

# introduction: life in global communication

Susan Petrilli

I said to myself, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.” And I applied my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow. —Ecclesiastes, 1.16–18

Rhythm represents a unique situation where we cannot speak of consent, assumption, initiative or freedom, because the subject is caught up and carried away by it. The subject is part of its own representation. It is so not even despite itself, for in rhythm there is no longer a oneself, but rather a sort of passage from oneself to anonymity. This is the captivation incantation of poetry and music. It is a mode of being to which applies neither the form of consciousness, since the I is there stripped of its prerogative to assume, its power, nor the form of unconsciousness, since the whole situation and all its articulation are in a dark light, *present*. Such is a waking dream. Neither habits, reflexes, nor instinct operate in this light. The particular automatic character of a walk or a dance to music is a mode of being where nothing is unconscious, but where consciousness, paralyzed in its freedom, plays, totally absorbed in this playing. —Emmanuel Lévinas, “Reality and Its Shadow,” 1948

## preamble

There are different ways of viewing global communication. Before being a fact of globalization understood as a phenomenon connected with technological progress and the market, communication is a fact of life and therefore of globalization understood as a biosemiotic phenomenon. And given that communication in the human world passes through a human species-specific primary modeling device also called language that determines the capacity for suspending immediate activity and, therefore, for deliberation, communication in the human world is not only semiotic but also metasemiotic activity. If the anthropological implications are translated into what we propose to call “semio-ethical” terms, what emerges is that the biosemiotic and specifically anthroposemiotic capacity for metasemiotic, that is, sign consciousness, lays the condition for freedom and responsibility ensuing from creativity connected with the human primary modeling device. The problem of responsibility is analyzed in relation to the concepts of otherness,

intercorporeity, and dialogical interconnection, and is developed in a more strictly philosophical key in the second part of this introduction. Attention is also placed on the consequences of choosing (at varying degrees of conscious awareness) between the logic of otherness and the logic of identity for communication in the world in its various expressions, and not least significantly with reference to the political sphere, and therefore with considerations on the communication of war and peace in a globalized world.

## communication, globalization, and life

Communication is not possible without signs, so the study of communication is not possible without the study of signs. Consequently, the foundations of all sciences of communication call for a general science of signs or semiotics.

Today's world, the world we inhabit, is the world of global communication. To investigate this world we need an approach to semiotics capable of a purview that is just as global as the phenomenon under analysis. Our pivotal target in the present volume is to study communication in this situation of globalization with the instruments of semiotics or the general science of signs (see Petrilli 1998, 2005).

As argued in the theoretical part of the volume, semiotics, and in agreement with Thomas A. Sebeok (1920–2001), specifically “global semiotics,” should be founded on the science of signs as conceived by Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914). Moreover, it must be connected to different perspectives from which signs today may be critically approached: for example, feminist views, the problem of gender and the subject, cultural expressions of post-modernism, artistic communication. However, all approaches and all sign interpretations require the preliminary work of demystifying superficial inferences and false guessing.

The semiotics of Sebeok (2001), or, as he preferred, his “doctrine of signs,” provides a general plan with suitable instruments for global semiotics. Thanks to his global semiotic perspective, it is now clear that human semiosis, or anthroposemiosis, is only one special sphere of sign activity among the many in an enormous sign network. This network has been described as converging with life. Indeed, biosemiotics has demonstrated that life and sign processes (“semiosis”), in their great multiplicity of different forms populating the entire planet, converge.

The implication is that well before the advent of global communication as understood in today's capitalist, or post-capitalist, society, that is to say, well before the spread of the communication network at a worldwide level with progress in artificial intelligence, technology, and development of the global market supporting this network in socioeconomic terms, globalization was already a fact of life. In other words, there are different ways of viewing global communication, which in fact reveal different dimensions and aspects that are interrelated and mutually imply each other.

Globalization may be understood reductively as a corporate-led phenomenon characteristic of contemporary capitalist society. This phenomenon invests the entire reproductive system in its globality, in its various phases—production, circulation, and consumption—with wide-ranging and often devastating effects over the entire planet. But globalization may also be understood in biosemiotic terms, that is to say, as a tendency that characterizes the evolution of life from its origins (Ponzio and Petrilli 2001).

Globalization in this second acceptance is the structural condition provided by the processes of evolutionary development for the proliferation of life itself over the planet, in

its multiform and interconnected manifestations, which are sign manifestations. As a specific form of life, the human, we are born into a sign network that is preexistent with respect to specific ontogenetic, even phylogenetic phenomena, presumably as a potential contribution to the further development of this network. The sphere of anthroposemiosis appears relatively late on the evolutionary scale and develops interrelatedly with the other spheres of semiosis, which coincide with the superkingdoms—microsemiosis, phytosemiosis, mycosemiosis, zoosemiosis, of which anthroposemiosis is a specification. Together these form the global biosemiosphere. And, of course, with ongoing progress in the development of life and technology, other spheres of semiosis, ranging from endosemiosis to cybersemiosis, continue to emerge and are studied by just as many branches of semiotics from a global semiotic perspective (see Posner et al. 1997–2004).

