism, responsibility is associated with the power to transcend the limits of egocentric identity, similarly to the concept of “unlimited responsibility” according to Bakhtin and Levinas, which too is grounded in the logic of alterity (Bakhtin, 1990, 1993; Levinas, 1961, 1978). But to return to Peirce, the subject is also recognized as a physical necessity and automaton (*CP* 7.581). Another original aspect of his research is his commitment to accounting for the human condition with the instruments of logic, conceptualizing man as a cognitive and rational entity, a general representation, a symbol. At the same time, however, he grounds his analysis in the logic of otherness, theorizing sign and subject (which is made of

sign material) in terms of transcendence, infinity, immortality. Along the same lines Bakhtin speaks of “unlimited responsibility” and “unfinalizability.” With Peirce reason is grounded in “reasonableness” (see 3.6–3.8). Similarly to Welby’s and Morris’s approach, Peircean semiotics does not claim neutrality, but rather develops the conjunction between semiotics and axiology, signs and values, with which it overcomes the limits of cognitive semiotics.

7.5 Imagery, Meaning, and Interpretation

With the term “significs” which evokes the verb “*to signify*,” Welby evidences the dual semantic valency of the concept of meaning—the cognitive and the valuative. Unlike the terms “semantics” and “semiotics,” “significs” was free from technical associations and consequently was appropriate to focus on the connection of meaning to value. In “Sense, Meaning and Interpretation,” 1896, Welby identifies three levels of meaning—“sense,” “meaning,” and “significance,” the latter being the term that most underlines the originality of significs as extending the epistemological-cognitive boundaries of semiotics in the direction of the intersection between sign and sense, semiotics and axiology.

In “Meaning and Metaphor,” 1893, Welby highlights the symbolic character of language in both theoretical and pedagogical terms, the relation between the symbolic system and what it symbolizes, and need to focus on analogies and metaphors in linguistic usage which otherwise are mostly unconscious and unintentional:

. . . we might begin by learning better what part symbolism plays in the rituals of expression, and ask ourselves what else is language itself but symbolism, and what is symbolism, and what it symbolises. We should then examine anew the relations of the “symbolic” to the “real”; of image, figure, metaphor, to what we call literal or actual. (Welby, 2009a [1893]: 422)

She thematizes the figurative dimension of signifying processes, the role of imagery in the development of inferential procedure and knowledge, communication and understanding, focusing on the pragmatic dimension of meaning as much as on the conditions of meaning (Ibid.: 422–3). Figurative discourse enhances the stratification of sense and signifying potential, significance and expressive import in dialogic correspondence to development in experience, knowledge, and understanding, and is not simply a question of resorting to abstractions or rhetorical devices. Figurativity is structural to thought and language (see Welby’s analysis

of the psychological parable of “mental vision,” *Ibid.*: 425–7). Also, as anticipated above, to analyze figures of discourse, metaphor, simile, analogy, homology, comparison, and confrontation, verbal and nonverbal imagery, is to verify their cognitive validity. The world reveals itself through interpretive processes of hypothesis and approximation, on the basis of inferential procedure characterized by signifying “plasticity” and “corrective power” necessary to the acquisition of knowledge (*Ibid.*: 423).

The question “What do we really mean?” signals the need to clarify meanings in order to understand an expression’s ultimate significance, its sense for us, but Welby also warns against the trap of oversimplification and reductionism. She critiques ambiguity when it is the cause of confusion and misunderstanding. But ambiguity is a positive value when it recognizes the semiotic nature of meaning, the plurivocality of signs, the stratification of sense. Welby promotes plurivocality and polylogism and proposes a dynamical, structural, and generative analysis of meaning. She critiques the “plain meaning fallacy,” the concepts of “simple, plain meaning,” of “common sense,” the search for “clear” and “convincing” argumentation, if this means to ignore the plurivocal and polylogic nature of meaning.

As a semiotic phenomenon meaning is never univocal and uniform, fixed and invariable, defined once and for all as though we are dealing with numbers, labels or symbols “of unanimous consent” (*Ibid.*: 423): “. . . we strangely assume that we may safely play upon all the chords of imagery, reserving without difficulty for serious use a body of terms which are direct expressions of ‘fact’” (*Ibid.*). To critique “plain meaning” is to critique the idea of referring directly to “hard, dry facts.” In Welby’s thought system, knowledge and signifying value are engendered in the interaction between symbolic systems and “objects,” “things,” “facts,” “events” that belong to real and imaginary worlds, and are interpreted by those systems. “Hard, dry facts” do not exist given that the fact is such for the “mind,” that is, becomes such in interpretive processes, as she also states in subsequent papers.

We may appeal and are right to appeal to “hard, dry” facts; but we perforce put something out of ourselves even into these. They become “facts” under the quickening touch of “mind,” while that emerges from a dim world of prepossession, bequeathing us many a primitive legacy from pre-intelligent sentience, and perhaps from little-suspected sources lying yet further back. (*Ibid.*: 424)

Evolution of the human species, history, scientific progress converges with evolution of signifying processes where the capacity for

metaphorization and stratification of meanings plays a primary role. “The sun rises” is an expression that resounds differently in the modern era after Copernicus, just as the word “infection” has different implications with the discovery of microbes.

When we talk of “heat,” we no longer mean what we used to mean even fifty years ago. And when a man says that he believes in the sun, the planets, the cosmos, in the heavens and the earth, in mind and matter, in soul and body, in spirit and flesh, he cannot, if he would, mean just what his forefathers meant, or indeed anything at all absolutely and finally. Whether we will or no, the meaning of such terms is changing on our very tongues, and ever swaying between the extremes which we call literal and metaphorical. (Ibid.)

Welby describes the evolution of human beings from the viewpoint of the evolution of language and expressive capacity in an uninterrupted sequence of interactions between “inorganic” and “organic,” “matter” and “mind,” “physical reality” and the “psychic” where recourse to the use of “appropriate metaphors” plays a central role (Ibid.: 424 and 427).⁸ She evidences how human beings, by comparison to nonhuman animals, are endowed with a special capacity for critique and interrogation:

The mere fact of the question is the riddle to be solved. For certainly the beasts had not taught him either to wonder or to ask. And not merely insatiable questioning but something more here rises to challenge our attention and to demand reflection. Man is the first critic because he is the first idealist; the first to be discontented, to protest, to see life as a “ravell’d end,” as something which is incomplete and speaks of something more. Surely in any case the step of all steps, the deepest yet the narrowest line to cross is the step from something noticed or found, from something which happens or appears from something which somehow affects us, excites us, to its significance. (Ibid. 425)

Human beings are conscious that life is “incomplete and speaks of something more,” that we respond to the world and are influenced by it in such ways as to search for significance. According to Welby, even physical reality is modeled in the interpretive sequence of sense impressions. Nor did she exclude the possibility of dealing with the problem of the “origin” (of the world and of language) in scientific terms and in the big picture of relations with the universe, without necessarily resorting to mysticism. Humanity is articulated in ever more complex systems as “interpretation” and “translation” processes multiply in a world that teams ever more with meaning and significance:

In any case, *meaning*—in the broadest sense possible—is the only value of whatever “fact” presents itself to us. If this were not true, to observe and record appearances

or occurrences would become a worse than wasteful task. Significance is the one value of all that consciousness brings, or that intelligence deals with; the one value of life itself. (Ibid., 429)

In 1893, Welby had already theorized the relation between “metaphorical meaning,” “indirect meaning,” or “figurative meaning,” on the one hand, and “literal meaning,” “indirect meaning,” or “actual meaning,” on the other, maintaining that the expression “literal meaning” is more figurative and more ambiguous than the concept of “metaphorical meaning” given that it is impregnated with metaphorical meaning to varying degrees. In fact, these two poles are not clearly distinguishable and can only be identified by abstracting from real signifying processes, for the sake of conceptualization. Welby hypothesizes a “third value” of meaning, a contact zone without precise boundaries, “neither wholly literal, nor wholly figurative,” which characterizes a large part of ordinary expression (Ibid.: 423–4). Meaning cannot be reduced to rigid binarism and opposition between the literal and the figurative. In *What is Meaning?*, 1903, Welby continues working on her “third value” hypothesis and draws up a diagram to represent her analysis. The following passage is from chapter XVII with the corresponding note from the Appendix (included with the notes at the end of this chapter):

It is obvious that if, as the approval of the author and of representative experts in the subject thus “translated” seems to warrant us in assuming, this points to really valid correspondence between the highest mental and the most complex neural activities, we must consider in this context the question of the existence of a class of ideas which cannot be considered either as merely literal or as merely figurative, but as combining both. This, we may say, as of a fine picture, is the combination of the actual and the symbolic, of the real and the idea.

In the case of knowledge acquired by the scientific method, we know that beyond the simple directness of sense-perception we have various forms of indirect knowledge. Perhaps the most obvious of these is found in the case of vision already touched upon. First we “see” with the naked eye; then we acquire the telescope, and “through” it indirectly or mediately see more; lastly, we use a sensitive plate in connection with telescope and eye, and our vision becomes doubly indirect. But we are through dealing with the same “realities.”

Now, we are accustomed to reason as though in the pursuit of fact or truth there could only be two possible alternatives. We are dealing either with something literal or actual, or with metaphor. The former is fact, the latter is at best merely useful illustration, essentially causal and partial, and therefore never to be treated as evidence.

Suppose, however, that what we take for mere metaphor may in some cases be indirectly perceived fact, which must be expressed, if at all, analogically? Suppose that there is a middle region in which we are dealing neither with the merely literal nor the merely metaphorical, but with direct, indirect, and doubly indirect experience?⁹ (Welby, 1983 [1903]: 138–9)

In “Meaning and Metaphor,” Welby cites a passage written by Benjamin Jowett (in *Dialogues of Plato*, vol. I: 285–6, 293) who thematizes meaning and language in terms that inspire the architectonics of her own thought system and could easily be attributed to Mikhail Bakhtin:

Words appear to be isolated but they are really the parts of an organism which is always being reproduced. They are refined by civilisation, harmonised by poetry, emphasised by literature, technically applied in philosophy and art; they are used as symbols on the border-ground of human knowledge; they receive a fresh impress from individual genius, and come with a new force and association to every lively-minded person. They are fixed by the simultaneous utterance of millions and yet are always imperceptibly changing:—not the inventors of languages, but writing and speaking, and particularly great writers, or works which pass into the hearts of nations, Homer, Shakespeare, Dante, the German or English Bible, Kant and Hegel, are the makers of them in later ages. They carry with them the faded recollection of their own past history; the use of a word in a striking and familiar passage, gives a complexion to its use everywhere else, and the new use of an old and familiar phrase has also a peculiar power over us. (Jowett cited by Welby, 2009a [1893]: 427)

Jowett’s considerations resound in Welby’s theory of interpretation as articulated throughout all her writing. Accordingly, in the Preface to her book of 1911, *Significs and Language*, she observes that “The interpretative function is, in truth, the only one in any direct sense ignored or at least casually related. And yet, it is that which naturally precedes and is the very condition of human intercourse, as of man’s mastery of his world” (Welby, 1985 [1911]: vii).

A series of factors condition meaning and contribute to its plurality, polysemy, and changeability, to its “plasticity,” according to a structure that is never identical to itself. These include interlocutor background knowledge, mental world, inferences, degree and focus of attention, intention, the capacity for association, allusion, memory, circumstance, life context, social *milieu*, linguistic context, usage, the tendency to symbolize or picture. In this framework, to merely cite or report the word of another is a complex act. The same word may change meaning according to usage and variations in conditioning factors. The act of interpretation is never neutral; it is always accountable and must always account for the other, just as the word object of interpretation is never neutral and is always implicated in the logic of otherness, in the word of another.

An important contribution to the critique of simple, plain meaning is also that by Giovanni Vailati. He too criticized approaches that theorize

the need to literalize figurative meaning and reduce it to plain meaning, and thematized the function of metaphor in discourse and inferential procedure as part of his own research on logic and meaning. With his collaborator Mario Calderoni, Vailati was in contact with Welby who worked on similar issues as himself. She also sponsored translation of his essays from Italian into English. Moreover, thanks to Welby's mediation, Vailati was among the first in Italy to appreciate Peirce, in particular his philosophical pragmatism. In "I tropi della logica" (The tropes of logic), he examines metaphors employed to discuss inferential procedure, discourse, and thought processes, which condition our understanding of linguistic and logical operations. In relation to the tropes of logic, Vailati identifies three main types of images which express (1) *support* (as when we speak of conclusions that are "founded," "based," that "depend on," or "connect up with"), (2) *inclusion* (conclusions "contained" or "included" in the premises), (3) *movement* (*coming* and *going back to*, *ascending* and *descending*, as in the case of ideas that "come from," or conclusions that "go back to" certain principles). Vailati analyzes these types of images as they are employed to describe reasoning. He draws attention to their connection with a hierarchical view of the world (to base, to found), or with the distribution of certainties (included in premises) which must simply be explicated, and observes that to speak of attraction and mutual support is more appropriate, given that certainty is bidirectional, not unidirectional (Vailati, 2000: 91). The metaphors analyzed evoke premises as consisting of simple elements as though there exist truths that are primordial, atomical, and that consequently cannot be deconstructed. In reality, simplicity or complexity of a given statement is always relative (Ibid.: 89).

7.6 For a Critique of Similarity

Insofar as it is founded on the modeling capacity, or "language" as understood by Sebeok, thanks to which differently from other animal species human beings are capable of producing infinite possible worlds, predicative judgment escapes the limits of the real world and is free to wander into the world of the imagination. Following Husserl, author of *Experience and Judgment*, 1948, the so-called as-if relation is a characteristic of predicative judgment and does not only concern the possibility of constructing imaginary objects and worlds. Predicative judgment in all fields of discourse must necessarily make use of metaphorical procedure

to the point that, as anticipated, it is difficult, if not impossible, to distinguish between the literal and the metaphorical: in the last analysis even the concept of literal expression is metaphorical.

Thanks to the “as-if” relation something can be determined on the basis of something else that acts as its interpretant, precisely in the “as-if” form. Therefore, the “as-if” relation is a constitutive part of predication. Furthermore, to predicate is to act: from this point of view cognitive action parallels practical action. Husserl is clear on this point in the following passage from *Experience and Judgment* dedicated to the relation between cognitive activity and the practical:

We prefer to think of action as an external doing, a bringing-about of external objects (things) as self-giving from other self-giving objects. In cognitive activity, new objectivities are indeed also preconstituted, but this production has an entirely different sense from that of the production of things from things [. . .]; and—what is here important above all—this production of categorial objectivities in cognitive action is not the final goal of this action. All cognitive activity is ultimately referred to the substrates of the judgment—without prejudice to the possibility of moving, on the mere self-evidence of clarity, a great way in the progress of cognition merely in the domain of made objects, of logical *structures*. The goal of this activity is not the *production of objects* but a *production of the knowledge* of a *self-given* object, therefore the possession of this object in itself as that which is permanently identifiable anew. (Husserl, 1948, Eng. trans.: 200)

This parallel between practical activity and cognitive activity signals the importance of avoiding any separation between predicative judgment and operations connected with perception, the body and the surrounding environment. It is also the starting point for the genesis of predicative judgment. The *cognitive tendency* is significantly described (it too an *as-if* determination) as if it were *desirous striving* where the relation between these terms is something more than a mere “analogy,” as Husserl says; and in fact, it is a relation of “homology.” Similarly to the cognitive tendency,

Desirous striving leads to an action which is instituted by a “fiat” and tends toward realisation. In the progress of the action, the striving fulfills itself more and more, developing from the initial mere intention into a realisation. The path to the goal can be simple, consisting in a simple act, or it can be complex, proceeding through interim goals which are intended in specific acts of will and have the character of being of service to the dominant “aim.” With the growing fulfillment of the intention during the activity and with the approach to the goal, a growing feeling of satisfaction sets in [. . .]. (Ibid.: 201–2)

In Peirce’s thought system the concept of *likeness* or *similarity* is somewhat problematic as a criterion of distinction between the concepts

of ground and immediate object. Similarity characterizes something that presents itself as *firstness*, presence, “such as it is,” pure quality; at the same time, however, similarity makes the immediate object an interpretant, the *type* of a certain interpreted, its *token*. Umberto Eco reasons like this:

[. . .] the Ground should not even be an icon if the icon is similarity, because it cannot have relations of similarity with anything, except with itself. Here Peirce wavers between two notions: on the one side, as we have seen, the Ground is an idea, a skeleton diagram, but if this were so it would already be an Immediate Object, the complete realisation of Thirdness; on the other side, it is a *likeness* which does not resemble anything. It only tells me that the sensation I feel emanates somehow from the Dynamical Object. (Eco, 1997: 84; English translation of this and following texts by Eco are mine.)

Eco proceeds to claim that the concept of *similarity* must be freed from the concept of *comparison* on the grounds that “comparison is given in relations of *similitude*,” taking a stand against Peirce whom he considers imprecise on this point. Once “liberation” is attained, reserving the concept of similarity (or so it seems), as distinct from comparison and similitude, for the *ground*, the icon, *firstness*, Eco unexpectedly concludes that the icon cannot be explained in terms of similitude, but neither can it be explained in terms of similarity: “the icon is the phenomenon which founds all possible judgments of similarity, but it cannot be founded by them.” Moreover, once the concepts of comparison-similitude and (unexpectedly) similarity are eliminated from the icon, Eco proceeds to differentiate between the icon and the mental “image.” Peirce connects the concept of icon to similarity, comparison, similitude, and mental image. Eco, instead, isolates the icon from all such phenomena and introduces the concept of “primary iconism” in relation to the *ground*:

I do not wish to say that mental images should not be allowed [this obviously concerns the concept of icon] or that at given moments Peirce [not so obviously] considered the icon as a mental image. What I’m saying is that in order to conceive the concept of primary iconism, that which is established at the moment of the Ground, even the notion of mental image must be abandoned. (Ibid.)

Eco is right to signal the importance of primary iconism. Nonetheless, the problem is how can the icon be discussed separately from the concepts of similarity and image (mental image). Instead, the distinction between similarity and similitude is convincing. Eco associates his separation between primary iconism and the mental image with Peirce’s critique of psychologism. Consequently, to explain the process of primary

iconism “without resorting to mental events or representations” is not to betray Peirce (Ibid.: 394, n. 28). Without opening a discussion on Peirce’s interpretation of the concept of “mental,” important to observe is that it is free from psychologistic connotations. Peirce used the term “mind” for the interpreted–interpretant relation without implying a subject understood psychologically. In Peirce’s view the mind does not presuppose an I or a subject given outside this relation and independently of it. Primary iconism corresponds to an early and constitutive level in the interpreted–interpretant relationship. In any case, there is no reason why the primary icon should be separated from either similarity or the (mental) image or mind.

In *Experience and Judgment* Husserl analyzes “passive predata” as they originally emerge, abstracting from all qualifications of the known, from all qualifications of familiarity with that which affects us (passive predata subsist at the level of sensation and are already known and somehow interpreted, thanks to such qualifications). Important to underline is the role of similarity on this level of analysis as well. If we abstract from reference to the already known object that produces the sensation (secondness, indexicality), or from familiarity through habit and convention according to which what affects us subsists as already given (thirdness, conventionality, symbolicity), and remembering that as much as something is unknown, somehow it is already known (the rhinoceros or Eco’s platypus), according to Husserl we do not end up in pure chaos, in a mere confusion of data. When color is not perceived as the color of a thing, of a surface, as a spot on an object, etc., but as a mere quality, in Peirce’s terminology as “firstness,” where something refers to nothing but itself and is significant in itself, this something still emerges as a *homogeneous* unit against the background of something else, that is, the heterogeneity of other data: for example, red on white.

Similarity in terms of primary iconism is homogeneity that stands out against heterogeneity: “homogeneity or similarity” varies in degree to the limit of complete homogeneity, that is, equality without difference. A certain degree of dissimilarity always subsists in contrast with similarity. Homogeneity and heterogeneity result from two different fundamental modes of associative union. Husserl discusses “immediate association” in terms of “primary synthesis” which enables *a given datum*, *a given quality* to emerge, specifying that an “immediate association” is an association through similarity. The claim is that synthetic unification is achieved in primary iconism, thanks to similarity. Obviously, primary association

has nothing psychological about it. Husserl's antipsychologism encounters Peirce's. We may speak of *transcendental primary association* as a condition of possibility for the constitution of the sign. In this context, "transcendental" does not concern the mental order. In any case, from a Peircean perspective we also know that the term "mind" does not necessarily refer to the human mind, but to any interpreted–interpretant relationship in "protosemiosis" (Prodi, 1977).

Having restored "similarity" to the concept of icon, the notion of "image" must also be recovered—mental image, as Eco specifies, the image of "primary iconism." From this point of view, most significant is a paragraph entitled "Image and Resemblance" in an essay by Levinas of 1948, "La réalité et son ombre." Levinas too addresses the problem of the original relation between the object, which is not yet perceived or determined as such, and the "symbole ou signe ou mot," and asks the question, "in what does an image differ from a symbol, a sign, or a word?" (Levinas, 1987a: 6). His answer is the following: "By the very way it refers to its object: resemblance" (Ibid.); with the addition that this presupposes that the mind stops "on the image itself," and consequently it presupposes "a certain opacity of the image." "A sign, for its part, is pure transparency, nowise counting for itself." And Levinas continues like this:

Must we then come back to taking the image as an independent reality which resembles the original? No, but on condition that we take resemblance not as the result of a comparison between an image and the original, but as the very movement that engenders the image. Reality would not be only what it is, what it is disclosed to be in truth, but would be also its double, its shadow, its image. (Ibid.)

This approach to the problem of similarity and the image considered in relation to the icon as distinct from the sign properly understood, that is, as distinct from thirdness and conceptual interpretation, leads to critical interrogation of the primacy of ontology. In fact, it reveals an "otherwise" (*autrement*) with respect to what is, an "otherwise" which is not in turn a "being otherwise" (*être autrement*), but rather is outside and before being, that is, before identity, determination, definition, difference based on the logic of identity. The image is the otherness of being, its double, its shadow, otherwise than being (*autrement qu'être*, as recites the title of Levinas's monograph of 1978). Reality is not exhausted in that which is. In addition to being itself, reality has an unrestrainable otherness of its own, as if it were something else, something otherwise than being.

We may now enter that part of the discussion which concerns “metaphysics” as understood by Levinas as well as by Maurice Merleau-Ponty in *Sens et Non-sens* (1966 [1948]). In “Reality and Its Shadow” (1948), Levinas analyzes “excess” with respect to being, which he had already discussed in terms of “evasion” in 1936 (1982 [1936]): “Being is not only itself, it escapes itself” (Levinas 1948, Eng. trans.: 135); and in terms of “otherwise than being” (*autrement qu’être*) after 1948. A person is not only itself. A person is also its own alterity. Alterity escapes from under identity which like a torn sack is unable to contain it. With respect to something familiar, its qualities, color, form, and position remain behind its being, delayed as it were, that is, they do not entirely coincide with its being, with its identity:

There is then a duality in this person, this thing, a duality in its being. It is what it is and it is a stranger to itself, and there is a relationship between these two moments. We will say the thing is itself and is its image. And that this relationship between the thing and its image is resemblance. (Ibid.: 6)

The image is the dynamical object that is not exhausted in the identity of the immediate object. On the contrary, as the *ground*, as the primary icon, the image imposes itself on the interpretant over and over again (*immer wieder*, in Husserl’s terminology), as its irreducible otherness. “The original gives itself as though it were at a distance from itself, as though it were withdrawing from itself, as though something in a being delayed behind being” (Ibid.: 6–7). A sort of “consciousness of the absence of the object” characterizes the image as regards the presence of the immediate object and signifies, according to Levinas, “an alteration of the very being of the object, where its essential forms appear as a garb that it abandons in withdrawing” (Ibid.: 7).

But to return to the issue of primary iconism, in Husserl’s view this original level can only be reached by way of abstraction achieved either through a phenomenological reduction of the *epoché*, by bracketing the already given world and relative interpretive habits, or through artistic vision. The image is the otherness of that which is, its strangeness to itself, its double. And artistic discourse refers to the image; it depicts the other face of being. Artistic discourse does not represent reality, but depicts its double. In other words, what Levinas calls image is the image of artistic vision; the image is the other of the interpreted object which artistic extralocalization reveals by showing this object as “double.” Therefore, not only is the object the object of knowledge, as such subject to a concept, but

it is also the image. As Merleau-Ponty maintains in relation to Cézanne, painting is the search for that which is other with respect to habitual attitudes toward familiar objects and conventions. We need a perspective, as Cézanne says, where by perspective is understood a logical vision. This logical vision is the result of an abstractive process enabling regression to a relation with an object, and this is a relation of primary iconism. As Merleau-Ponty observes in “Le doute de Cézanne”:

We live in an environment of objects constructed by human beings, among utensils, in houses, streets, cities and most times we only see them through the human actions of which they may be the points of application. We are in the habit of thinking that all this exists necessarily and is immovable. Cézanne’s painting suspends such habit [. . .]. This is why his characters are foreign and as though they are sighted by a being of another species [. . .]. His is a world without familiarity [. . .].

His painting denies neither science nor tradition [. . .]. Setting science completely aside, it is a question of seizing once again the constitution of the panorama as a rising organism, through the sciences [. . .]. For that painting there, a sole emotion is possible: the feeling of estrangement, a sole lyricism: that of existence beginning again always anew. (Merleau-Ponty, 1966 [1948]: 28–30; English translation mine)

Cézanne’s painting returns to a perceptual relation where the category of firstness (Peirce) dominates almost completely, giving the impression of a rising order, of an object in the process of appearing, of agglomerating under our gaze (Ibid.: 25). And agglomeration occurs on the basis of associative processes founded on similarity, on likeness.

What Levinas calls image is based on similarity and like Peirce’s icon is independent, autonomous from what it resembles. Therefore, paraphrasing Levinas in Peirce’s terminology, unlike the symbol and index which are transparent, the image is a sign with a certain degree of opacity. “An icon is a sign which would possess the character which renders it significant, even though its object had no existence; such as a lead-pencil streak as representing a geometrical line” (CP 2.304).

In terms of inferential procedure, this is why abduction, being oriented by iconicity, can take its distance from the already given world, the already constituted world, from convention and consolidated habit and evolve as “the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis” (CP 5.172). In regard to abduction, Peirce adds that it

is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis.

Deduction proves that something *must* be; Induction shows that something *actually* is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something *may* be. (CP 5.172)

7.7 Metaphor, Iconicity, and Semioethics

With reference to his renowned sign triad, symbol, index, icon, Peirce classifies metaphors (with images and diagrams) as icons, more specifically as hypoicons, a subclass of icons, underlining the iconic quality of metaphor shared with the image and diagram:

Hypoicons may be roughly divided according to the mode of Firstness of which they partake. Those which partake of simple qualities, or Firstnesses, are *images*; those which represent the relations, mainly dyadic, or so regarded, of the parts of one thing by analogous relations in their own parts, are *diagrams*, those which represent the representative character of a representamen by representing a parallelism in something else, are *metaphors*. (CP 2.277)

Metaphor, image, and diagram are correlated in a relation of reciprocal contamination insofar as they share in iconicity and at once maintain their specificity. The relation of reciprocal contamination also holds for the triad, icon, index, and symbol. Like the diagram and image, metaphor shares in iconicity, therefore in the capacity to reason on the basis of relations and systems and not only through unilinear progression. By virtue of its iconic component metaphor achieves holistic and entymemic reasoning which is rich in interpretive possibilities and enhances signifying potential of verbal language and sign systems generally. In Peirce's description the icon is not exclusively visual, but is structural to cognitive processes. Therefore, it not only affects visual images, but also speech, writing, mathematics, logic, that is, all forms of reasoning and expressive processes.

The iconic relation of similarity between object-interpreted signs and interpretant-signs is foundational in modeling and signifying processes, in the generation and communication of knowledge and experience. We have already reported Peirce as stating that "The only way of directly communicating an idea is by means of an icon; and every indirect method of communicating an idea must depend for its establishment upon the use of an icon" (CP 2.278). And we have already underlined the affinity with Welby's approach when she maintains that language is a symbolic system, while its method is pictorial (1983 [1903]: 38). Not unlike Welby or Peirce who evidence the relation of similarity (grounded in the logic of alterity) between one mind and another as the condition for communication, Dupin, in Poe's "The Purloined Letter," attributes the success of his enquiries to a fundamental assumption, that is, the relation of similarity between his mind and that of the person he is searching

for—as unconscious as this may be. The purloined letter is searched for in a given place X, insofar as this possibility is predicted by the logical inferences generated by a given type of mental model. But the solution to the problem, for the case in point investigator Dupin was to find the letter robbed by Minister D from Mrs. S, depends on his capacity to vary the principles that regulate his enquiry whenever necessary, thereby modifying his own mental models according to possible worlds different from his own. Dupin was entrusted with a task that the Prefect had failed in because of his inability to carry out this type of projection.

From the perspective of sense generation at high degrees of creativity and inventiveness, Poe's short story reveals the importance of the capacity of projecting oneself into possible worlds different from one's own, from the already known, from already defined worlds. In terms of argumentation, discovery depends on the capacity to supersede the limits of deduction and induction and accomplish abductive leaps. X as a hiding place for the letter is a possibility generated by a given model of the world, or modeling procedure, which not everybody will necessarily act upon. The acquisition of knowledge through abductive leaps presupposes the capacity to foresee other possible mental models different from that already possessed and already known. Discoveries are made by relating worlds and models that are different from each other, according to the logic of alterity rather than of identity. In addition to being a Minister, the robber is also a poet and, thanks to his creativity, deceives the Prefect who insists on conducting his enquiries according to preestablished models of the world, which he was incapable of modifying. Instead, Dupin is ready to predict the unpredictable by acknowledging the robber with a capacity for variation with respect to initial models. With moves different from the traditional modalities of conducting investigations, Dupin reconstructs the hypothetical possible world of the robber and finds the purloined letter hidden in full view.

A description of metaphor in semiotical terms evidences its cognitive and ethical import beyond the aesthetic in the oversimplifying sense of the decorative and rhetorical. The role of metaphor not only in artistic discourse, but in the sciences, in philosophy, religion, mythology, in everyday discourse, etc., indicates the importance of the figurative dimension, ultimately of iconicity in Peirce's sense, in reasoning, therefore in the construction of possible worldviews and models of the world. The structural role of metaphor in signifying processes, in the generation of sense, and in worldview modeling procedures emerges in Peirce's

writings just as much as in Poe's narratives, despite scarce direct references in this sense.¹⁰ In the light of the generative and procedural logic of Peirce's semiotics, as of Welby's signifiacs, knowledge and truth neither emerge as absolute nor neutral, but as multifaceted and figurative, plurioriented and without predetermined and fixed limits. Meaning and knowledge are generated in the sign network which means to say that the world we live in, reality as we experience it are developed and enhanced in signifying potential through semiosis. To conceive the world in terms of semiotic reality means to conceive it as a text, as narration, which finds a poetic formulation, for example, in a film which celebrates metaphor, *Il postino* (*The Postman*), directed by Michael Radford and Massimo Troisi (1994). The postman in fact candidly asks Neruda, the Chilean love poet, whether the world is all a metaphor.

Metaphor provides new perceptual-cognitive models and opens new worlds, perspectives, and interpretive orientations. The generation of meaning through metaphorization is connected with the capacity for musement and dreaming, with the creation of new possible worlds beyond the actual. Metaphorization is a generative process structural to narrativity in which different universes of discourse are brought together to confront and enhance each other. Metaphor remodels the world, restructures it, regenerates sense and expression in processes of refiguration (Petrilli and Ponzio, 1999, 2003a). Thanks to the capacity for identifying relations of similarity, affinity among alterities that on a surface level do not seem reconcilable, metaphor reaches high degrees of dialogism and extralocalization, enhancing the signifying and expressive potential of discourse not only in cognitive and aesthetic terms, but also in the ethical and critical. In fact, thanks to its capacity to construct new worldviews, further knowledge, and develop perception, metaphor is an important instrument for critique and its translation into operative terms, consequently for denunciation and revolution, for social change. In the film *Il postino*, Neruda is exiled as a political refugee in Italy because the metaphors he dedicated to the emarginated were perceived as a threat to the established order. The iconic component makes metaphor an effective device in the revolution of human consciousness. Thanks also to its critical modeling power and ability to reveal other faces of experience, truth, and behavior, metaphorization is endowed with a semioethical dimension and capacity to reorient behavior in relation to value systems.