Global communication is a fact of life from which we cannot prescind, if life, including the human, is to continue flourishing globally as foreseen by the nature of sign activity (see Ponzio 2002b). On the contrary, globalization understood in terms of today's global socioeconomic system, that is to say, as corporate-led globalization, is neither inevitable nor desirable, and indeed even threatens to destroy life on Earth as we know it.

Global communication as understood in terms of today's social reproductive system is only one aspect of the great web of communication formed by life over the entire planet Earth. All life forms may be analyzed in terms of dynamical sign systems. In fact, in this volume human life is not only considered in the fundamental terms of biosemiosis, which, for what concerns us here, serves to evidence the relation of dialogical interdependency with all other life forms on Earth, therefore the condition of global interconnectedness, but it is also put into focus in its specificity as anthroposociosemiosis, therefore as sociocultural semiosis.

## communication, metasemiosis, and the semioethic capacity

Our emphasis is on what appears on a surface level as a dual modality, at the very least, of existing in the world, characteristic of semiosis among human beings. In the first place, the human being exists as a biological organism flourishing interconnectedly with other organisms populating the great *biosphere*. This first modality, therefore, is one we share with all other organisms inasmuch as, according to recent findings in biosemiotic research, the biosphere as a whole is a semiosphere. Second, differently from other life forms, human beings have a distinctly species-specific impact on the semiosphere (or biosemiosphere). In fact, as so-called “semiotic animals,” human beings are endowed with a capacity for creativity, innovation, and critique, as well as for taking responsibility, sooner or later, to survey and tend to the good functioning of the biosemiotic system in its globality. The terms “metasemiosis,” “semiotics,” and “language” used in the present context are to refer to a *modeling capacity specific to human beings*. In particular, the term “language” is not only used to indicate verbal language, or other human sign systems with communicative and expressive functions, but also the *modeling capacity* in the human species. (On these issues see, for example, Sebeok 1986, 1991; Ponzio and Petrilli 2001, 2002a,b; see also Deely, Petrilli, and Ponzio 2005). However, the metasemiotic or semiotic capacity also implies a third modality of existing in the world beyond the biosemiotic and the metasemiotic, which is reserved to human beings, that is, what we

propose to call the *semioethic* modality (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005). This is connected with our critical capacity for creative awareness of the other as other, which implies a unique condition of responsibility investing mankind for life in its multiform manifestations, which presupposes the global condition of interrelated and intercorporeal dialogical otherness to which we are all subject as living organisms (see chapter “Man-Machine Communication in the Era of High Technology” in the present volume).

This third modality of existing in the world, the semioethical, is the key to a full understanding of the nature and of the extent of our involvement with all other living beings in the semibiosphere, therefore of the measure of our responsibility as human beings for the health of semiosis, that is of life, over the entire planet—our responsibility for semiosis in all its forms, whether a question of the semioses of other human beings, or of other nonhuman life forms, which in turn flourish interconnectedly with the nonliving forms of existence and together engender the great geobiosystem called Gaia (see Ponzio and Petrilli 2003).

All human life forms as such are endowed with a capacity for *modeling*, *communication*, and *dialogism* (see chapter “A Global Approach to Communication, Modeling, and Dialogism”). Modeling determines worldview. However, differently from other life forms, human animals are endowed with a special modeling device, which, as anticipated, may also be called “language,” but also “writing,” that is, writing *ante litteram*, and is characterized by *syntax*, or better *syntactics* (see Sebeok and Danesi 2000). (The term “writing” should not be confused with “writing” understood as the transcription or translation of oral verbal signs into written verbal signs. With respect to transcription or translation, writing as we are now describing it is an *a priori*, and the same goes for “language”; see Ponzio 1994).

Thanks to syntax the human being is able to construct, deconstruct, and reconstruct an infinite number of worlds and worldviews on the basis of a finite number of elements. This capacity distinguishes human beings from other animals, where the relation between modeling and what the biologists call *Umwelt* is univocal, unidirectional (von Uexküll 1909, 1992; Hoffmeyer 1996, 2001). Nonhuman animals are born into a world that they are not programmed to modify, if not according to an original *bauplan* as established by the genetic patrimony of the species to which they belong. On the contrary, thanks to syntax the human being is endowed with a capacity for creativity and metasemiosis, and as such may be defined as a *metasemiotic* or *semiotic animal*.

This entails a capacity for the suspension of action and deliberation for the sake of critical thinking and conscious awareness. The immediate implication is that, by contrast with other animals, the human being is invested biosemiosically and phylogenetically with a unique capacity for responsibility, for making choices and taking standpoints, for creative intervention upon the course of semiosis throughout the biosphere. In this sense the “semiotic animal” is also a “semioethic animal.” Given that human beings are invested biosemiosically with a capacity for responsibility, this means to say that they are endowed with the capacity to care for semiosis, for life, in its joyous and dialogical multiplicity (see Ponzio and Petrilli 2001, 2002b, 2003; Deely, Petrilli, and Ponzio 2005).