The text below is cited from the USA journal, *Monthly Review*, and provides a good example of the generation of sense, including the sense

of critique through a narrative structure that is profoundly metaphorical. This text is a press release written by the Mexican Chiapas in defense of their revolutionary leader, Marcos; a reply to the Mexican pro-government press which cried scandal at his sexual identity in the attempt to discredit him. Narrativity is generated through a sequence of metaphors that amplify the initial signifying input of the text as it passes from defense of a single individual to denouncing all forms of emargination in the world. The text closes on the expression “Enough” which resounds dramatically, charged with a stratification of meanings engendered by the sequence of metaphors leading up to it, what Rossi-Landi (1961) calls “additional meanings.” By virtue of the critical force of metaphor, this text is rich in ideological and ethical implications promoting such values as love and responsibility for the other, listening and hospitality:

Subcommander Marcos Is More than Just Gay

In April *The San Francisco Chronicle* quoted Subcommander Marcos, voice of the Zapatista Revolutionaries in Chiapas, Mexico, as saying that he had worked in a San Francisco restaurant but had been fired for being gay. The pro-government Mexican press cried scandal—a queer revolutionary! The Zapatistas responded with the following communiqué:

About whether Marcos is homosexual:

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristóbal, a gang member in Neza [a huge Mexico City slum] a rocker in the National University [a folk music citadel], a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in the Defense Ministry, a communist in the post-Cold War era, an artist without gallery or portfolio. . .

A pacifist in Bosnia, a housewife alone on Saturday night in any neighborhood in any city in Mexico, a striker in the CTM [the giant pro-government union federation, which virtually never authorizes strikes], a reporter writing filler stories for the back pages, a single woman on the metro at 10 p.m., a peasant without land, an unemployed worker. . . an unhappy student, a dissident amid free-market economics, a writer without books or readers, and, of course, a Zapatista in the mountains of southeast Mexico.

So Marcos is a human being, any human being, in this world. Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed minorities, resisting and saying, “Enough!” (*Monthly Review* 46/4, Sept. 1994: 1)

Notes

1. Ivor A. Richards develops his theory of “complementarity” which he applies to the human sciences adapting it from Niels Bohr’s “principle of complementarity” and his atomic physics. On the basis of the concept of complementarity, Richards develops the distinction between “tenor” and “vehicle,” proposed in his 1936 book,

- Philosophy of Rhetoric* (but introduced for the first time in his essay “Art and Science,” 1919, see Richards, 1976: 108–26, and 280, n. 19), and therefore the relation between metaphorical meaning and given meaning.
2. The results of the Oxford *Symposium on Meaning* were published in the journal *Mind* in 1920 under the title *The Meaning of “Meaning”* (Oct. n. 116). The main speakers contributing to the debate included F. S. C. Schiller, B. Russell, and H. H. Joachim with interventions and critical discussions from A. Sidgwick and C. A. Strong. These were published in a subsequent issue of the same journal (see *Mind*, 1920, 1921a, b).
 3. In a letter to Welby of 1904, Russell declared his intention to focus on signs and meaning and on the principles that make them possible (see Cust, 1931: 159–60; the main part of their correspondence is now available in Petrilli, 2009a: 310–25). As stated by Russell himself (1959: 13), his interest in the problem of meaning arose in relation to Welby and her own research (see Petrilli, 2009a: 294–300; Schmitz, 1985: ix–ccxxxvii).
 4. Bertrand Russell and Ferdinand C. S. Schiller were among the many eminent personalities of the time who corresponded with Welby. Their epistolaries are now available in the volume *Signifying and Understanding* together with her letter exchanges with other personalities including Edwin Arnold, Andrew C. and Francis H. Bradley, Henry and William James, Benjamin Jowett, George Stout and his wife Ella, Michel Bréal, André Lalande, Charles K. Ogden, Frederik van Eeden, Mary Everest Boole, and others still (see Petrilli, 2009a).
 5. However, some of the places in Peirce’s *Collected Papers* where he thematizes metaphor include CP 2.222: inserted in a chapter entitled “The Ethics of Terminology” which in turn is taken by the editors from Peirce’s book of 1903, *Syllabus of Certain Topics in Logic* (pp. 10–4) (see CP 2.219–2.226, n.); CP 2.277: inserted in a chapter entitled “The Icon, Index, and Symbol.” According to the editors, this and other paragraphs in the same chapter (CP 2.274–2.277, 2.283–2.284, 2.292–2.294) are developed in an unpublished paper of 1902, “Syllabus” (see CP 2.274–2.308, note to title of the first section); CP 7.590: now in Peirce, 1982: 497, the first volume of a series of twenty collecting his writings in chronological order under the general title *Writings of Charles S. Peirce*.
 6. See Peirce’s Lecture XI (MS 132) in the “Lowell Lectures” delivered between 1866 and 1867 at the Lowell Institute. This series is presented under the general title “Logic of Science; or, Induction and Hypothesis,” in *Writings of Charles Sanders Peirce* (see Peirce, 1982–93, vol 1: 490–504, and CP 7.579–7.596).
 7. See the paragraph entitled “Consciousness and Language” in Peirce’s *Collected Papers* (see note 5). Reflecting on the relation between logic and metaphysics, he concludes with the following consideration: “nec ad melius vivendum, nec ad commodius disserendum” (CP 7.596).
 8. The idea of the genesis of the world through expressive, interpretive, and signifying processes has a poetical example in Australian Aboriginal Dreamtime mythology. According to legend, the earth is born and regenerated in song and emerges as a narrative construction made of intersecting songlines in an open and unbounded sign network extending over the entire continent (see Chatwin, 1987; Ross, 1992).
 9. The following is a note by Victoria Welby to the corresponding text cited above:

Appendix, Note XVI, p. 139

Let A be the speaker or writer.

Let B1 be the simply Actual or Literal, and its direct expression.

Let B2 be the simply Figurative or Metaphorical, and its indirect or reflective expression.

Then let C stand for a central point in expression, and let C1 and C2, respectively, stand for the points where it is supposed to become obvious that a given form or mode of expression is to be classed under the literal or the metaphorical. The central region then becomes one which combines theoretical and metaphorical, actual and figurative. Where should its limits be placed? And what should it be called?

Any word with accepted variations of meaning may be written (with necessary context) at the various points on the arc, so as to test the question,—Is there or is there not a gradation, in every case, from the literal to the metaphorical, and *vice versa*, and can this generally be traced? (Ibid.: 292)

10. On the relation between metaphor and modeling and more broadly between iconicity and modeling, and on the translatability of metaphor, see Black, 1962; see also Merrell, 1992.

8

Translation, Interpretation, and Communication

8.1 Signs in Translation

Translation theory is well grounded in sign theory, especially interpretation sign theory following such authors as Charles S. Peirce, Victoria Welby, and Mikhail Bakhtin. In this framework, the typology of translation proposed by Roman Jakobson in his epochal essay of 1959, “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation,” can be developed to include translation in semiosis in its globality, biosemiosis, and not just semiosis in the human world. Also, with specific reference to interlingual translation, the problem of translation is closely connected to the problem of reported discourse and the question of otherness. From this point of view, translation is inseparable from dialogue where the terms involved are interconnected by a relation of responsive understanding and presuppose the original condition of irreducible extralocalization.

To translate is neither to decodify or decipher, nor to recodify. No doubt such operations are part of the translational process, but they do not exhaust it. *To translate is firstly to interpret.* If we agree with Peirce that signs do not exist without an interpretant, that the meaning of a sign can only be expressed by another sign acting as its interpretant, translation is constitutive of the sign: sign activity or *semiosis* is a translational process. Peirce defines semiosis in terms of translation on various occasions as in the renowned statement: “a sign is not a sign unless it translates itself into another sign in which it is more fully developed” (*CP* 5.594; 1898). Moreover, he explicitly identifies interpretation with translation: “Interpretation is merely another word for translation” (*MS* 283; 1905, 6). Semiosis—the generation of meaning is interconnected

with translation—in fact is engendered in translational processes as it emerges only too clearly when meaning is described as an “interpretive route” (see 5.7).

From this perspective translation not only concerns semiosis in the human world, *anthroposemiosis*, but far more extensively is a *constitutive modality* of semiosis in its totality. Translational processes pervade the entire living world, that is, the great biosphere. (Various examples of what hereafter will be classified as endosemiotic and intersemiotic translative processes are available in Sebeok, 1991b, 1994, 1998a). When the question of translation in the human cultural world is addressed, reference is mostly to the relationship among texts in different historical-natural languages. However, to translate is not only to transit from one language to another—interlingual translation.

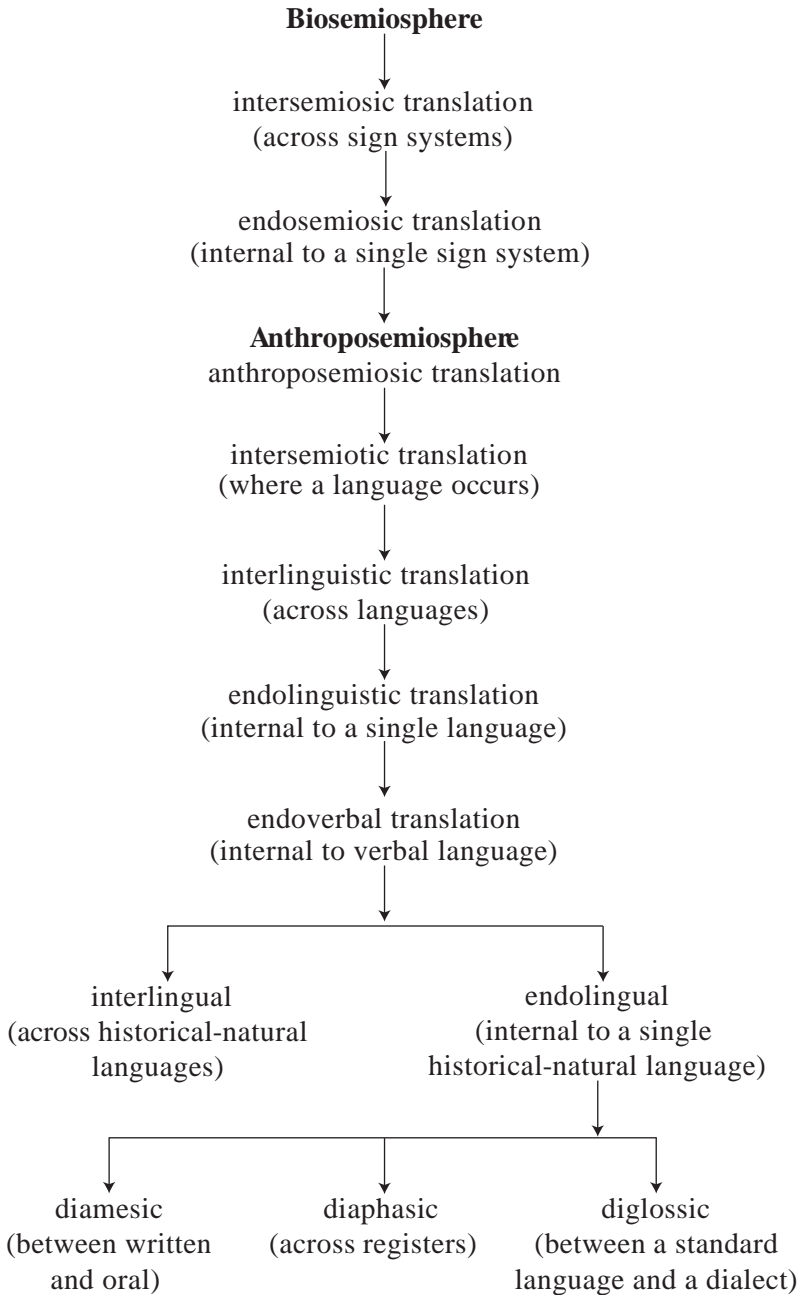
Beyond this common understanding of “translation” (which, however, does not imply operations classifiable as common), other forms of translation must also be addressed. Translative processes are internal to the same language; they also occur from verbal sign systems to nonverbal sign systems and vice versa, or exclusively among nonverbal sign systems and again among nonverbal languages. The terminology proposed by Jakobson in “On Linguistic Aspects of Translation” is useful here. Jakobson distinguished between three main types of translation: (1) *intra-lingual* translation or rewording, that is, interpretation of verbal signs with other verbal signs from the *same* historical-natural language (in “Des tours de babel,” 1985, Jacques Derrida observes that the expression “same language” referred to a historical-natural language presupposes the concepts of “unity and identity,” underlining the need to understand the implications involved), (2) *interlingual* translation or translation proper which consists of interpreting verbal signs of a given historical-natural language with verbal signs of another historical-natural language, and (3) *intersemiotic* translation or *transmutation*, the interpretation of verbal signs with nonverbal sign systems.

The English terminology avoids confusion between the concepts of “language-in-general” (Fr. *langage*, It. *linguaggio*) and “historical-natural language” (Fr. *langue*, It. *lingua*) which arises when the adjective “linguistic” and its derivatives (“intra- or endolinguistic” and “interlinguistic”) are used to refer indifferently to both, as in Italian. In fact, the term “linguistic” derives indifferently from both language-in-general (*langage*, *linguaggio*) and from historical-natural language (*langue*, *lingua*). However, as Derrida points out, when Jakobson analyzes

“translation,” he refers to translational processes among historical-natural languages, while reserving the terms “rewording” and “transmutation” for all other cases. In Jakobson’s view translation among historical-natural languages is “translation proper.” But while he provides other interpretants to explain “intralingual” and “intersemiotic” translation, respectively, “rewording” and “transmutation,” he fails to do so for “interlingual” translation which, moreover, he describes as “translation proper.” This reveals the difficulties involved precisely when translating the word itself “translation,” that is, when a question of “translation proper”; therefore, it also betrays the fact that while it seems reassuring, this tripartition presents problems.

Let us now begin from the most general level of translation and from this perspective propose a more articulate typology: the schema below (on p. 234) is an attempt at visualization.

A distinction can be made between *intersemiotic* translation and *endosemiotic* translation: the first refers to translational processes across two or more sign systems; the second is internal to a given sign system. Both types of translation occur in the living world globally, and not only in the human cultural world. Where a language (Fr. *langage*, It. *linguaggio*) occurs (strictly speaking only in the sphere of anthroposemiosis), including verbal language, intersemiotic translation is specified as *intersemiotic* translation. When translation occurs uniquely across languages (Fr. *langage*, It. *linguaggio*), including from nonverbal signs to verbal signs and vice versa or across nonverbal sign systems, we have *interlinguistic* translation, where the adjective “linguistic” derives from language-in-general (Fr. *langage*, It. *linguaggio*) and not from historical natural-language (Fr. *langue*, It. *lingua*). When a question of translative processes within a single language (*langage*, *linguaggio*), we have *endolingual* translation. Instead, when a question of *linguistic* translation within verbal sign systems, we may speak of *endoverbal* translation. The latter is specified as (1) *interlingual* when signs transit from one historical-natural language to another, or as (2) *endolingual* when a question of transiting across languages forming a single historical-natural language. *Endolingual* translation may in turn be characterized as (2a) *diamesic endolingual* translation (from *diamesia*, linguistic variation relative to the medium of expression: translation from oral verbal signs to written verbal signs and vice versa), (2b) *diaphasic endolingual* translation (from *diaphasia*, linguistic variation relative to different registers: colloquial, formal, professional, etc.), and (2c)



diglossic endolingual translation (from *diglossia*, the term introduced by Fishman and Ferguson for socially connoted bilingualism with the dichotomy between *high language* and *low language*, for example, standard or national language and dialectical forms of expression).

8.2 Translator Discourse and Discourse of the Other

Let us now focus on what is most commonly understood by “translation,” that is, translation among historical-natural languages, interlingual translation.

Translation thus understood is *reported discourse*. In this case, the translator’s discourse is not evidenced for what it is, that is, reporting discourse, discourse reporting the word of another, the author’s, but is made to appear as direct discourse, as the author’s own original discourse, while translator discourse is denied—or at least this is the aim. The reported word, that is, the translated word is represented in translation as though it were a direct word. Indeed, if from this point of view translated discourse resembles direct discourse, different from direct discourse translated discourse is in total denial of translator discourse, reporting discourse, of the dynamics between reporting and reported discourse, between the direct and the indirect word. Consequently, when translating from one historical-natural language to another, neither comments nor recourse to discursive expedients that mark the boundaries between one’s own word and the word of the other, for example citation marks, are necessary. In this sense, the text in translation is represented as a dramatization. The characters in a drama speak directly, while the author’s word is silenced (or only comes forward in the stage directions). Similarly, when a question of interlingual translation, one’s own word, the translator’s word (we could even speak of the translator–author, the translator as author), the word reporting someone else’s discourse, the word of the other, in another historical-natural language is also silenced. The translator’s word, reporting discourse, converges with the direct word of translated discourse, reported discourse, the author’s original discourse. Translator discourse is presented as the direct word of another, or at least this is the claim. The authorial dimension of translator discourse is completely denied. And, in fact, denial of the direct word of the translator, the translator–author, in this sense of the translator–authorial word, subtends the popular image of the translator as a mere mouthpiece, as spokesperson for the author of the text in translation. If the translator is ever mentioned anywhere in the “translation-text,”

that is, the text which interprets/translates the source text, what I also propose to call “translatant” treading Peirce’s term “interpretant” (Petrilli, 2010: 237–42), mention is usually only marginal, extrinsic given that the translator tends to disappear behind the author of the original text, the text in translation, what I propose to call the “translated text” or simply the “translated,” treading the expression “interpreted sign” or simply the “interpreted” (Ibid.). Only one of the two initial voices must remain or at least this is the accepted task of the translator.

In the case of indirect discourse, one’s own word and the word of the other are clearly distinct and flourish together in a dialogic relation which may vary from simple exposition, to deferent and obsequious indication, even appeal to the author’s authority in the form of *ipse dixit*, to citing someone else’s text for critical discussion and even rejection. On the contrary, when a question of translation, the translator’s word is of no account—or so it seems: the only word recognized is the original author’s word. We could even claim that the sole function of the translatant as regards the original-text, or “translated” is of an ostensive order: the translatant text must simply indicate the translated text, show it. From this point of view, translation draws completely away from the practice of reporting the discourse of the other in the form of indirect discourse. In fact, when interlingual translation is not involved, reporting discourse normally not only manifests itself for what it is, but also performs an analytical function in regard to reported discourse. Reporting discourse must explain reported discourse, clarify it, explicate its sense, and somehow take a stand toward it. On the contrary, in the case of translation, the ostensive function implies that the original-text subsists in translation without interventions by the translator, that it is presented as it is. In this case, we have authorial interpretive discourse, on the one hand, and translator discourse understood as ostensive discourse, on the other. But, in fact, to translate is inevitably to interpret, and the translator is yet another of the many masks worn by the author of the original text. This particular mask is that of a faithful mouthpiece that neither interprets, critiques, analyzes, or discusses, that does not take a stand, but simply reports faithfully. In other words, as reporting discourse translation is *sui generis* indirect discourse in the sense that it presents itself under the “mask” of direct discourse; that is, the translator’s word is an indirect word masked as a direct word.

With internal differences foreseen by the various historical-natural languages, the modalities of reported discourse comprise direct discourse,

indirect discourse, and free indirect discourse. A fourth modality may now be added in line with our discussion: reported discourse in the form of translation from the source language into the target language. Translation is indirect discourse if by indirect discourse is understood discourse that analyzes, interprets, explicates, clarifies, solves ambiguities, decides on senses, establishes the intonation, orientation, intent of another discourse, of the utterance-text in translation. The translator does all this. Reporting discourse pervades reported discourse, is ubiquitous in reported discourse to the point that all syntactical indicators and punctuation marks distinguishing the translator's voice from the translated voice are eliminated. Therefore, if free indirect discourse is direct discourse masked as indirect discourse, translation is *indirect discourse masked as direct discourse*.

Transition from one language to another implies that the target language sets to work to explain what is said in the source language. The very fact of gazing at one language with the eyes of another means to subject the text in translation, the "translated," to processes of observation, analysis, interpretation, and eventual clarification. And given that, from the smallest utterance to the most complex and articulated text, discourse is not stated directly in a historical-natural language but is always mediated by the sectorial languages which form that particular language, translation also involves encounter among different sectorial or special languages, that is, transfer from one sectorial or special language to another, interpretation of one sectorial or special language by another. And no matter how similar a special language in the target language may be to the special language in the source language, as much as the special languages correspond, translation inevitably produces a shift, in some cases even a complete change in register as when the Bible was translated into German and the sacred language of the original was subjected to processes of contamination, profanation.

As indirect discourse masked as direct discourse, as explication and unfolding of the word of the other, translation must not be deferent toward the translated word, it must not consider it as the ultimate word, an inaccessible word, protected by boundaries, a word that withdraws from contact, closed in its own self-sufficiency. Like indirect discourse and free indirect discourse, the translant word is a word that must necessarily attract the word in translation, the translated, and involve it in a relation of dialogic interaction. The translated should not be cited with respect, at a distance. On the contrary, it must enter an interpretive

game and become part of a dialogic relation of involvement without the slightest possibility of withdrawal. Its pretentious claim to autonomy and identity with the author is uncovered for what it is. The word in translation is pervaded with dialogism as when it came to life and entered the world as the word of the author.

Translation recovers the word's constitutive dialogism in the relation with other words. In addition, translation recovers the constitutive dialogism of historical-natural languages and their special languages in the relation with other historical-natural languages and other special languages. The implications of this claim are the following: in principle, translation among different historical-natural languages is no different from translation within a single language. In both cases, processes of interpretation and explication are at work. To the question, "What do you mean? Explain yourself better," we could just as easily reply by reformulating the utterance in the same historical-natural language or in a different language: this will simply depend on the relation among speakers to the different special languages and historical-natural languages involved. In any case, it is a question of reformulation which necessarily specifies sense and orients interpretation. When reformulating one's own discourse or someone else's discourse in the same historical-natural language, eventually using a different special language, it is common practice to introduce such expressions as "I mean that . . .," "She means that . . .," "What I mean is that . . .," "What she means is that . . .," etc., which signal indirect discourse. Use of similar expressions in the case of interlingual translation by analogy should seem just as normal, eventually transforming first person into third person: "It's cold," "She says it's cold"; or "How are you?," "She wants to know how you are." Even if such expressions are not used explicitly, they are implied. Though presented in the form of direct discourse, translation is indirect discourse.

But there's more. Given that words are always taken from the mouth of others, as Mikhail Bakhtin says, even direct speech in a given historical-natural language is indirect speech (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980). Direct speech is always the discourse of others reported as "one's own," or at least discourse that must work to establish itself as "one's own," that must make its way through discourse that was originally someone else's. This makes translated discourse from one historical-natural language and discourse reformulated in the same language very similar. Reformulation in its various forms, including forms identified as one's own discourse,

ranges from imitation to parodization to caricature to more or less obvious, or more or less hidden controversy, etc. Translational processes are active in all forms of discourse—which always involve interpretation, reformulation, reported discourse, indirect discourse—and in all single historical-natural languages given that interlingual translation is part of their very own constitution. Historical-natural languages are predisposed for translation, are prone to translation, for they flourish in translation both internally with respect to special languages and externally with respect to other historical-natural languages. This aspect will be addressed below in relation to the problem of translatability.

Reference to the relation between the object-interpreted sign and the interpretant sign in Peirce's most renowned triad, icon, symbol, and index, affords a better understanding of the relationship between the translated-text and the translant-text. In the "indexical relation" or index, the interpreted sign and interpretant relate to each other on the basis of necessity, whether a question of temporo-spatial contiguity and/or cause and effect; in the "symbolic relation" or symbol, convention or habit prevails; instead, the icon implies a relation of reciprocal autonomy and likeness. The translant does not relate to the translated on the basis of indexicality alone. Whatever the level of adequacy, however "*relevante*" (Derrida, 1999/2000), translation cannot be reduced to a mere fact of indexical correspondence. As Peirce clarifies, no one of the three types of relations connecting interpreted to interpretant subsists without the other two which are always present even if to a minimal degree: indexicality, symbolicity, and iconicity are always present together and in this sense are characterized by "degeneracy" as this expression is understood in the language of mathematics. No doubt not only would the translant not exist without the original text, the translated, but moreover the overall configuration of the translant is influenced by the forms of adequacy that characterize the original translated text which the translant attempts to reach. In a sense, the translant is parasitic with respect to the "original" text, to which it owes something (which it "must render," as is commonly said). Such dependency justifies speaking of indexicality. However, if the indexical relation increases disproportionately, the translant not only loses in value, but it may even lose in adequacy with respect to the original translated text. Like any interpretant, to be an adequate interpretant the translant must not simply repeat the interpreted, or the translated, but must establish a relation of responsive understanding with it, a relation

oriented by the logic of otherness and dialogism. The translator's interpretive ability is directly proportional to the degree of indexicality in the relation between the translantant and the translated.

We might even claim that the translantant and the translated, or the original, do *not* relate to each other on the basis of deduction: given a particular translated, a given translantant does not necessarily ensue. This is no different from our previous statement. The translantant is not connected to the translated by a relation of necessity, of cause and effect, even less so by a relation of contiguity, for the translantant can exist autonomously from the translated, even detach itself from it. At the same time, however, the relation between the translantant and translated is not purely symbolic or conventional either. To interpret the translated–translantant relation in such terms means to maintain the fallacy that to transit from one historical–natural language to another, from one linguistic conventional system to another simply means to transfer the “same meaning” into different signifiers. But to translate does not at all mean to transfer the “same” meaning from the original text to the translantant text. As anticipated, the translantant must attempt a relation of responsive understanding with respect to the original. Even more interesting is the fact that the meaning of the original is determined and decided in interpretive work thus described and remains unvaried until another translantant proposes a different interpretant, that is, a different interpretation, a different meaning.

The type of interpreted–interpretant relation that best renders the character of translation is the “iconic.” In translation, indexicality and conventionality are necessarily present, but iconicity dominates. If, with Peirce, the icon is understood as the sign that depends neither on a relation of causality or contiguity, nor on a conventional relation (despite the presence of indexicality and symbolicity), but rather is characterized by a relation of likeness or resemblance with its referent, then the relation between the translantant and the original translated text is essentially iconic: the translantant must *resemble* the translated, the original. As Peirce maintains in his analysis of the icon, likeness does not obstacle but is a condition for inventiveness, creativity, and autonomy with respect to the original text. According to Peirce, the icon is the sign most endowed with value on its own account, independently from that which it resembles. A translation may have different aspirations and lay different claims: it may simply accompany the original translated text word by word, or it might aim to recreate the translated in another language and succeed

brilliantly to the point that the translant has value in itself and even reaches high degrees in aesthetic value in the case of a literary text, whether in prose or poetry.

Strictly speaking, we never express ourselves (whether orally or in writing) in a given historical-natural “language” (Fr. *langue*, It. *lingua*), but always in a special language (Fr. *langage*, It. *linguaggio*), that is, in one of the concrete forms of language that constitute a historical-natural language. The “sentence” belongs to language understood in its indeterminate abstractness. But the sentence does not belong to anybody, is not part of a context, is not addressed to anybody, is not pronounced with given overtones, does not resound with significance. On the contrary, the “utterance” is a concrete, intentional expression that belongs to a subject and is oriented toward an interlocutor, is contextualized in discourse, connected to a situational context, is a response in a dialogically structured communicative situation and calls for a response in turn. The utterance partakes in concrete language. Generally, the work of translation does not deal with sentences but with utterances. Only a translator of texts in linguistics, of grammars and texts in language theory—where the sentence is generally introduced as the object of analysis—is called to translate sentences. Given that it is isolated from the live context of discourse, the sentence is always ambiguous in varying degrees from one historical-natural language to another. Therefore, a sentence introduced as an example of abstract language and sometimes even thought to exemplify the general rules of human linguistic usage (consider Noam Chomsky’s linguistics) does not lend itself to translation.

In the entry “Traduzione” in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*, Giulio C. Lepschy makes the mistake of exchanging the insurmountable difficulties of conferring sense upon a sentence as we are describing it with difficulties of translation (Lepschy, 1981: 456–7). He takes the English sentence, “His friend could not see the window,” only to conclude that translation into Italian, even in such a simple case, requires that we choose from at least twenty-four different possibilities. The truth is that the translator is never faced with this kind of choice, where in reality no choice is possible, as Lepschy himself is forced to admit. On the contrary, in the case of a sentence that becomes an utterance, translation difficulties connected with this type of ambivalence disappear and the Italian translator will know automatically whether to understand “amico” or “amica,” “suo” or “sua,” “riuscì” or “riusciva,” “finestra,” “finestrino,” or “sportello.”

Therefore, to signal this case as an example of the difficulties involved in translation is not well chosen. In effect, a linguist focused on sentences (which is most often the case), whether in the sphere of traditional taxonomic-structuralist linguistics or generative-transformational linguistics, is not in a position to say anything to the translator about the difficulties involved in translation given that the object of translation is generally the utterance and not the sentence.

We could even claim that a translator translating from a “language,” that is, from a historical-natural language (an abstract formal structure) to another does not exist. In reality, the translator translates from a given special language and from a given discourse genre belonging to a given historical-natural language to a corresponding special language and discourse genre belonging to another historical-natural language. This means that translative competency is always relative to competency in a given sectorial or special language, in a given discourse genre. In this sense, the translator is a specialist not as a translator but as a translator specialized in a given special language. We might even claim that there is no such thing as a general translator, indeed that the notion itself of “the profession of translator” requires interrogation. A medical text cannot be translated by someone who simply professes “translation”: the competent translator must also profess the language of medicine in the source language as much as in the target language. This also holds for a text in philosophy, a literary text, a novel, and even more so for poetry. Is translation of a poetic text possible? The same question should also be asked about a medical text, a philosophical text, but also about a cookbook. Is it enough to be a “good” general translator to translate Artusi (the famous nineteenth-century Tuscan cookbook with its wealth of specific terminology)? To translate a poem does not only call for translative competency, but also for “poetic” competency. The commonplaces attached to such words as “translate,” “translation,” “translator,” and “interpret,” “interpretation,” and “interpreter” emerge clearly from the relative entries in a good dictionary of the English language.

In *Les testaments trahis*, Milan Kundera makes some interesting observations on the difficulties of translation understood as “interpretation” (Kundera, 1993: 121–43). He signals the problem of the translator who violates the text in the name of rules that in reality are alien to it. For example, in the effort to avoid a “literal translation,” the translator may exaggerate in investing the metaphor with literary value and enhance

expressivity to the point of distorting sense. Another mistake that the translator tends to make in the effort to obey general rules (e.g., at school we are taught to avoid repetitions) is what Kundera calls “*synonymization reflex*” which consists of resorting to a vast range of synonyms according to the rules of “*bello stile*” in order to avoid offending stylistic elegance with repetition. (This consideration is made in a section entitled “Postilla sulla sinonimizzazione” included in the Italian edition but lacking in the French, *Ibid.*, It. trans.: 112). Kundera evidences this type of error in French translations of Kafka’s *Château* in which metaphor, repetition, essential vocabulary play a central role in the Kafkaian literary word where “L’envoûtante mélodie [. . .] est fondée intièrement sur des répétitions” (*Ibid.*: 138). “Simplification” and superficial “aesthetic” reasons may induce the translator to fragment an expression considered too long or a paragraph lasting several pages. Of course historical-natural languages differ in their capacity to cope with chains of subordinate phrases that work in one language but are too long or complex in another. But general rules do not apply in this case either. Kundera observes that paragraphs visualize a certain movement in a given piece of prose and should not be modified as fancied by the translator. He complains that the only two paragraphs forming chapter three in *Château* are broken down into five paragraphs in Max Brod’s edition and into ninety and again ninety-five in the two main French translations (Alexandre Vialatte, subsequently reviewed by Claude David and Bernard Lortholary).

Problems relating to the translation of literary texts are not the same as those relating to the translation of nonliterary genres. However, the problems involved in literary translation evidence the need for a dialogic relation between the translator/interpreter and the text in translation, whatever the discourse genre in question. In fact, a necessary condition for competent and creative translation is the relation of dialogic otherness between interpreter/translator and the text in translation, ultimately between *translatant* and *translated*.

8.3 The Question of Translatability as the Question of Expressibility

Now we shall focus on the problem of translatability among historical-natural languages. From this point of view, the question whether or not historical-natural languages communicate with each other is irrelevant. As close as two languages may be in terms of historical formation the answer is that they do not communicate with each other. That two

languages have aspects in common either because they are familiar with each other or because they share a common past in terms of formation, and transformation processes does not eliminate any differences among them. Nor is there necessarily overlap between the two distinct universes of discourse these languages represent. Each language is endowed with a specificity of its own on all eventual levels of analysis: phonological, intonational, syntactic, semantic, lexical, pragmatic, semiotical-cultural. The unaware translator may be deceived by so-called false friends, that is, words that are “similar” (or almost), but that belong to two different languages. Louis Hjelmslev makes an important contribution to showing how the same substance, purport, or meaning is organized differently in different languages on both the levels of content and expression. An example from Hjelmslev: Lat. *Nescio*; Eng. *I don't know*; It. *Non so*, all share the same content substance which, however, on a semantic level is organized differently in different languages. Pertinent traits find expression and are specified in different languages through different lexical and grammatical expedients.