In a biosemiotic perspective modeling, communication, and dialogism are interconnected and presuppose each other. From this point of view communication is not understood in the oversimplifying terms of message transmission from emitter to receiver, as much as this is one of its possible manifestations. Far more extensively, communication as we understand it coincides with semiosis and therefore with life; it refers to the universal condition of dialogical interrelatedness and interdependency among signs forming the

great biosemiotic network that is life over the planet (see Sebeok, Hoffmeyer, and Emmeche 1999).

In the context of communication understood as converging with the sign activity that is life, dialogism is not reductively understood as the exchange of rejoinders among interlocutors, but, far more radically, far more vitally, as the permanent condition of intercorporeal involvement and reciprocal implication among bodies and signs throughout the semiotic universe. This, of course, is a necessary condition for the emergence of more specialized forms of dialogue in the sphere of anthroposemiosis, what, for example, with Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), we may identify as the various articulations of “formal dialogue” by contrast with “substantial dialogue” (Bakhtin 1990, 1993, 1998). *Modeling, communication, and dialogue* together form the foundation and condition of possibility for the engendering of life in its multiplicity and its specificities, including the human, over the planet Earth. And as we have already stated, human life is endowed with a species-specific trait called syntactics, therefore with a species-specific capacity for metasemiosis beyond the less complex levels of semiosis in its direct and more immediate forms.

Metasemiosis, or “semiotics”—the latter term is synonymous with metasemiosis when it is not used to indicate the theory, or science, or doctrine, or discipline that studies sign activity—has determined the course of hominization through to the present phase of development in evolution. “Semiotics” thus described is the biosemiotic *a priori* with regard to the anthropological and cultural necessity for responsible and polyphonic living.

The latter implies the capacity for *listening* and *hospitality* toward difference, toward the other in each and every one of us, toward the other beyond self (see Sebeok, Petrilli, and Ponzio 2001). Moreover, otherness is not a condition we concede with an act of generosity toward the world. On the contrary, the logic of otherness is structural to life itself, a condition for life to flourish, for intercorporeity. Otherness implies dialogism and is connected with the nonfunctional.

Life is the right to otherness, unindifferent difference, nonfunctionality, excess with respect to roles, rights, and identities sanctioned by officialdom and convention (see Ponzio 1997).

## otherness, difference, responsibility

From the point of view of anthroposociosemiosis the nonfunctional may be juxtaposed to the ideology of functionality, productivity, competition as fostered through social roles based on the logic of identity, that regulates behavior connected with those roles. Human subjectivity is best connoted in terms of the propensity for the nonfunctional, the nonproductive. In other words, the highest degrees in humanity are reached in the time–space of nonfunctionality, otherness, and excess where differences are not indifferent to each other, but, on the contrary, interrelate dialogically and are reciprocally responsive to each other. Such logic cannot be englobed within roles, cannot be reduced to roles, but, on the contrary, exceeds and at once subverts the logic itself of roles and identities. These no doubt are differentiated on the basis of the otherness relation, but this is a question of “relative otherness,” a limited form of otherness with boundaries necessary to the delimitation of one’s behavior in relation to a given role and relative responsibilities. Instead, the type of otherness that cannot be restricted to roles and identities may be

described as “absolute otherness” and is connected with the condition of “unlimited responsibility,” which does not admit of indifference.

The properly human rests in our capacity for absolute otherness, unlimited responsibility, the relation of dialogical intercorporeity among unindifferent differences, nonfunctionality with respect to the functionality of identity and relative roles. The properly human tells of the condition of vulnerability and of exposition to the other (see Lévinas 1961).

The places that best evidence the properly human are the places where time is beaten out in terms of the relation to the absolute and nonfunctional other, the nonproductive other; the time of death, aging, disease, of friendship and eroticism; the time of mothering and nurturing; the time of aesthetic discourse (whether a question of literature, figurative arts, music, or cinema, etc.); the time of inventiveness and scientific progress, of the play of musement, of the ephemeral, of the ineffable. This is the time of excess with respect to closed identities, the time of dialogical detotalization and proliferation of differences that cannot be recruited and put at the service of the World as it is.

In the present context of discourse, by “World” is understood the most vulgar forms of realism, dominant ideology, identity, being, the order of discourse, the coherent and well-defined subject with a clean conscience, the lying rhetoric of political systems or of mass media, which are all functional to a global and totalizing world. On the contrary, the flourishing of special semioses, the great multiplicity of different languages and cultures are signs of the potential for critique and resistance in the face of the tendency toward globalization reductively understood in terms of homogenization and leveling onto today’s dominant values connected with the global market, power, and control. All these places are explored in the various chapters forming the present volume (see also Ponzio 2002a,b; Petrilli 2003, 2005).