The real question does not concern communication but *expressibility*. Therefore the question of translatability is the following: can what is expressed in one historical-natural language be expressed in another? The reply cannot be inductive, that is, based on verification of the relation between premises and conclusion case by case and among all languages. And given that we are operating in the human sciences (and not in a formal discipline), the reply cannot be deductive, that is, formulated on the basis of a theoretical axiom. Instead, our reply must be of the abductive or hypothetical-deductive order, that is, based on verification of a given hypothesis.

From this point of view to translate (this impossible communication among historical-natural languages) is always possible, which is a statement based on the metalinguistic dimension of verbal signs. Interlingual translation occurs in territory that is common to all historical-natural languages, the verbal, and involves endoverbal translation as much as endolingual translation. Therefore, interlingual translation occurs on ground shared with speakers of the same language and involves common practices: the practices of transverbal expressibility.

The verbal is endowed with a distinctive feature that differentiates it from nonverbal special languages—the *metalinguistic* capacity. By contrast with nonverbal sign systems, verbal sign systems have a particular vocation for speaking about themselves, for becoming the object

of discourse. The presence of special languages in a single historical-natural language, that is, internal plurilingualism, enhances the speaker's metalinguistic capacity. All the same, the degree of distancing between metalanguage and the object language in a single historical-natural language, thanks to internal plurilingualism, is inferior to translation across different historical-natural languages. Therefore, if the problem of translatability is viewed in terms of expressibility, then it is clear that the relation with another historical-natural language favors expressibility and that translation is not only possible, but even enhances speaker metalinguistic capacity.

Moreover, interlingual translation is also endoverbal translation and as such is achieved on the basis of what in 1961 Ferruccio Rossi-Landi called "*parlare comune*" (common speech), a relatively constant system of techniques and broadly international system that transcends national-cultural boundaries (Rossi-Landi, 1961: 165). The "common speech" hypothesis posits that similarity between the original text and the translant is neither a question of isomorphism, nor of analogy, but of homology. In other words, in spite of important differences among historical-natural languages, these are interconnected by a relation of similarity of the genetical-structural order. Therefore, texts in different historical-natural languages share a sort of filigree identified as "common speech." In terms of the metalinguistic capacity of verbal sign systems, it is always possible to reformulate a text or an utterance differently, whether in the same or in a different special language and historical-natural language. Translatability is structural to the verbal and is always possible across languages, thanks to "common speech"—a view which contradicts the conception of historical-natural languages as closed and self-sufficient systems as much as the extreme theory of "linguistic relativity." As a metalinguistic device, translatability is a capacity common to all historical-natural languages, all of which partake in "common speech."

As reported discourse translation resorts to a practice shared by all historical-natural languages, that is, reporting the discourse of others. However, reported discourse not only concerns the *langue*, but also the *parole*. The individual *parole* is always reported discourse to varying degrees in the form of imitation, stylization, parodization, direct or hidden controversy, etc. (according to the modalities analyzed by Bakhtin in the two different editions of his monograph on Dostoevsky, the first published in 1929, the second in 1963). The word of the other in one's

own word and the fact that one's own word must make its way through the word of others, through sense, meaning and intention stratified in the word of others, reinforces the word's constitutive dialogism and favors the word's disposition for dialogism in translation. The inclination to respond to and report the discourse of others is structural to historical-natural language, to the utterance. Consequently, the disposition to respond to and report the word of others across historical-natural languages in the form of interlingual translation is inscribed in the functioning and tradition of language and is a condition of possibility for communication across languages. The main difficulties a translator may encounter concern the fact that the utterance or text in translation belong to a special language that he or she may not be sufficiently familiar with, if at all. But this is no different from the difficulties involved in endolingual translation. In any case, such difficulties do not support the principle of interlingual intranslatability.

The distanced and indirect character of the word favors translatability especially when a question of literary texts, even more so poetry; and yet the language of literature is often used to support the opposite thesis of intranslatability. The literary word, including the poetic word, is connected to the translating word homologically, that is, by a relation of similarity in terms of formation and structure. Similar to the literary word, the translating word too partakes in *secondary* or *indirect discourse genres* as distinct from primary or *direct discourse genres* (Bakhtin, 1979). In primary discourse genres the word and subject—a compact, coherent subject—converge, according to the logic of identity. Instead, in secondary genres, the word is not a direct word, one's own word, an objective word that coincides with the subject of discourse, but an objectified word. As an objectified word, a word that is pictured, figured, distanced from the self of discourse, the literary word evidences the indirect character of the word. The literary word is no longer the word that the author identifies with; on the contrary, the literary word is other, such that anyone using it can say "I" without identifying with this pronoun. Examples include the novel narrated in first person, drama where characters speak directly, lyrical poetry, autobiography (which too always involves a certain degree of distancing between the writer and the I of discourse): "*extralocalization*" is a condition for the discourse of literature.

Translation is indirect discourse masked as direct discourse which all the same is distanced from the word of the author–translator. Even

when a question of simultaneous oral translation, the translator does not identify, nor is he or she identified with the “I” of discourse. The ambassador says, “Thank you for receiving me, I’m honored to be here”; the interpreter translates, “Grazie per l’accoglienza, sono onorato di essere qui”; and nobody would dream of thinking that it is the interpreter who is grateful or honored. Contrary to prejudice against the possibility of translating literary texts (especially poetry), the capacity for distancing and extralocalization which is structural to translation also favors translation of the literary word, making the translant a privileged place for orientation of discourse in the sense of the literary word. The literary word and the translating word share characteristics that relate them far more closely than is generally recognized.

But “translatability” does not only signify the possibility of interlingual translation. It also indicates an open relation between the interpreted sign and the interpretant sign and when specifically a question of translation, between translated and translant. Insofar as it indicates the general “interpretability” of a text, translatability (a special case of interpretability) also indicates that the translation of a text remains open, that the translated can be reinterpreted with different translantants over and over again, in different languages or in the same language and eventually by the same translator. The semiotic materiality, complexity, and articulation of the interpreted–translated sign, its otherness is evidenced by the fact that it cannot be exhausted in any single translant, in any single interpretant (see 5.9). At the same time, the interpretant–translant must keep account of the semiotic materiality of the interpreted–translated, its otherness which is the real limit to infinite drift and deferral among signs. The concept of “translatability” thus understood can help clarify the problem of the limits of translation as of interpretation generally.

8.4 Translatability and the Semiotic Order of Meaning

The interpretive trajectory that concludes with the translation of a text in a different historical-natural language from the original transits across types of signs and systems of signs that are different from the original and involve a broad range of implied meanings that condition the text’s sense and significance. The result is that specifically *interlingual* translation only concerns the point of departure and of arrival, in the sense that all the intermediary interpretive work is of a *semiotic* order. The verbal text can only be “transferred” from one historical-natural language into

another on the basis of *intersemiotic translation* which involves both verbal and nonverbal signs. The question of translatability from one language to another is connected to the question of meaning which is not circumscribable to a single type of sign or sign system, and as such can only be adequately explained in semiotic terms. Reading together Victoria Welby (who with “significs” describes her theory of meaning as a theory of significance, interpretation, and translation) and Charles S. Peirce (whose interpretive sign theory is also a theory of translation), it is evident that translation is the condition for signs to subsist as signs, is constitutive of signs. The sign is not possible without an interpretant, that is, another sign that develops its meaning. In other words, echoing Peirce and Welby, meaning develops in the relation of mutual translation among signs.

Theoretically there are no limits on the possible interpretants of a preceding sign; in other words, there are no boundaries of a typological or systemic order on the sign’s meaning, on the interpretive trajectory that forms meaning. Potentially each time meaning is developed all types and systems of signs are eligible to provide further interpretants. The meaning of a sign is not circumscribed to a given *type of sign*, for example, indexical signs (traces, clues, symptoms), nor to a given *system of signs*, for example, a given natural language or conventional code, such as that formed by road signs. To speak of the meaning of verbal signs or of nonverbal signs as if meaning can be constituted by a single order of sign is a fallacy. Each time something is endowed with meaning, no order of sign is necessarily excluded from the interpretive route in which that something is positioned; each time there is meaning, all types of signs are potentially involved. Properly speaking, there is no such thing as verbal meaning or nonverbal meaning *tout court* given that meaning is not in the sign but in the relation among signs, verbal and nonverbal, in the network of signs. For all these reasons meaning is a phenomenon of the semiotic order (see Petrilli 2003).

Meaning and translation are semiotic phenomena whether interpretation/translation processes occur in the verbal sign system generally, among the sectorial languages of a single historical-natural language—endolingual translation—or among different historical-natural languages—interlingual translation. To understand the meaning of a verbal sign whether in one’s own historical-natural language or in a different historical-natural language means to activate interpretive processes with interpretants that are not necessarily of the verbal order

alone. Therefore, to translate from one historical-natural language to another means to apply artificial limits, as it were, on the process: the translator searches for interpretants—translatants exclusively among the verbal interpretants of the translating language. In the case of interlingual translation, the point of arrival must necessarily be verbal, that is, interpretants are chosen from the language into which the text is translated. But, as anticipated, limitation to verbal signs only concerns the goal of interpretive routes, the result, and landing place of interlingual translation, while the course and development of these interpretive routes is not direct from one historical-natural language to another. Translation difficulties do not arise because the text is recalcitrant to translation. Translatability is the condition for signs to flourish, for the life of signs. Difficulties arise in the case of interlingual translation, on one hand, because choice of the interpretant is restricted to the verbal sphere, and specifically to the verbal sphere of a given historical-natural language (the target language) and, on the other hand, also because within the sphere of the verbal the range of interpretants—translatants to choose from can be enormous.

A perfectly bilingual speaker will understand a text uttered in either one of the two languages. All texts give rise to interpretive routes involving signs of the verbal and nonverbal order. However, as regards the verbal this route is limited to the historical-natural language in which it is formulated and does not reach the other language which does not partake in the interpretive process. The transition is not direct from one historical-natural language to another. In addition, in the case of interlingual translation if this were the course followed, the perfectly bilingual speaker would be a bad translator.

The interpretive route branching out from a given text includes both verbal and nonverbal signs without boundaries as regards types or systems of signs or even the historical-natural languages eventually involved. However, each one of us at any given moment in the interpretive process only ever activates small portions in the global sign network (including both verbal and nonverbal signs), moreover limitedly to a given historical-natural language, and within that to a given special language. All the same, any interpretive route is necessarily part of the same global sign network such that an interruption can only occur because the interpreter has stopped interpreting. In any case, we only ever activate small portions of the sign network which is a question of natural economy no different from the logic that governs all sign systems

including historical-natural languages. Moreover, interpretation of a verbal text, whether oral or written, does not necessarily require verbal interpretants, even less so written interpretants. Only in rare cases is the verbal or written interpretant explicitly an *interpretant of identification* (noise in oral communication, a sign of deterioration in the written text—its archaic character, etc., a specialized text); more generally it presents itself as an *interpretant of responsive understanding* and involves signs of the nonverbal order, for example, a graphic sign such as an image or diagram, or a phonic, tactile, corporeal sign such as a gesture.

8.5 Translating between Repeatability and Uniqueness

In the case of interlingual translation, the interpretive route must *extend across at least two historical-natural languages*. The interpretant chosen to translate, the translant, must be *exclusively verbal and expressed in the translating language*. From this point of view, the translant would seem to simply identify a translated sign from the source language and carry out the task of *identification interpretant*. This would seem to make interlingual translation depend on a direct relation between two historical-natural languages and between their respective sectorial languages and discourse genres. But such is not the case.

In a paper of 1950–51, “The Problem of the Text in Linguistics, Philology, and the Human Sciences: An Experiment in Philosophical Analysis,” Bakhtin distinguishes between “two poles” in the text: language as a system of signs and the text as utterance:

The two poles of the text. Each text presupposes a generally understood (that is, conventional within a given collective) system of signs, a language (if only the language of art). If there is no language behind the text, it is not a text, but a natural (not signifying) phenomenon, for example, a complex of natural cries and moans devoid of any linguistic (signifying) repeatability [. . .].

And so behind each text stands a language system. Everything in the text that is repeated and reproduced, everything repeatable and reproducible, everything that can be repeated outside a given text (the given) conforms to this language system. But at the same time each text (as an utterance) is individual, unique, and unrepeatable, and herein lies its entire significance (its plan, the purpose for which it was created) [. . .]. (Ibid.: 105)

It is possible to proceed toward the first pole, that is, toward language—the language of the author, the language of the genre, the trend, the epoch; toward the national language (linguistics), and, finally, toward a potential language of languages (structuralism, glossematics). It is also possible to proceed toward the second pole—toward the unrepeatable event of the text. (Ibid.: 107)

As an utterance, the text is unique and unrepeatable. Of course, just as a fingerprint may be mechanically reproduced (in any number of copies),

a text too can be mechanically reproduced (i.e., reprinting). However, “reproduction of the text by a subject (a return to it, a repeated rereading, a new execution quotation) is a new, unrepeatable event in the life of the text, a new link in the historical chain of speech communication” (Ibid.: 106). This is even more true of the original text and its translation. However, when a question of the text, as anticipated, the problem of interlingual translatability is not a problem of translatability among historical-natural languages, just as it is not a problem of translatability of the text as such. The problem of translatability concerns the fact that ultimately the translantant of a text can *only* be a verbal interpretant from another given language. And as much as the text is part of an open interpretive route, of an open chain of signs such that in principle it can neither exclude nor withdraw from the interpretant, it does not arise, is not “made” for this type of interpretant.

On the question of translatability of historical-natural language, Bakhtin maintains that “in principle” insofar as it is as sign system any historical-natural language can be translated into any other language: “Consequently, sign systems have a common logic, a potential single language of languages (which, of course, can never become a single concrete language, one of the languages)” (Ibid.: 106). On the contrary, when a question of translatability of the text, Bakhtin continues like this: “But the text (as distinct from the language as a system of means) can never be completely translated, for there is no potential single text of texts” (Ibid.). But what determines the “unrepeatable event of the text,” the fact that it “can never be completely translated”? Bakhtin replies that different from a sentence or from a sample text, a model text—an example of a syllogism or of style, etc.—, an utterance text is not reproducible if not mechanically:

Two or more sentences can be absolutely identical (when they are superimposed on one another, like two geometrical figures, they coincide); moreover, we must allow that any sentence, even a complex one, in the unlimited speech flow can be repeated an unlimited number of times in completely identical form. But as an utterance (or part of an utterance) no one sentence, even if it only has one word, can ever be repeated: it is always a new utterance (even if it is a quotation). (Ibid.: 108)

Therefore, if an utterance repeated as an utterance *in the same historical-natural language* is no longer the same utterance, this is even more so when a question of transferring into a different historical-natural language. Consequently, Bakhtin is right when he says that translatability among different historical-natural languages is possible because there

is “a potential single language of languages,” but the text “can never be completely translated” because “there is no potential single text of texts.”

However, that the utterance text *can never be completely translated* is not a characteristic of the text as such, but rather concerns it as a sign; the condition for the sign to be a sign is that it must always be open to interpretation by yet another interpretant, such that an exhaustive, definitive interpretant is not possible, if not as an ultimate interpretant (Peirce’s “final interpretant”). Consequently, the *difficulty* of interlingual translation consists in the fact that it only provides identification interpretants that must be chosen from another historical-natural language. As observes Bakhtin, “Both poles are unconditional: the potential language of languages is unconditional and the unique and unrepeatable text is unconditional” (Ibid.: 107). In truth, the “potential single language of languages” can be considered as an absolute pole insofar as it is a system of the systems of language without which the text would not be a sign. But if the text itself emerges as an absolute pole, this is because it is reduced to a “single language of languages,” despite its vocation for otherness. In other words, the text is forced into the signs of the historical-natural language that translates it, that is, into the identification interpretants acting as its translantants, when, instead, as stated earlier, meaning cannot be circumscribed to a single type of sign or sign system (including the potential “single language of languages”).

8.6 Communication and Its Conditions of Possibility: To Speak Is to Respond

If in oral or written communication we understand what is said, this is thanks to the action of interpretants which are not exclusively verbal interpretants. What we say is based on preceding communication, which is verbal and nonverbal communication, and occurs in a global sign network in which any given historical-natural language only occupies a small section. When we speak to communicate, such an “event” is possible thanks to the conditions of communication established previously. We could even make the seemingly paradoxical claim—but paradoxes often help to evidence how things stand—that when we speak to communicate, communication has already occurred, which is true in the case of both oral and written texts (Petrilli, 1998a: 95–105). Whether written or oral, speech does not install communication relations, but if anything ratifies, maintains, notifies, declares, or manifests them, furnishing “portmanteau

words” which enable partners to mutually recognize each other, to stay in these relations, and to express the will to maintain and preserve them (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980).