## The Logic of Identity, from world to war

The connection among World, Narration, History, Duration, Identity, Subject, Freedom, Donation of Sense by Intentional Consciousness, Individuality, Difference-Indifference, Interest, Ontology, Truth, Force, Reason, Power, Work, Productivity, Politics, and War is inscribed in the worldview of Western culture. This connection has been exploited and exasperated by capitalism from its very beginnings and ever more so in today’s global communication-production phase. The World is connected with consciousness, the subject—whether individual or collective—experienced as part of the World, as the place of signification of the World as it is. Therefore, a concatenation is realized uniting the concepts of Project, Narration, Ontology, Signification, and Subject. The World is also indissolubly connected with Politics associated with the ideology of totalization and functionality. Our allusion is to the realism of politics that (1) implements the strategies of productivity and efficiency, (2) is faithful to reality, (3) mediates the interests of subjects—individual and collective—and (4) orients “becoming” according to a realistic view of the present. This present is defended at all costs, resorting even to the *extrema ratio* of war, which belongs to the World, is part of it. Indeed, insofar as the World is constitutively based upon identity, it is predisposed or programmed for sacrifice of the other, of otherness in the name of identity. In such a perspective, peace is no more than an interval, momentary repose, reintegration of forces, respite, a truce that ensues from war,

preparation for war, similarly to rest, freetime, the night functional to the resumption of work, to the “madness of the day” (Blanchot 1973).

Work and war: war as manifest “collective work” (Marx 1857–1858) in the form of precapitalist production. Peace flourishes in and for war, similarly to rest, the night, which flourish in and for work, for the day.

The question we must ask is that to which Emmanuel Lévinas (1906–1995) dedicated the entire course of his research: that is, whether there be no other sense than that of being in the World and for the World? Whether the *properly human* may exceed the space and time of objects, the space-time of identity? Whether there exist relations that cannot be reduced to the category of identity and that have nothing to do with relations between subject and object, with relations of exchange, equivalence, functionality, interest, productivity? Whether there be interhuman relations that are altogether *other*, yet all the same material, earthly relations, to which one’s body opens? Whether there be a sense that is other with respect to sense in the world of objects? Such questions are oriented in the direction of a form of humanism that is different from the humanism of identity, and that we propose to call the *humanism of alterity*.

Such an orientation is regulated by the logic of otherness, is “movement” without return to the subject, a movement which Lévinas calls *œuvre*, exposition—at a risk—to alterity, hybridization of identity, rupture of monologism, and evasion from the subject-object relation. *Hors sujet* (Outside the subject) is the title of a book by Lévinas; “hors-sujet” also in the sense of being off the subject, not responsive to thematization, representation. All this is founded on the logic of otherness, the condition of possibility for a form of humanism where a good or clear conscience, human rights, which are the rights of self, of identity, and are interrogated in the light of the rights of others. The logic of otherness implies the capacity for otherness with respect to Western thought, which, on the contrary, incorporates and legitimizes the reasons of identity, allowing for prevarication over the other, even to the extent of acknowledging the reasons of war (see also Benjamin 1986).

In front of the face of the other, the I is called into question. Through its nudity, exposition, fragility, the face says that otherness will never be eliminated. The otherness of others resists to the very point of calling for recourse to homicide and war—being the evidence and proof of the other’s irreducibility. Another one, *autrui*, this other, says Lévinas, puts the I into the accusative, summoning it, questioning it, calling it back to the condition of absolute responsibility, outside the I’s initiative. Absolute responsibility is responsibility for the other, responsibility understood as answering to the other and for the other. This type of responsibility allows for neither 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; it interrogates the freedom of self. However, such interrogation is at once constitutive of self and its freedom insofar as it sanctions the passage from spontaneity to consciousness, from freedom as passive *jouissance* and self’s happy spontaneity, to freedom as a right, and speaking that right.

It is before the need to answer to others, it is under the weight of unlimited responsibility for others, that the rights and freedom of the self are instituted. The origin of self, an origin without an *arché*, in this sense *anarchical*, lies in an uneasy conscience in front of others, in a dirty conscience, therefore, in the need to justify one’s presence, in one’s re-

sponsibility without alibis and without escape from others. In the continued effort to achieve a good conscience, the self in the nominative, understood as the subject, as intentional consciousness, as speech, derives from interrogating the self and putting it into the accusative. From such interrogation also derive self's freedoms, self's rights—"human rights"—elaborated to defend the self summoned by the face of the other to account for the rights of others, in this sense to defend itself as an "I."

A just State must be established with just laws in order to guarantee freedom and avoid the danger of tyranny. Order based on the logic of closed identity, therefore of differences that are indifferent to each other, may also backfire against self in the form of fixed and inflexible law, it too tyrannical and violent. Law thus conceived is based on the I's rights as regulated by the logic of closed identity—in the extreme form, by commanding war, considered as an inevitable means of defense, the realistic face of being, of the interests of the individual and of the community. The I is open to blackmail from the impersonal order to the very point of accepting the *extrema ratio* of war without question, in the name of its own freedom. The reasoning is that violence can only be suppressed through violence.

The being of things as realistically administered by the impersonal discourse of law, in the context of which war is presented as ineluctable violence and self-sacrifice, has its otherwise than being in its very foundation, in the condition of face-to-face with others. This condition is even more realistic, indeed this time truly realistic: the face-to-face condition, as says Lévinas, implies a relation of commandment without tyranny, which is not yet obedience to an impersonal law, but the indispensable condition for the institution of such a law.

The opposition of a nude face, the opposition of disarmed eyes, with absolutely no protection, as from which self is constituted as responsibility, is not the opposition of a force, a relation of hostility. It is peace-loving opposition, where peace is not understood as suspension of war, violence withheld in order to be used more effectively. On the contrary, the violence perpetuated consists in eliminating this very opposition, in outwitting it, in ignoring the face, in avoiding the gaze. "No" is written on the face of the other—first, "You shall not kill"—for the very fact of being a face. Having a sense for itself, having been absolved from the relation with an I, the other is such insofar as it may absent itself from the presence of self and its projects, not go along with it. Violence is perpetuated when *no inscribed* on the face of the other is converted into hostile force or submission. Violence consists in prevailing and prevaricating over the other, to the point even of murder and war. Prevarication is perpetuated in spite of opposition to violence expressed in the commandment, "You shall not kill," which is inscribed in the face even before it is explicated in a formula.

Biblical prescriptions such as "you shall love your neighbor as yourself," "the stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as the native among you, and you shall love him as yourself" (Leviticus, 19.18 and 19.34), refer beyond politics to a form of peace that is antecedent with respect to political relations, a condition for peace that is no less than fundamental, and consists of the relation to the other as other, to the foreigner that every human is for every other. Extrapolitical or prepolitical peace, solicitation for another person (see "Entretiens" in Poirié 1987, 104), precedes rational thought, being in the form of an "I," statements made by the subject, knowledge and objectifying consciousness. Primordial peace is paradoxical and contradictory, for it implies responsibility for peace that is foreign (see Lévinas 1982), an interpersonal relation where the subject



“reaches the human condition assuming responsibility for the other person in the election that elevates it to this degree” (“Preface” of Lévinas 1990).

The situation of peace and responsibility in relation to the other, where individuals give themselves in their singularity, difference, non-interchangeability, unindifference, precedes politics and logic, says Lévinas. Politics and logic share the fact that they consider individuals as belonging to a genre, an assemblage of some sort, as equals. The relation of alterity is prepolitical and pre-logical. I am obliged to keep faith to this responsibility and to relate to every other indifferently, therefore, not only to a singularity, but according to a genre; I am obliged to relate to the individual of a given system or group, who as such is interchangeable with the other individual, in this sense indifferent to me. In other words, knowing, judging, doing justice, confronting two individuals in order to establish who is guilty, all this requires generalization through logic and the State, equalizing singularities with reference to a genre, insofar as they belong to the same State as citizens. The relationship with the other is mediated by institutions and juridical procedure. This generalizes and at once delimits responsibility, responsibility of each one of us for every other. From this type of generalization derives the necessity of the State. The action of the State is added to the work of interpersonal responsibility, responsibility as expected from the individual in its singularity—and in a sense denying it. The work of interpersonal responsibility is the work of the individual in its singularity; the person is responsible in an absolute sense: responsible like the hostage who must answer for something he did not do, for a past that was never his, that was never present to him (see “Entretiens,” in Poirié 1987, 118).

## sociology, fear, and freedom

Following such logic the Hobbesian concept of *homo homini lupus* is at last inverted: the State does not found personal responsibility toward the other but limits and defines it, while guaranteeing limited responsibility, responsibility with alibis, through generalization of the law. Instead, unlimited responsibility, responsibility for the other, unconditional, categorical, moral responsibility is not written and is not inscribed in the law. It does not converge with State justice. Indeed, from this point of view State justice is always imperfect with respect to human rights understood as the rights of the other as other, as foreigner. Preoccupation with human rights is not a state function, but rather a non-state institution in the State; it is the appeal to humanity that is yet to be accomplished in the State (see “Entretiens,” in Poirié 1987, 119).

Fear of the other, the fear we experience of the other, ensues from the constitution of identity. Whether it be individual or collective identity, the constitution of identity requires separation from the other, delimitation of the interests of identity on the basis of which is determined what belongs to identity and what does not, what regards identity and what does not—as much as the gaze of the other regards me always. Identity means to determine and delimit responsibility, which is defined and limited responsibility. As such, responsibility has recourse to alibis that enable the subject to circumscribe and limit one’s fear *for* the other, for the other’s well-being, and not one’s fear *of* the other, which, on the contrary, tends to increase.