The dynamics involved is similar to a love declaration: unless merely a conventional act, a formality (in which case it is not a love relationship), love is declared when the love relationship already exists, so that the declaration is only a portmanteau word anticipating another complementary portmanteau word as a response. For a professor to deliver a lecture successfully, certain conditions must be met however interesting or original the lecture; it will be appropriately received only if a series of conditions are met, including the initial implicit statement, “This is a lecture. Accept it for what it is.” When a child begins communicating with its mother verbally, this occurs on the basis of preceding long-term and intense communication relations between the two: this relation and its continuity is a necessary condition for learning, even to speak.

If the text or utterance were self-sufficient, that is, if it constituted its own conditions of possibility, if it did not depend on anything else but itself, if it were autopoietic, so to say, it would be completely dependent on the speaking subject’s initiative and the linguistic system the subject speaks in. In reality, however, neither the immediacy of speech nor the subject has priority in the construction of communication relations. Each time there is a subject, each time there is speech, an utterance, a text communication has already occurred and what that subject utters depends on previous communication. To speak, to act as a speaking subject, to be an author is always to respond, as for any text. The subject and the text constitute or decide anything, but not their conditions of possibility. This already emerges from the fact that each time the subject speaks or produces a text, it is responding; moreover, neither the subject nor the text constitute or decide anything in terms of reception, that is, whether and how they will be heard or read (see Petrilli 1998a: 95–105).

That to speak is to respond and is ineffective without presupposing that someone else is listening evidences that the subject’s initiative depends on the other: the other with which the subject has already communicated, to whom it must respond and answer to—and not just verbally. The subject responds and answers to the other on the basis of relations and sign systems that are not reduced to linguistic-verbal signs alone. A primary condition for communication to obtain by the subject, by self, by the text, any text, is the other, the other’s concession to listen.

Verbal action does not necessarily presuppose another verbal action. The word is a response, but that to which it responds beyond the superficial level of rejoinders in a formal dialogue is not in turn a word, a verbal text, but rather a whole communicative situation which preexists with respect to the immediate exchange. Actions accomplished by words and texts on the level of communicative exchange, of the “linguistic market” presuppose social relations, communication relations which are not in turn relations among words and texts. That is to say, the relations that produce relations among words are not in turn relations among words.

An immediate consequence of what has been claimed so far is that verbal action presupposes nonverbal communicative conditions. We could even claim that the expression “speech act” is inappropriate and that “verbal *action*” is preferable, where “action” concerns the subject, is connected with consciousness, is intentional, programmed, already decided, and presupposes initiative by the subject, while “act” refers to what has already occurred before action thus described. The subject is involved in the act, is implied by the act, has already been acted, decided, and is subject as in *subject to* (see 3.4, 6.6). When the subject expresses itself through words, by speaking, when it produces texts, when it fulfils verbal *actions*, the *act* has already occurred: the communicative action of words presupposes a communicative act that cannot be reduced to verbal actions. When a question of verbal communication, immediate verbal exchange is not the necessary condition for communication to obtain.

If communicative action decides its own *meaning*, it does not decide its own *significance*. Performative action can perform *because it is action interpreted as being significant*. To be significant means *to be endowed with value*. And value cannot be conferred by the same subject that signifies with its action. If in addition to having meaning the performative action of condemning is an event that affects the established order and provokes changes, this is because it is endowed with value and significance. Performative action presupposes a preceding communicative act that confers such value. Performative verbal action is action that must be interpreted to have meaning, but in order to be performative action, that is, action capable of having an effect, of producing change, it has already been interpreted. In other words, performative action has already received an interpretation that is antecedent and foundational with respect to the relation it constitutes at the moment of occurrence. Antecedence involves interpretation processes that have already invested performative action with significance.

The term “significance” is used by Victoria Welby in triadic correlation with “sense” and “meaning” (see 7.5; see also Petrilli, 2009a: chapter 3). With reference to this terminology, the claim is that the “meaning” of action presupposes “sense” understood as deriving from “to sense,” and not only as “orientation,” “direction.” To achieve performativity, verbal action must be “sensed,” “felt,” if not by the speaker who accomplishes the action, certainly by the partners addressed in a given communicative context. In addition to sense which is connected to listening, verbal action also presupposes significance. Unlike significance, sense is immediately associated with the senses, with feeling, with the sentiments or passions, while significance refers to the values that regulate a community, flourish in it, whether a minimal community (e.g., a couple), or a community that is more or less extended, more or less comprehensive.

Both Rossi-Landi (1961) and Bakhtin before him (1926) reflect on the relation between “explicit meanings” and “implied meanings.” Rossi-Landi distinguishes between “initial meanings,” which are explicit and communicated directly, and “additional meanings,” which are implicit and unsaid, showing how “initial meanings” to subsist as such depend on “additional meanings.” According to Bakhtin, every utterance is an “enthymeme” given that it always involves implicit meaning, as in the case of the syllogism where one of two premises is implied. “Additional meanings” understood as “implied meanings” are related to values, which is an aspect underlined by Bakhtin more than by Rossi-Landi. More exactly, implied meanings are related to values shared by partners in the communication relation. The implication is that a given communicative event is not only endowed with meaning, but is also significant. In *Significance and Signification* (1964), Charles Morris distinguishes between two meanings of the term “meaning”: *signification* refers to what something signifies on a semantic level; *significance* refers to the value of what is signified on an axiological level. Welby also uses the term “significance” for implied meaning connected with values and, in fact, all her research revolves around the relation between signs and values, therefore between semantics and axiology.

Verbal action stages “explicit meanings” or “initial meanings” on the semantic and pragmatic level. These presuppose “implied meanings” or “additional meanings,” better indicated with the term “significance” to distinguish them from the former. While the meaning of verbal action, that is, explicit or initial meaning on the semantic and the pragmatic level, depends on the speaking subject, on the author, instead, significance is implied and therefore is antecedent to verbal action. However, verbal

action becomes a performative word thanks to significance. The “sense” of a word, that is to say, that the word is perceived or felt as it is, to an extent is also determined by the subject. The speaking subject can resort to rhetorical devices to impress the word and make it felt. This is not true of significance which, on the contrary, presupposes communicative contexts that preexist with respect to the speaking subject and to the text that the subject utters.

Verbal action can also modify or subvert preexisting communicative contexts by interrogating significance and substituting habitual values. This occurs when values connected with a given communicative context cannot be taken for granted, are no longer implied, but rather are thematized and become the direct object of discussion and critique. So long as a communicative relation persists (whether this involves a small community—self, a couple—or the extended community), the significance of verbal action is determined by the values implied in a given context. When significance is questioned, the customary communicative context is already in crisis. Verbal action depends on the communicative situation. If the word questions the communicative situation and proposes new axiological referents, this is because the communicative situation itself elicits interrogation given the crisis in values, and activates new values with correlated new communicative programs. Moreover, for verbal questioning to be plausible, to even conceive the possibility of interrogating implied communicative values, the level of degeneracy is such that communication is no longer automatic, no longer proceeds smoothly, but presents disturbances, noise, entropy which can even put an end to communication. Roland Barthes (1915–80) speaks of the “rustle of language” (an expression used as the title of one of his later collections of critical essays) to refer to the verbal automatism accompanying language, which he compares to a motor that has been started up and produces a generally unnoticed rustling noise. By analogy, the “rustle of communication” persists unnoticed until a breakdown occurs in the transmission chain leading from the implied values of a communicative situation to the sense, meaning and significance of verbal action. If verbal action has an effect, this is because it responds adequately to the communicative situation and keeps account of any contradictions, of any crisis. The performing word is a response and counts as a new portmanteau word for a situation it did not produce.

In any case, the communicative relations in which portmanteau words arise, circulate, degenerate, and disappear are never homogeneous or free of internal contradictions. Consequently, as adequate as a portmanteau

word may be to a given communicative situation, it also responds to its contradictions and allows for evasion with respect to its function in a given communicative situation, for excess that somehow anticipates new communicative relations. In his essay, “*Criteri per lo studio ideologico di un autore*,” Rossi-Landi evidences the possibility of excess with respect to dominant significance, “dominant ideology” in his terminology (Petrilli, 1995b; Rossi-Landi, 1985: 167–82): as much as the author’s word is determined by the communicative situation it partakes in, it resounds all the same with a margin of overflow and excess with respect to the order of discourse (Balzac is exemplary from this point of view), and though this word expresses dominant ideology, its overtones can be ironical, parodical, critical, etc., thereby anticipating breaks and contradictions not yet completely manifest in the social. But given the margin for excess and evasion which characterizes the word, it cannot become a portmanteau word, nor its significance be acknowledged until new communicative conditions are created that allow for this.

All such phenomena should be taken into account when thematizing the problem of translation. As anticipated, the real difficulty does not consist in translating a text from one historical-natural language to another, but rather in understanding and interpreting the text, the communication that makes it possible in the first place, that renders it significant as a response, given that the text is not self-sufficient and presupposes more communicative relations than it actually installs.

Before the text in translation reaches the target language and finds adequate interpretants-translatants, the work of interpretation involves interpretants that not only do not belong to the target language, but that do not even necessarily belong to the source language. These interpretants are part of the global verbal and nonverbal sign network and emerge without one necessarily foreseeing which interpretive pathways will be followed, which portions of the network will be explored. Meaning and translation are semiotic phenomena and translatability, beyond putting two languages into communication with each other, implies evidencing the interpretants that connect the text object of translation to the communicative situation in which it is produced and to which it responds.

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Index

- Abduction, 54–55, 106–107,
142–147, 154–156,
199, 223
see also Retroduction
- Act, 218
Communicative–, 254
–of interpretation, 216–218
Speech–, 253–254
- Action, 218, 254–257
–and automatism, 176–178
Communicative–, 254–255
Sign–, 73, 92–97, 100–102, 127
Verbal–, 254–257
see also Sign, Signification
- Aesthetics, 60–62
Transcendental–, 3–6
- Agapasm, 63–65, 142–146
- Agape, 62, 146
see also Love
- Agapism, 177
- Alterity, 7, 109, 131, 187–188, 209–210,
222, 225
see also Otherness
- Ambiguity, 129, 147, 152–153,
213–216
see also Confusion, Meaning, Critique
of plain meaning
- Anancasm, 142–144
- Ananchism, 177
- Anders, Günther, 183
- Animal, 84, 111, 115, 118, 122, 181
Rational–, 11, 69
Reasonable–, 69
Semiothic–, 13
Semiotic–, 10–14, 70, 92, 149, 189
- Answerability, 172–173
Art and–, 170–173
see also Responsibility
- Anthropocentrism,
Critique of–, 57, 73, 83–85
- Anthropomorphism, 84
- Anthroposemiosis, 10, 19, 57, 58, 73,
85, 104, 115, 118, 123, 145, 149,
232–233
- Anthroposemiotics, 80, 93, 97, 118–119,
150
- Arendt, Hannah, 1, 127
- Aristotle, 149, 173, 194
- Arnold, Edwin, 228
- Artusi, Pellegrino, 242
- Augustine, Saint, 92, 96, 149
- Autruì*, 19, 45, 68, 158, 173
see also Alterity, Other, Otherness
- Automatism, 176–178
see also Action, subjectivity
- Bakhtin, Mikhail, xiii, xvi, xvii, 8, 13,
18, 28, 44, 52, 53, 69, 116, 117,
129, 130, 131, 132, 133, 135,
136, 137, 150, 159, 160, 162,
165, 169, 171, 172, 176, 179,
186, 193, 211, 212, 216, 231,
238, 245, 250, 252, 255
- Baluska, Franteseck, 91
- Barbieri, Marcello, 90, 91
- Barthes, Roland, 72, 81, 131, 150, 169,
172, 177, 193, 256
- Being,
–and communication,
see Communication
–and its shadow, 68, 221
–otherwise, 60, 189, 221
Otherwise than–, 35, 60, 189, 221–222
- Berkeley, George, 99
- Berlusconi, Silvio, 25
- Binarism, 141, 178–179
see also Dialogism, Triadism
- Biosemiotics, 9, 15, 71–73, 75–79,
85–93, 116–119, 125, 150, 184
- Biosphere,
–and dialogism, 7–8
–and modeling, 9–10

- and semiosis, 123, 150
- and semiosphere, 57–58, 85–86, 93–96
- and translational processes, 232
see also Semio(bio)sphere
- Black, Max, 194, 229
- Blanchot, Maurice, 44, 46, 173
- Body, 8, 18, 34–36, 51–52, 136–137, 145, 200–213
 - and consciousness, 51–52
 - and dialogue, 8
 - and global communication, 3–5
 - and self, 49–51
 - and sign, 51
 - Grotesque–, 8–9, 18, 137
see also Intercorporeity
- Boll, Mette, 90
- Bonfantini, Massimo A., 128, 155, 179, 180, 182, 183, 186, 189, 197
- Boole, George, 54
- Boole, Mary Everest, 54, 145, 228
- Borges, Luis, 173
- Bouissac, Paul, 82, 83, 125
- Bradbury, Ray, v
- Bradley, Andrew C., 228
- Bréal, Michel, 228
- Bruni, Luis, 91
- Bruno, Giordano, 173
- Bühler, Karl, 150

- Calderoni, Mario, 217
- Calvino, Italo, 173
- Capitalism, 5–9, 30, 41, 188
- Cassirer, Ernst, 102, 150
- Cézanne, Paul, 141, 223
- Chaplin, Charlie, 110
- Chardin, Theilhard de, Pierre, 93
- Chatwin, Bruce, 228
- Chomsky, Noam, v, 115, 123, 125, 151, 161, 162, 163, 165, 201
- Cobley, Paul, 6, 75, 88, 126, 140
- Colapietro, Vincent, vii, xiii, xix, 65, 180
- Communication, xii–xvii, 1–16, 19–23, 36–42, 113–131, 252–258
 - Animal–, 72, 74, 83, 84, 90, 113, 115, 117, 151
 - and being, 2–3
 - and conditions of possibility, 252–258
 - and globalization, 45–46, 59, 69, 188
 - and intercorporeity, 7–11
 - and interpretation/translation, 231–235, 243–247
 - and language, 121–126
 - and responsibility, 10–15
 - and speech, 113–115
 - and otherness, 115–120
 - models, 5, 127–131
 - production, 2–3, 14–23, 37–40, 59–60, 70, 188–189
 - Critique of–, xii, 187–189, 193
 - Global–, 1–7, 19–23, 45–46, 59, 69–70, 167, 187–188
 - and global semiotics, xvi, 1–7
 - Nonhuman animal communication, 72–74, 83–85, 111–118, 122, 151, 182
 - Transcultural–, 36–40, 44–45
 - World–, 1–2, 9, 26, 47, 188
- Community, 66, 106, 137, 154, 183, 207, 255–256
 - and the other, 33–36
 - Closed/open–, 28, 33–35
see also Identity, Otherness
- Competence,
 - Linguistic–, 163–164, 201
- Comprehension,
 - Answering– (or Responsive Understanding), 15, 53–54, 131–135, 139, 164–68, 171, 187, 193–194, 203, 231, 239–340, 250
see also Interpretant, Understanding
- Confusion, 51, 115, 140, 213, 220
see also Ambiguity
- Consciousness (carnal, social, spiritual), 211
- Context, 204, 211, 216, 241, 255–256
- Continuity, 28–29, 44–45, 47, 61–62, 69, 88, 96, 118, 143–146, 170, 211
see also Synechism
- Copernicus, Nicolaus, 214
- Cosmology, 144
- Cosmosemiosis, 67
- Cossiga, Francesco, 182
- Creativity,
 - Linguistic–, 161–162, 201
- Culture, 110, 137, 177, 188, 196, 201
 - and nature, 86, 91, 96,
 - Popular–, 8, 18