Identity is delineated on the basis of difference, but difference and identity also require indifference. Difference related to identity relates to a given genre, class, or group of some sort. Difference thus described requires indifference to the other, lack of interest in the other, disinterestedness, lack of fear for the other. Difference and identity call for cir-

cumscribed, limited responsibility, a type of responsibility that is connected with a genre, that begins and ends in a genre that is invested with the function of guaranteeing identity. *From unindifference to the other to difference and relative indifference*: this is the trajectory through which identity is constituted and delineated. With the delineation of identity in such terms, that which regards us is progressively reduced to that which regards the interests of identity. Such reduction finds justification in the condition of limited responsibility sustained by alibis. Moreover, the more we get free of the condition of *fear for the other*, the more our *fear of the other* increases to the point of exasperation.

“Fear of the other” can mean either fear of the other as experienced by the subject, fear in the sense of *subject genitive*, the subject that fears the other, or fear of the other as experienced by the object, fear in the sense of *object genitive*, the object that fears the other (see Ponzio 1995a, b). Logic traditionally distinguishes between *subject genitive* and *object genitive*: the subject who fears, the other who fears; subject and object. However, to grasp the third sense, *fear for* the other, it will be necessary to abandon the dichotomy or polarization as established by traditional logic. According to this third case, fear of the other means to experience the other’s fear, fear as experienced by the other, therefore, fear for the other. Here, we no longer distinguish between subject and object, nor refer to community identification. In other words, the relation among differences does not imply community identification, therefore indifference among identities and differences. On the contrary, the relation among differences is based on non-indifference among differences, on absolute otherness. Following this logic and developing the discourse of Lévinas, the expression “of the other” may be designated as an “ethical genitive” (see “Entretiens,” in Poirié 1987, 119). This third case of the genitive should be taken into account by logic as the third sense according to which the expression “fear of the other” may be disambiguated, that is, as “fear for the other.”

In today’s world, fear of the other understood as fearing the other, fear that the subject experiences of the object, has reached paroxysmal degrees. However, contrary to the Hobbesian principle of *homo homini lupus*, fear of the other, fear in the transitive is not the starting point but the point of arrival in the constitution of identity. In Western history, identity has always prevailed over otherness, difference and relative indifference have always prevailed over unindifference, relations among individuals belonging to the same genre, class, or group of some sort, to a community based on identity, with ever more restricted responsibilities, have always prevailed over relations without alibis among singularities beyond genre or whatever the identity community in question.

Capitalism has constructed its socioeconomic reproductive system on the logic of identity, to the point of exasperation. This means to say that capitalist ideology has developed the subject’s fear of the other—the object—as stated, to paroxysmal degrees, ever more limiting and attenuating the propensity to *fear for* the other and transforming it into *fear of* the other.

A paradox connected with globalization today in its current phase of development is the fact that social relations emerge more and more to paroxysmal degree, limiting and attenuating it as relations among individuals who are separate from each other, reciprocally indifferent to each other. The relation to the other is suffered as a necessity for the sake of achieving one’s own private interests. And exclusive preoccupation with one’s own identity, with one’s own difference indifferent to the differences of others, increases fear of the other understood as fearing the other. Following this type of logic, the community is the passive result of the interests of identities that are indifferent to each other. In-

deed, the community so construed presents itself as a compact identity only for as long as its interests require cohesion and unification.

The egological community, the community of selves forming the identity of each and every one of us, presents the same type of sociality. Sociality thus understood is founded upon relations of reciprocal indifference among differences and identities. Such a condition at once ensues from and is evidenced by separation between public and private behavior in the same individual subject, separation and mutual indifference among roles, competencies, tasks, languages, among responsibilities, in the same individual, in the same subject, separation viewed as the “normal” or “standard” way of conforming to the social system to which that subject belongs.

Limitations on individual responsibility, limitations of an ethical-normative, juridical, and political order, behavior regulated by the laws of equal exchange, functions fixed by roles and social position, distinctions among individual identities sanctioned by law, identities and differences whose sphere of freedom and imputability is at once delimited and guaranteed by law: none of this will succeed in undoing the intricate tangle between self and other, in eliminating the inherent asymmetry in the relationship between self and other, in impeding obsession for the other, in ending involvement, in avoiding substitution.

Responsibility for others is oriented asymmetrically: in other words, the other is elevated and taken upon one’s own shoulders, so to say, in a relationship that is asymmetrical. As says Lévinas, the person I must answer for is also the person I must answer to. I must answer to the person whom I must answer for. Responsibility in the face of the person I am responsible for: responsible for a face that regards me, for its freedom.

## A NOTE ON THE ORGANIZATION OF THIS VOLUME

In their focus on human semiosis viewed in its multiform manifestations, the chapters forming this volume analyze a series of fundamental concepts revolving around the sign, with specific reference to subjectivity, gender, cultural identity, artistic creativity, interpretive processes. All this is considered in the context of global communication today, therefore in relation to the dynamics and polylogic multiplicity of human sign behavior in the context of globalization and of global semiosis. Overall then, the chapters forming this book come together and enhance each other as part of a unitary project intended to explore human signs, with a special focus on those signs that most express the properly human.

This volume presents a selection from a cycle of lessons and seminars organized by Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio in the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis, Bari University, Italy, between November 1999 and May 2000. Each author contributing to the present volume created encounters with colleagues and students that proved to be special, even memorable in unique ways. Vincent Colapietro started the series delivering his lectures on December 7 through 19, 1999, on the semiotics of C. S. Peirce, specifically on the following themes: “Early Experiments in Devising a New List of Categories,” “Patricide: Peirce’s Critique of Cartesianism,” “Pragmatism: First Step Toward a Theory of the Practice of Inquiry,” “Pragmatism: Refining the Theory of Practice; Mature Experiments in Devising a General Theory of Signs,” and “Semiosis and/as Translation.” After Vincent came Floyd Merrell, who delivered three lectures on February 23 through 25, 2000, entitled “Introduction to Peirce’s Semiotics,” “Peirce’s Concept of the

Sign,” and “Jorge Luis Borges, Science, and Peirce.” Floyd was followed by John Deely, who lectured from March 1 to 3 on “Semiotics and the Cultural Unconscious,” “Semiotics and Philosophy of Language,” and “Semiotics and the Postmodern (in Philosophy).” Then came Joyce Cutler-Shaw, who delivered her lectures on March 16 and 17 dedicated to “Language Images and the Messenger Cycle,” followed by “The Anatomy Lesson and Works in the Public Realm.” Also in March Eero and Eila Tarasti delivered lectures on March 29, 30, and 31, dedicated to “A Theory of Musical Semiotics, Myth and Music,” “On Post-colonial Semiotics,” and “Icons in the Piano Suite *Icons* by the Finnish Composer Einojuhani Rautavaara.” Barbara Godard and Tom Short delivered their lectures on April 5, 6, and 7—Barbara under the general title “Towards a Critical Semiotics: Feminist Interventions,” while Tom dedicated his series of lessons to “How Peirce at First Failed but Later Succeeded in Developing a Theory of Signs that Explains Thought’s Intentionality: 1. Intentionality, 2. Finiosity, 3. Semeiosis.” Marie-Christine Lala lectured on “Le sens du sacrifice aux limites de la communication” and “L’opération souveraine et le langage,” April 12 and 13. The entire cycle was happily concluded with Thomas A. Sebeok and Paul Copley, who lectured on May 24 and 25—Paul under the general topic, “Signifiers and Subjects,” while Tom entertained us with two lessons under the titles, “The Triple Crown: The King of Lydia, The Thane of Cawdor, and The Emperor of Ice-Cream,” and “Biosemiotics in the Twentieth Century: Its Fields and Domains.” The three texts by the organizers of this cycle of encounters, Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, were delivered in a sequence of presentations at intervals between one visit and another.

The atmosphere of that academic year was tense with intellectual excitement deriving from our common concern for problems involving us all as students, friends, and citizens of the world. Many thanks to all these people and to my husband, Franco, for his conviviality as we shared meals at home with him and the children, Madeleine and Kalif, then 6 and 9 years old, who never doubted they should participate actively in all that was happening around them at table and in conversation.

I wish to express my deep sense of gratitude to the publisher, Linda Babler, for her commitment to this project and its happy conclusion, and also to Robert Magnan for his precious editorial care.

Many thanks to Rosa Stella Cassotti and Arianna De Luca for their assistance in preparing this manuscript in its various phases. Thomas A. Sebeok is also remembered affectionately with this volume, not least for having connected me originally with most of the authors who have contributed to its realization. To Marcel Danesi, my good and generous friend, my most heartfelt thanks.

January 2003  
Bari, Italy

## references

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1990. *Art and answerability*, edited by Michael Holquist and Vadim Liapunov. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1993. [1920-24]. *Toward a philosophy of the act*, English translation Vadim Liapunov, edited by Michael Holquist. Austin: University of Texas Press.