- Cust, Nina, 54, 126, 145, 228
 Cybersemiotics, 97
 Cytosemiotics, 97
- Danesi, Marcel, 74, 76, 125, 126, 151, 197, 200, 201
 Deception, 111, 117, 180–183
 Deduction, 144, 147, 154–156, 177, 199, 223, 225, 240
see also Inference
 Deely, John, 10, 57, 74, 91, 92, 97, 124, 126
 Deferral,
 –and difference, xv–xvi, 55
 –and identity, 28–29
 –and interpretation, 152–154, 169
 –and meaning, 152–156, 193–204
 –and semiosis, 55–56, 60–61, 133, 146, 159, 179, 187
 –and subjectivity, 136–138, 210–211, 247
 –and translation, 247–250
see also Renvoi, Shift, Translation
 Deleuze, Gilles, 178, 238, 253
 Deledalle, Gérard, 156
 Derrida, Jacques, xiii, 27, 40, 187, 193, 232, 239
 Designatum, 109, 168, 182
see also Referent, Significatum
 Desire, xvii, 21, 54, 67, 145–146
 Detotalization, xviii, 7–9, 17, 36, 69, 120
see also Method
 Diachrony, 128
 Diagnostics, 75, 88
 Diagram, 107, 110–111, 116, 219, 224, 250
 Dialogism, xviii, 7–10, 17–19, 61–65, 127–139, 145–147, 155–156, 173–181, 187, 194, 204–208, 238–246
 –and intercorporeity, xviii, 7–10, 130–133, 137
 Formal/Substantial –, 9, 131, 136–137, 181
 Dialogue, 7–9, 119–120, 131–132, 136–137, 158–159, 179–181, 183–190
 –and translation, 231–232
 Socratic–, 136–137
see also Intercorporeity, Otherness
- Difference, xiii–xvi, 17–21, 23–25, 26–29, 40–44, 60, 65, 68–69, 176, 182, 186–187, 189, 220–222
 Critique of–, 17–36
 Cultural–, 34–35, 44–47
 Signs of–, 26–29
 Unindifferent–, 26–29, 65, 189
 Discontinuity, 44, 174, 176
 Discourse, 181, 183–190
 Direct–, 235–239, 246–247
 Free indirect–, 237–238
 Indirect–, 236–239, 246
 Lying–, 180–181
 Order of–, 46, 49, 53, 176, 257
 Reported–, 231–239, 245–246
 Dissatisfaction/Satisfaction, 22, 55, 218
 Doctrine of signs, 81, 83–96, 123, 199
 Dostoevsky, Fyodor M., 245
- Eco, Umberto, 61, 72, 82, 121, 128, 130, 133, 148, 153, 154, 181, 197, 219, 212
 Edelin, Kenneth, 111
 Eeden, Frederik van, 228
 Einstein, Albert, 23, 24, 26
 El-Hani, Charbel, 90
 Emmeche, Claus, 89, 90, 91
 Endosemiotics, 73, 97–98, 116
 Ephemeron, 49, 175
see also Ident, Identity, Self, Subjectivity
 Equal exchange,
 Logic of–, 6, 20, 32–36, 128–133, 169–176, 184–188
 Semiotics of–, 128–133, 159–170
 Ethics, 13–16, 62
 –of narrativity, 174–175
 –of terminology, 229
 Evolution, 55, 63–64, 73–74, 95–96, 142, 146, 214
 Modes of evolutionary development, 142–146
 Excess,
 Logic of –, 32–36, 50–51, 133, 153–159, 168–169, 174–176, 184–188, 257
 –and subjectivity, 50–51, 222
 Exchange, *see* Equal–
 Exotopy, *see* Extralocalization

- Expressibility, 244, 245
 –and translation, 243–247
- Extracommunitarian other, 33–37
see also Other, Otherness
- Extralocalization/Extralocality
 (Exotopy), 29, 131, 168,
 170–174, 194
 –and translation, 246–248
- Fallacy, 84, 248
Pars pro toto–, 71, 85, 114, 119, 150
 Plain meaning–, 193, 213, 240
- Fano, Giorgio, 78
- Favareau, Donald, 90, 125
- Fear, 30
 –for the other, 27, 67–68
 –of the other, 30–33, 63–68
- Figuration (picturing, depiction), 201
see also Representation
- Firstness, 140–144, 179, 224
- Fisch, Max, 82, 200
- Florkin, Marcel, 89, 90
- Foscolo, Ugo, 173
- Foucault, Michel, 17, 18
- Frazer, James G., 110
- Freedom, 14, 34, 40, 172–173, 175,
 177
- Freud, Sigmund, 150, 170, 171, 195
- Functionality, 174–176, 183–185, 189
- Future, xv–xviii, 74, 209–210
- Gaia, 93, 96, 98, 106
 –hypothesis, 92–99, 106
- Galen of Pergamon, 11, 75, 81, 88, 149,
 185
- Galilei, Galileo, 173
- Gandelman, Claude, 173
- Gardiner, John W., 124
- Genitive,
 Ethic–, 67
 Object–, 67
 Subject–, 67
see also Fear
- Genre, 29, 34–36, 198
 Discourse–, 242–243, 251
- Globalization, xvii, 1–7, 29–33, 59, 69,
 184, 188
see also Communication and–
- Glottocentrism, 73
 Critique of–, 73, 84
- Goethe, Johann W., 173
- Gorn, Saul, 85
- Grammar, 115, 207, 209
 Bigradual theory of generative–, 162
 Transformational generative–, 178
 Universal generative grammar, 161,
 163, 178
- Gramsci, Antonio, 177
- Graves, Robert, 78
- Greenstein, George, 93
- Ground, 133, 141, 219–222
- Guattari, Félix, 178, 238, 253, 265
- Hagège, Claude, 46
- Hardwick, Charles S., 55, 65, 95, 96,
 110, 134, 138, 208
- Hediger, Heini, 124
- Hegel, Georg W. F., 216
- Herzfeld, Michael, 125
- Heterogeneity, 140, 177, 220
- Heteroglossia, 147, 160–161, 168, 174
see also Plurilingualism
- Hjelmslev, Louis, 81, 178, 244
- Hippocrates of Cos, 11, 75, 81, 88, 149,
 185, 186
- Hobbes, Thomas, 30
- Hodgson, Shadworth, 211
- Hoffmeyer, Jesper, 89, 90, 91
- Homer, 216
- Homogeneity, 140, 220
- Homology/Analogy, 37, 107, 117–118,
 197–199, 213, 218, 245
see also Method
- Homo*, 10–11, 57–58, 97, 99, 114, 151,
 207,
 –*sapiens sapiens*, 98, 122–123
- Hospitality, xvii–xviii, 3, 7, 17, 27,
 30–36, 43–47, 174, 227
- Houser, Nathan, 79
- Humanism, 10–15, 22
 –of identity, 56, 189
 –of otherness, xviii, 55–60, 70, 189
- Humanitas*, *humus*, *humilitas*, 86
- Humanities and the life sciences, 86–88
- Husserl, Edmund, 140, 141, 160, 185,
 217, 218, 219, 220
- Icon, 105–113, 117, 131, 139–142, 156,
 177–178, 194, 200, 219–225,
 239–241
- Iconism,
 Primary–, 140–141, 219–223

- Iconicity, 53, 63, 83, 95, 105–112, 125, 137–140, 143–145, 155–156, 179, 194, 197, 224–229, 240–241
- Ident, 49–51, 175, *see also* Ephemeron, Identity, Self, Subjectivity
- Identity, xi–xii, xv, 26–29
- Closed–, xv–xviii, 17, 23, 26–29, 35–36, 49, 56–57, 131, 136, 172, 175, 186
- Critique of–, 17–36, 170–173, 187–189
- Oppositional–, xi–xv
see also Ephemeron, Ident, Self, Subjectivity
- Ideology, xvi, 8–9, 24, 36–40, 53–54, 60, 133, 157–169, 183–190
- Critique of–, 162, 165, 187
- End of–, 165–167
see also Sign theory
- Image, 107, 111–112, 206, 112, 219–224, 250
- Imagery, 195, 211–215
- Imitation, 212, 239, 24
see also Image
- Immortality, 49, 210–212
- Index, 79, 93, 102, 105–111, 138–143, 155–156, 177–178, 194, 208, 223–224, 228, 239
- Indexicality, 106, 137–140, 143–144, 179, 220, 239–241
- Indifference, 19, 27–28, 35–36, 59, 173, 188
see also Difference
- Induction, 54, 106, 142, 144, 147, 154–156, 178, 199, 223, 225
- Inference, 107, 140–147, 152–155, 199, 205
- Three types of–, 54, 154
see also Abduction, Deduction, Induction
- Information, –theory, 167, 178
- Innovation, 20, 47, 139, 145, 156, 163, 192–194, 196–199
- Intercorporeity, xvii, 7–10, 51–52, 65–69, 130, 137
- Interlocutor, 44, 52, 68, 139, 216, 241
- Interpretant, 7–9, 52–58, 61, 65–66, 79, 85, 93–95, 112, 103–105, 129–130, 133–135, 147–148, 153, 155, 164, 194, 239, 247
see also Interpreted
- Interpretation, xii, 101–117, 128–130, 135–137, 167–170, 212–217, 231–235
see also Meaning, Sense, Significance
- Interpreted, 61, 65–66, 101, 103, 106–107, 112, 129, 135, 145–148, 152–155, 165, 171, 236, 239, 247
see also Interpretant
- Interpreter, 79, 94, 133–134, 170, 242–244, 247, 250
- Interpretive trajectory (or route), 52, 152–154, 202, 248
- Ivanov, Vjačeslav, V., 10, 150
- Jacob, François, 95, 150
- Jakobson, Roman, 57, 72, 78, 87, 110, 124, 200, 231, 232
- James, Henry, 64, 228
- James, William, 228
- Jowett, Benjamin, 216, 228
- Kanaev, Ivan I., 117
- Kant, Immanuel, 80, 99, 163, 173, 174, 216
- Kierkegaard, Søren, 173
- Kilstrup, Mogen, 90
- Knowledge, 9, 47, 52–55, 60–63, 134–135, 149, 163–165, 169, 182, 185, 192–198, 208–210, 213, 215, 218, 222–227
 –acquisition, 53, 163, 167, 182, 192–193, 195–196, 213–215, 225
- Koerner, Konrad, 124, 125
- Kollontaj, Aleksandra M., v
- Krampen, Martin, 73, 97
- Kristeva, Julia, 72, 171, 193
- Kull, Kalevi, 88, 89, 90, 91, 126
- Kundera, Milan, 242, 243
- Lalande, André, 228
- Language, xi, xvii, 28, 37, 121–126, 157–165, 173–178, 232
- Critique of–, 165, 189, 193
- Historical-natural–, 10, 150–152, 233–235, 238–240, 242, 245, 246, 248–257
- acquisition, 167,
- as modeling, 150–152
- of languages, 250–252

- Special-, 237–238, 241–243,
245–246, 250, 252–253
see also Communication, *Langue*,
Modeling
- Langue / Parole*, 128–130, 132–133,
166, 177, 232–233, 241, 245
- Laziczius, Gyula, 77
- Leopardi, Giacomo, 173
- Lepschy, Giulio C., 241
- Lévi-Strauss, Claude, 83, 85, 124, 128
- Levinas, Emmanuel, xiii, xvi, xvii, 13,
14, 18, 27, 28, 35, 40, 43, 44, 48,
51, 54, 56, 60, 62, 67, 68, 122,
129, 146, 158, 159, 162, 172,
173, 174, 176, 185, 188, 189,
193, 196, 211, 221, 222, 223
- Life, xv–xviii, 1–3, 5–7, 10–12, 20
Care for–, 11–15
Signs and–, 5–7, 92–100
see also Responsibility
- Likeness, 106–108, 192–194, 198–200,
206, 218–219, 221–224, 240–241
see also Resemblance, Similarity
- Linguistic creativity, 10, 161–162,
196–202
- Linguistics, 242, 250
Cognitive–, 200–202
- Listening, xvi, xviii, 4, 12, 15–16,
35–36, 43–47, 65, 69, 87, 158,
173–175, 183, 253–255
- Logic,
Binary–, 178
Critique of–, 178,
–as dia-logic, xviii, 53, 65, 156, 187
Poetic–, 200
see also Equal exchange, Excess
- Locke, John, 80, 81, 85, 87, 96, 99, 200
- Lortholary, Bernard, 243
- Lotman, Jurij M., 10, 75, 87, 91, 116,
150
- Lotz, John, 77
- Love, 14, 50–51, 62–68, 142–146, 253
see also Agapasm, Agape, Agapism
- Lovelock, James, 93
- Lying discourse, 181
see also Deception
- Mandela, Nelson, v
- Mannoury, Gerrit, 125
- Manzoni, Alessandro, 173
- Maran, Timo, 90, 97
- Margulis, Lynn, 95
- Market, 3, 20, 22, 26, 28, 31–32, 39–40,
45, 59, 165
Linguistic–, 254
- Markos, Anton, 91
- Martinet, André, 203
- Marx, Karl, 8, 157, 162, 165, 173, 183,
195
- Materiality, 62, 170, 206, 210
Physical–, 206–210
Semiotic–, 155, 162, 169–170, 203,
206–210, 247
- Matthew, St., 191
- Mead, Margaret, 81
- Mead, George H., 118
- Meaning, 214–216
Additional/Implied–, 227, 255
Critique of plain–, 192–195, 213–217
Initial/Explicit–, 255
Literal, direct or actual–, 192–193,
212–229
–and theme, 56
–and truth, 202–205, 209, 226
–and value, 21, 37, 166, 167, 205, 254
–triad (sense, meaning, significance),
52, 65
Metaphorical, indirect, or figurative–,
221–229
Plasticity of–, 192, 213–216,
Semiotic nature of–, 193, 213
Third value of–, 215–216
see also Interpretation, Mediation,
Metaphor, Sense, Significance
- Mediation, 86, 93, 134, 137, 142–143
- Memory, 170–171, 201, 207
- Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 141, 185, 222,
223
- Merrell, Floyd, 87, 134, 156, 229
- Metalinguistics, 160, 180, 244–246
- Metaphor, xviii, 68, 86, 107, 176,
191–202, 206–223, 224–229
–and critique, 215–219
see also Diagram, Image
- Metaphorization, 192–195, 200–214,
226–227
- Metasemiosis, 10–11, 15, 58, 68, 86, 149
see also Semiotics
- Method, 117–120, 157–161, 171–172,
194, 204, 215
see also Detotalization,
Homology/Analogy

- Migration, 3, 21, 29–33, 36–37
 Mind, 220, 221, 224–225
 Modeling, xviii, 4, 7–10, 20, 52, 58, 68,
 74–75, 113–114, 123, 144–145,
 150–152, 191–202
 Primary–, 10–11, 68, 75, 115, 123,
 150–152, 201–202
 Secondary–, 10, 75, 115, 123,
 150–151, 201
 Tertiary–, 75, 123, 151, 201
 see also Language, Speech, Writing
 Monod, Jacques, 150
 Monologism, 49, 56, 60, 193
 see also Univocality
 Morris, Charles, xiii, xvi, xvii, 13, 21,
 25, 33, 41, 58, 60, 67, 68, 69,
 72, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83,
 85, 86, 87, 93, 95, 97, 118, 124,
 146, 149, 150, 151, 169, 185,
 200, 255
 Moro, Aldo, 125, 183
 Mother-sense (or Primal sense), 52–55
 Mother-wit, 53
 Multiculturalism, 35, 37
 Multivoicedness, 152, 160, 174
 see also Heteroglossia,
 Plurilingualism
 Murdoch, Rupert, 24
 Mycosemiotics, 97, 116

 Narrativity, 46, 174–175, 226–227
 see also Storytelling
 Neruda, Pablo, 226
 Nomination, 120–121
 Nuessel, Frank, 124, 125

 Object,
 Dynamical–, 134, 138–139, 141, 219,
 222
 Immediate–, 134, 141, 219, 222
 Obsistence, 140–142
Œuvre, 56, 176
 Ogden, Charles K., 150, 203, 205, 228
 Opposition, 33–34, 132, 141, 172,
 178–179, 215
Orality, 46–47
 Originality, 140–142
 Orwell, George, 173
 Osgood, Charles E., 124
 Other,
 Extracommunitarian–, 33–37
 Absolute–, xv, 32, 158
 Care for the–, xvii, 45, 58, 63
 Discourse of the–, 235–242
 see also Translation, Translator
 Relative–, xv
 Rights of the–, 40, 70
 Otherness, ix–xiii, xv–xviii, 17–19,
 26–36, 43–45, 48–58,
 60–68, 87, 103, 116–121,
 127–133, 135–136, 138–143,
 145–149, 153–156, 158–160,
 168–169, 171–181, 187–189,
 191–196, 203–211, 221–222,
 231, 240, 247
 Absolute–, xvi, 7, 19, 27, 29,
 33–34, 36, 49, 51, 67, 139, 142,
 172–174, 176, 187, 195
 Dialogic–, 50, 54, 145, 147, 243
 Humanism of–, 56, 70, 189
 Relative–, 7, 33–35, 51, 142, 172
 see also Alterity, *Autruì*, Dialogism,
 Dialogue, Subjectivity
 Outsideness, 172, 176
 see also Extralocalization