- Bakhtin, Mikhail. 1998. *Per una filosofia dell'azione responsabile*, edited by Augusto Ponzio. Lecce: Manni.
- Benjamin, Walter. 1986. *Reflections. Walter Benjamin. Essays, aphorisms, autobiographical writings*, edited and Introduction by Peter Demetz. New York: Schocken Books.
- Blanchot, Maurice. 1973. *La follie du jour*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana.
- Deely, John, Susan Petrilli, and Augusto Ponzio. 2005. *The semiotic animal*. Ottawa: Legas.
- Hoffmeyer, Jesper. 1996. *Signs of meaning in the universe*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Hoffmeyer, Jesper. 2001. Origin of species in natural selection. *Athanos. Semiotica, filosofia, arte, letteratura* XII, 4, edited by Susan Petrilli: 240–255.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1934. Quelques réflexions sur la philosophie de l'hitlérisme. *Esprit* 26: 199–208.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1948. La réalité et son ombre. *Les Temps Modernes* 38: 771-789. English translation in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, edited by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Marinus Nijhoff, 1987: 1-13.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1961. *Totalité et Infini*. La Haye: Nijhoff.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1982. *De Dieu qui vient à l'idée*. Paris: J. Vrin.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1987. *Hors sujet*. Montpellier: Fata Morgana.
- Lévinas, Emmanuel. 1990. Reflections on the philosophy of Hitlerism, translated by Sean Hand. In *Critical Inquiry* 17:62-71.
- Marx, Karl. 1857–1858. *Grundrisse*. Vol. 28 of *The collected works of Marx and Engels*. London: Lawrence and Wishart (1975–).
- Petrilli, Susan. 1998. *Teoria dei segni e del linguaggio*. 2n edition. Bari: Graphis, 2001.
- Petrilli, Susan. (ed.). 2003. *Linguaggi*. Bari: Graphis.
- Petrilli, Susan. 2005. *Percorsi della semiotica*. Bari: Graphis.
- Petrilli, Susan, and Augusto Ponzio. 2005. *Semiotics unbounded: Interpretive routes through the open network of signs*. Toronto: Toronto University Press.
- Poirié, François. 1987. *Emmanuel Lévinas*. Lyon: La Manufacture.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1990. *Man as a sign*, translated, edited, and Introduction by Susan Petrilli. Berlin-New York: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1993. *Signs, dialogue, and ideology*, translated and edited by Susan Petrilli. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1994. *Fondamenti di filosofia del linguaggio* (with P. Calefato and S. Petrilli). Rome-Bari: Laterza. (New ed. 1999).
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1995a. *La differenza non indifferente. Comunicazione, emigrazione, guerra*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1995b. *Sujet et altérité. Sur Emmanuel Lévinas*. Paris: L'Harmattan.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1997. *Elogio dell'infunzionale. Critica della comunicazione mondializzata*. Rome: Castelvechi.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 1999. *La comunicazione*. Bari: Graphis.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 2002a. *Il linguaggio e le lingue. Introduzione alla linguistica generale*. Bari: Graphis.
- Ponzio, Augusto. 2002b. *Vita. Athanos. Semiotica, filosofia, arte, letteratura* XIII 5, edited by Augusto Ponzio.

- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 1998. *Signs of research on signs. Semiotische Berichte Österreichischen Gesellschaft für Semiotik, mit: Linguistik Interdisziplinär*, Special Issue Jg. 22, 3/4. Jg. 22, 3 4/1998.
- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 1999. *Fuori campo. I segni del corpo tra rappresentazione e eccedenza*. Milan: Mimesis.
- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 2000. *Il sentire della comunicazione globale*. Rome: Meltemi.
- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 2001. *Sebeok and the signs of life*. London: Icon Books.
- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 2002a. *I segni e la vita. La semiotica globale di Thomas A. Sebeok*. Milan: Spirali.
- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 2002b. Sign vehicles for semiotic travels: Two new handbooks. *Semiotica* 141-1/4: 203-350.
- Ponzio, Augusto, and Susan Petrilli. 2003. *Semioetica*. Rome: Meltemi.
- Posner, Roland, Klaus Robering, and Thomas A. Sebeok (eds.). 1997-2004. *Semiotik/Semiotics*, 3 Vols. Berlin: Walter de Gruyter.
- President of the United States. 2002. *The national security strategy of the United States of America., The White House, Washington, September, 2002*.
- Schaff, Adam. 1992. *Umanesimo ecumenico*, edited by Augusto Ponzio. Bari: Adriatica.
- Sebeok, Thomas A. 1986. *I think I am a verb*. New York & London: Plenum Press.
- Sebeok, Thomas A. 1991. Semiosis and semiotics: what lies in their future? In Thomas A. Sebeok, *A sign is just a sign* (97–99). Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Sebeok, Thomas. 1998. *A sign is just a sign. La semiotica globale*, translated, edited, and Introduction by Susan Petrilli. Milan: Spirali.
- Sebeok, Thomas A. 2001. *Global semiotics*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.
- Sebeok, Thomas A., and Marcel Danesi. 2000. *The forms of meanings. Modeling systems theory and semiotic analysis*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Sebeok, Thomas A., Jesper Hoffmeyer, and Claus Emmeche (eds.). 1999. *Biosemiotics*. Special issue of *Semiotica*: 127(1/4).
- Sebeok, Thomas A., and Susan Petrilli. 1998. Women in Semiotics. In Gerald F. Carr et al. (eds.), *Interdigitations: essays for Irmengard Rauch*. Bristol, England: Thoemmes Publisher.
- Sebeok, Thomas A., Susan Petrilli, and Augusto Ponzio. 2001. *Semiotica dell'io*. Rome: Meltemi.
- Uexküll, Jakob von. 1909. *Umwelt und Innenwelt der Tiere*. Berlin: Springer.
- Uexküll, Jakob von. 1992. *A stroll through the worlds of animals and man (1934)*. Special Issue of *Semiotica* 89(4).
- Whitman, Walt. 1888. *Democratic vistas, and other papers by Walt Whitman*. London: Walter Scott.