 Paré, Joseph, 46
 Pareto, Vilfredo F., 128, 165
 Pasolini, Pier Paolo, 173, 183
 Passion, 54, 145,
 –of signs, 171, 174, 175
 –*see also* Passivity
 Passivity, 54, 175
 see also Passion
 Peace, 14, 44, 69, 188
 Performance, 163–164
 Peirce, Charles S., xii, xiii, xv, xvi, 9, 18,
 24, 25, 47, 48, 50, 51, 52, 63, 54,
 60, 61, 62, 63, 64, 65, 66, 67, 68,
 71, 72, 79, 80, 81, 82, 84, 85, 87,
 88, 93, 95, 96, 99, 104, 105, 106,
 107, 108, 109, 110, 117, 120,
 124, 127, 130, 131, 132, 133,
 134, 135, 136, 138, 139, 141,
 142, 143, 144, 145, 146, 147,
 149, 150, 154, 155, 156, 169,
 170, 173, 178, 179, 186, 192,
 193, 194, 195, 197, 199, 200,
 205, 206, 207, 208, 210, 211,
 212, 217, 219, 220, 223, 224,
 228, 231, 239, 240, 248
 Peter of Spain, 156, 173

- Petrilli, Susan, xi, xii, xiii, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 16, 30, 32, 34, 39, 43, 45, 46, 49, 52, 53, 54, 55, 64, 65, 69, 77, 78, 80, 81, 94, 96, 97, 104, 105, 106, 107, 109, 115, 117, 122, 123, 125, 126, 131, 142, 145, 146, 148, 152, 156, 159, 169, 170, 175, 179, 185, 188, 193, 194, 200, 203, 204, 205, 226, 228, 236, 248, 253, 255, 257
- Phenomenology, 140–143, 159, 184
- Philodemus, 93
- Philosophy of language, 129, 146, 157–161, 165, 183–185
- Phonocentrism, Critique of–, 151
- Phyosemiotics, 73, 92, 97–98, 116
- Planning, Social–, xvi, 22, 24, 36–43, 162
- Philodemus, 93
- Plato, 55, 136, 173, 216
- Pluridiscursivity, 203
- Plurilingualism, 129, External–, 129 Internal–, 129, 131, 160, 169, 213, 245 *see also* Heteroglossia
- Plurivocality, 60, 110, 129, 147–149, *see also* Plurilingualism, Polylogism
- Poe, Edgar Allan, 101, 173, 197, 225
- Poinsot, John (= Joannes a Sancto Thoma), 96
- Political economy, 166 –and linguistics, 163, 165–167
- Polylogism, 53, 60, 129, 160, 179, 195, 213
- Polysemy, 129, 132, 147, 193, 216 *see also* Plurilingualism, Plurivocality
- Ponzio, Augusto, xi, xvi, xvii, xix, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 16, 26, 28, 30, 32, 34, 43, 45, 46, 64, 65, 67, 76, 77, 80, 81, 94, 97, 105, 115, 122, 125, 128, 129, 130, 131, 132, 142, 146, 147, 154, 155, 156, 157, 158, 159, 160, 161, 163, 164, 165, 166, 167, 168, 169, 170, 171, 172, 173, 174, 176, 177, 178, 179, 180, 182, 183, 184, 185, 186, 187, 188, 189, 194, 200, 201, 226
- Posner, Roland, 123, 125, 178
- Prezzolini, Giuseppe, 182
- Prodi, Giorgio, 74, 75, 87, 88, 90, 221
- Proni, Giampaolo, 197
- Production, Linguistic–, 161–166
- Proust, Marcel, 173
- Psychoanalysis, 13, 170–171
- Psycholinguistics, 74, 124–125
- Quinlan, Karen A., 111
- Rabelais, François, 8, 18
- Radford, Michael, 226
- Realism, Grotesque–, 18
- Reason, 22, 62, 65, 69, 211–212 Critique of–, 4–5 Dialogic–, 4–6, 189 Father–, 52
- Reasonableness, From Reason to–, 60–65, 211–212
- Referent, 52, 168–169, 202–205 *see also* Designatum, Significatum
- Relativity, Linguistic–, 245
- Renvoi/* Deferral, xv–xvi, 60–61, 79, 133–135, 138, 152–153, 179, 187 *see also* Difference, Shift
- Repeatability, 250–252
- Representation, 56, 79–80, 111, 162, 200–201, 211
- Representamen, 106, 133, 147, 179, 224
- Reproduction, Social–, 2, 19–26, 30–33, 37–40, 162–168, 172–179, 188–189
- Resemblance, 106–108, 182, 221–222, 224 *see also* Likeness, Similarity
- Residue, Semiotic–, 153 Sign–, 153 Uninterpreted sign–, 152–153
- Responsibility, 10–14 Limited or special–, 13, 35, 172 –and life, 13–14 Unlimited–, 13, 172, 211–212 *see also* Answerability
- Restitution, 43–47, 171
- Retroduction, 155, 199 *see also* Abduction

- Richards, Ivor A., 150, 194, 202, 205, 227, 228
- Rights,
 Human-, 40, 56
- Rimbaud, Arthur, 196
- Robering, Klaus, 178
- Romanes, George, 150
- Ross, Gibson, 228
- Rossi-Landi, Ferruccio, xi, xvi, 6, 24, 37, 38, 39, 52, 60, 72, 77, 94, 99, 100, 104, 107, 117, 128, 162, 163, 165, 166, 167, 177, 186, 195, 227, 245, 255, 257.
- Russell, Bertrand, 228
- Sagan, Dorian, 95
- Shaumjan, Sebastian K., 161
- Saussure, Ferdinand de, 73, 80, 81, 83, 84, 128, 129, 147, 149, 150, 165, 166, 167
- Schaff, Adam, xi, 162, 166, 169, 173
- Science,
 Exact-, 160
 Life-, 64, 71, 74, 85–86, 117, 197
 Rigorous-, 160, 185
- Schiller, Ferdinand C. S., 205, 228
- Schmitz, H. Walter, 186, 228
- Sebeok, Thomas A., xiii, xvi, xviii, 10, 47, 57, 70, 71, 72, 74, 75, 76, 77, 78, 79, 80, 81, 82, 83, 84, 85, 86, 87, 88, 89, 90, 91, 92, 93, 94, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99, 100, 101, 102, 104, 105, 106, 109, 110, 111, 112, 113, 114, 115, 117, 118, 120, 121, 122, 123, 124, 125, 126, 149, 150, 151, 178, 181, 182, 185, 186, 200, 201, 217, 232
- Secondness, 109–110, 140–144, 156, 179
- Self, 54, 175, 188, 207–211, 218, 237, 245
 Transcendental-, 159
 see also Ephemeron, Ident, Identity, Subjectivity
- Semantics, 81, 202–203, 255
- Semeiotics, xvii, 11–12, 81–82, 102, 149, 185–186
 see also Symptomatology
- Semio(bio)sphere, 7, 11, 14–15, 57, 184
- Semioethics, xvii, 5, 10–19, 55–60, 69–70, 80, 170, 185–186, 224–231
- Semiology, 80–82, 93, 97, 119–120, 127, 134, 179
- Semiosis, 5–7, 10–15, 26–29, 85–105, 121–125, 127–135, 140–150
 Common -, 52, 163
 Proto- 74, 97, 221
 Quasi- 97, 104
 –and communication, 9
 –and life, *see* Life
 –with and without language, 121–125
 Spheres of-, xviii, 7
 see also Anthroposemiosis, Cosmosemiosis, Metasemiosis
- Semiosphere, xvii, 7, 43, 57, 75, 93, 116, 118, 121, 145, 146, 150
 see also Biosphere, Semio(bio)sphere
- Semiotic animal, *see* Animal
- Semiotic materiality, 34, 49, 61, 139, 147, 152–155, 169, 207, 210, 247
 see also Residue
- Semiotics/Semiotic,
 Code-, 76, 84
 Cognitive-, 15–16, 57, 61, 135, 212
 Communication-, 150
 –and conditions of possibility, 80–81, 252–257
 Decodification (or Equal Exchange)-, 128, 130, 167–170
 Global-, 1–7, 15–17, 57–59, 71–76, 85, 90–92, 118–120, 149–151, 178, 184–185, 189
- Interpretation-, 76–77, 84, 130, 167–170
- Signification-, 150
- Task of-, 80, 166
- Text-, 150
 see also Semioethics
- Sense, 246–247, 255–256
 see also Interpretation, Meaning, Mother-sense, Sensibility, Significance
- Sensibility, 3–7
- Sentence, 241–242, 251
- Shakespeare, William, 205, 216
- Shannon, Claude E., 128, 167
- Shift, 153–155, 174–175, 195, 204
 see also Deferral, *Renvoi*
- Shuy, Roger, 124, 125
- Sidgwick, Alfred, 228

- Sign,
 Doctrine of –, 80–81
 Objective and subjective –, 101–102
 –and life, 92–100
 –and nonsign, 100–104
 –s and values, 13, 80, 189, 212, 255
 –behavior, xvi, 13, 15, 57, 60, 75, 97
 –theory, xvii, 127–131, 131–135,
 158–161, 165–170, 231–235,
 247–250
 –typology, 105–113, 117, 142, 156,
see also Icon, Index, Symbol
 –and phenomenological categories,
 140–143
 Verbal and nonverbal–, 164, 167–169,
 184, 200, 203, 213, 248–249,
 257
- Signality, 109–110, 120, 145, 169,
 186–189
- Signifiant / Signifié* (Signifier / Signified), 159, 167–169, 179–182,
 187
- Signific Movement in the Netherlands,
 125
- Significance, 48, 51–54, 60–61, 65–68,
 168
- Signification, 52–55, 66–68, 169
see also Action, Behavior, Meaning,
 Sign, Significance, Value
- Significatum, 168
see also Designatum, Referent
- Significs, 52, 60, 65, 66, 170, 186
see also Signific Movement in the
 Netherlands
- Similarity, 10, 55, 106–112, 116–118,
 138–141, 156, 177, 193–194,
 226, 245–246
 Critique of–, 217–223
see also Likeness
- Similitude, 206, 219
- Simulation, 182, 189
- Singularity, 29, 31–35, 69, 163,
 210–211
- Snow, Charles Percy, 87
- Socialism, 23–25, 41
- Sociality, 5, 15, 19, 25–27, 33–34, 45,
 52, 162, 211
- Socrates, 136, 173
- Solimini, Maria, 77
- Speaker, 52, 162–164, 196, 245,
 249–250, 255
- Speech,
 Common–, 6, 52, 163, 167, 245
 –act, 253–254
see also Language, Modeling
- Solimini, Maria, 77
- Spencer, Herbert, 198
- Stepanov, Jurij, 89
- Sterne, Laurence, 173
- Stirner, Max, 29
- Storytelling, 45–47
see also Narrativity
- Stout, George F., 228
- Stout, Ella, 228
- Strong, Charles A., 228
- Structuralism, 127, 179, 250
- Structure, 67, 79, 112, 127, 164,
 180–181, 184, 210, 216, 227,
 242, 246
- Subjectivity, xvi–xviii, 3–4, 33–35,
 47–5, 60–63, 65–68, 144–146,
 158–162, 170–176, 205–212
 Critique of–, 62–66
 –and intercorporeity, 51–52
 –and interpretation, 135–137
 –and listening, 43–46
 –and logic, 53–55
 –and mother-sense, 52–54
 –and otherness, 50–59, 65–69
 –and responding to the other, 61–63
 –and transcendence, 53, 55, 189
see also Ephemeron, Ident,
 Identity, Self
- Svevo, Italo, 173
- Symbol, 79, 93, 102, 105–113, 137–140,
 156, 228
- Symbolicity, 92, 106, 108, 137–140,
 143–144, 154–155, 179, 220,
 239, 241
- Symbolization, 195, 208
- Symptomatology, xvii, 11–12, 75, 81,
 88, 90, 102, 149, 185
see also Semeiotics
- Synchrony, 56, 128
- Synechism, 47, 62–64, 143, 146,
 210–211
see also Continuity
- Syntax, 110, 122, 151–152, 203
- Syntactics, 13, 82, 122, 123, 151
- Szasz, Thomas, xix, 12
- Tasca, Norma, 125

- Tembrock, Günter, 92
 Text, 131, 132, 136, 235, 255–257
 –and translation, 235–252
 –semiotics, 150, 153
 Theory,
 Interpretive linguistic–, 164
 Unigradual linguistic–, 161
 Thirdness, 86, 93, 134, 138, 140–144,
 178–179, 210, 219–221
 Thom, René, 90, 95, 112, 150
 Token, 109, 219
 Tonnessen, Morten, 91
 Tönnies, Ferdinand, 33
 Toporov, Vladimir N., 10, 150
 Totality, 9–10, 18–19, 54, 58, 65,
 68, 85, 118–121, 159, 167,
 175–177
 Totalization, 9, 17, 27, 69, 129
 Transculturalism, 35, 44
 see also Multiculturalism
 Translatability, 229, 239, 243–246,
 247–250, 251–257
 Translatant, 236–247, 250–251
 Translated, 243, 247–252
 Translation, 231–250
 –and reported discourse, 235–243
 Interlingual–, 204, 232–234
 Intralingual (or endolingual)–, 204,
 232–234
 Interlinguistic–, 232–235
 Intersemiotic–, 232–235
 Intersemiotic–, 204, 232–234
 –theory and sign theory, 231–234,
 247–250
 Typology of–, 233–235
 see also Deferral
 Translator, 235–243
 Author–, 246–247
 Task of the–, 236
 –discourse, 235–242
 Transuasion, 140, 142
 Triad, 58, 65, 102, 105, 107–108, 130,
 147, 156, 177, 179, 224, 239
 Triadism, 178–179
 see also Binarism, Dialogism
 Truth, 204–205, 226
 Meaning and–, 202–205
 see also Value
 Tychasm, 142, 144
 Tychism, 177
 Troisi, Massimo, 226
 Uexküll, Jakob von, 77, 84, 88, 91, 92,
 95, 117, 124, 150
 Uexküll, Thure von, 75, 89, 124, 150
Umwelt, 58–59, 150
 Understanding, 53
 Responsive–, 53, 187, 193–197, 203,
 213, 240, 250
 Sympathetic (Agapic)–, 53, 146
 see also Comprehension, Interpretant
 Unemployment, 29–32
 Uniqueness / Singularity, 16, 29, 31,
 34–35, 49, 69, 250–252
 Univocality, 49, 60, 148, 171, 193, 204
 see also Monologism
 Utterance, 132–133, 153, 164–165,
 202–203, 237, 242, 245–246,
 250–255
 Vailati, Giovanni, xi, 173, 181, 182, 186,
 216, 217
 Valéry, Paul, 173
 Value, 62, 142, 159, 167, 184, 195,
 205–206, 210–215, 223, 226,
 241–242, 254–255
 Artistic–, 176
 Exchange–, 159, 166, 176
 Linguistic, 166–167
 Literary–, 172
 Semiotic–, 166
 Signifying–, 54, 60, 65, 210, 213, 145,
 192, 215
 Truth–, 202, 204,
 Types of–, 58
 see also Action, Sign, Signification
 Vaughan, Genevieve, 44, 187, 188
 Vernadsky, Vladimir, 93
 Vialatte, Alexandre, 243
 Vico, Giambattista, 120, 200, 201
 Voloshinov, Valentin N., 52, 117, 128,
 129, 133, 159, 165
 Vuysje, David, 125.
 Vygotskij, Lev S., 150
 Walras, Léon, 128, 167
 War, 2, 5, 14, 21–25, 44, 183, 188–189,
 228
 Walras, Léon, 128, 167
 Weaver, Warren, 128, 167
 Welby, Victoria, xii, xiii, xvi, 12, 13, 25,
 49, 50, 51, 52, 53, 54, 55, 60, 62,
 64, 65, 66, 67, 95, 96, 110, 117,

- 126, 134, 138, 145, 150, 175,
185, 186, 191, 193, 194, 195,
197, 198, 199, 200, 204, 205,
208, 211, 212, 213, 214, 215, 216,
217, 225, 228, 231, 248, 255
- Williams, Brooke, 92
- Wittgenstein, Ludwig, 115, 150, 173
- Woolf, Virginia, xix
- World, xii–xiii, xv, 1–10, 20–25, 27,
36–47, 52–55, 60, 93–97,
100–104, 112–114, 122–125,
150–152, 187–189, 213, 226, 233
- Word,
Direct–, 235–236, 246
Indirect–, 174, 235–236
- Man and–, 205–208
- Performative–, 255–256
- Portmanteau–, 253, 256–257
–and corporeity, 206
–of the other, 5, 131, 158, 174,
235–237, 246
- Work,
Linguistic work, 162–163
- Writing, 195, 206, 216,
Literary–, 174, 195
see also Language, Modeling
- Zaliznjak, Andrej A., 10, 150
- Zeman, Jay J., 112
- Zoosemiotics, 90–91, 97, 116–119