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READING AUGUSTO PONZIO, MASTER OF SIGNS AND LANGUAGES

1.   *The general theoretical framework*

Augusto Ponzio is a pivotal figure in two research fields that are closely related – semiotics and philosophy of language. The expression "philosophy of language" conveys the scope and orientation of his studies as he addresses problems relevant to semiotics from the perspective of philosophy of language, updated in light of latest developments in the sign sciences, from linguistics to biosemiotics. As such his approach may be more properly described as pertaining to general semiotics. However, Ponzio practices general semiotics in terms of critique and the search for foundations, which derives from his work in philosophy of language. As critique of semiotics, Ponzio's general semiotics overcomes the delusory separation between the humanities, on the one hand, and the logico-mathematical and the natural sciences, on the other, evidencing instead the condition of interconnectedness among the sciences. His own semiotic research relates to different fields and disciplines, practicing an approach that is transversal and interdisciplinary, or if we prefer "undisciplined", to use a concept theorized by Ponzio. Moreover, in such a framework general semiotics continues its philosophical search for sense. From this perspective Ponzio most significantly addresses the problem of the sense of science for human beings.

2.   *A semiotical- philosophical profile*

Augusto Ponzio (b. 17 February 1942) is Full Professor of Philosophy of Language and General Linguistics and member of the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis, Bari University, Italy. From 1981 to 1999 he directed the Institute of Philosophy of Language, which he founded at the Faculty of Foreign Literature and Languages in 1981. From 1999 to 2005 he acted as Head of the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis, which he founded in 1999, at the same Faculty.

His research now spans a period of more than forty years finding expression in his passionate commitment to teaching and related activities, publications and a great variety of editorial enterprises. His principal research fields include philosophy of language, general

linguistics, semiotics, literary theory, translation theory, theory of ideology and of subjectivity. At Bari University, after teaching Theoretical and Moral Philosophy from 1966 to 1980, Ponzio has been holding courses in Philosophy of Language since 1970, Semiotics from1995 to 1997, Text Semiotics from 1997 to 2001, Communication Theory from 1995 to 1998, and since 1998 he also teaches courses in General Linguistics and Semiotics of Mass Media. Currently he is Director of the Doctoral Program in Language Theory and Sign Sciences at Bari University, which he inaugurated in 1988.

He was an associate editor of *Lectures* directed by Vito Carofiglio (1935-1996), and Editor-in-chief of *Scienze umane* directed by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985). With Claude Gandelman (University of Haifa), in 1989 he founded the journal *Athanor. Arte, letteratura, semiotica, filosofia* which he has directed alone since 1995 (year of Gandelman's death), and currently as part of a new series inaugurated in 1998 with Meltemi publishers in Rome. "Athanor" is an Arabic word which evokes the image of the alchemist in the laboratory mixing and transforming the elements. In addition to appearing with Italian publishers such as Bompiani (Milan), La Nuova Italia (Florence), Laterza (Bari-Rome), Guerra (Perugia), Meltemi (Rome), Ponzio has published with a series of foreign publishers in various languages. These include: Mouton De Gruyter (Berlin), John Benjamins (Amsterdam), l'Harmattan (Paris), Cátedra (Madrid), Corazon (Madrid), Toronto University Press (Toronto), Nueva Vision (Buenos Aires), Editions Balzac (Candiac, Canada), Skolska Kniga (Zagreb), Legas (Ottawa), Icon Books (London), Naklada Jesenski I Turk (Zagreb).

He has also contributed significantly as editor and translator to the dissemination in Italy and abroad of the ideas of Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975) and members of the Bakhtin Circle – including Valentin N. Voloshinov and Pavel N. Medvedev, but also the biologist Ivan I. Kanaev. His first monograph was on Emmanuel Levinas (1906-1995), and other monographs followed, including those dedicated to Thomas A. Sebeok (1921-2001) and Adam Schaff (1913-2006). I mention these authors simply because Ponzio has written books on them in addition to numerous essays.

He is in fact author of the first monograph ever worldwide on each of these thinkers: respectively, *La relazione interpersonale*, 1967 dedicated to Levinas; *Persona umana, linguaggio e conoscenza in Adam Schaff*, 1974 (2nd ed. 2002); and *Michail Bachtin. Alle origini della semiotica sovietica*, 1980 (2nd ed. 2004). Each of these monographs has been reworked over the years and presented in new revised and enlarged editions. The 1967 monograph has developed across various editions into *Responsabilità e alterità in Emmanuel Lévinas,* 1995 (French translation, l'Harmattan, also 1995), and now a second edition of the

original book was published in 2006. The 1975 monograph was developed into *Individuo umano, linguaggio e globalizzazione nella filosofia di Adam Schaff*, 2002, and includes an interview with Schaff held in Bari in 2000, specifically for the occasion. The 1980 monograph on Bachtin was developed into *Tra semiotica e letteratura. Introduzione a Michail Bachtin*, 1992, new edition 2004. This was followed by *La rivoluzione bachtiniana. Il pensiero di Bachtin e l'ideologia contemporanea*, 1997 (Spanish translation, Catedra, 1998).

Ponzio has also contributed to studies on Karl Marx in Italy. From this perspective, in 1975 he published the Italian edition of Marx's *Mathematical Manuscripts*, now available in revised and enlarged edition of 2005. *Manoscritti matematici* contributes to a better understanding of infinitesimal calculus, political economy, and logic – formal logic and dialectical logic. All these aspects have been recently developed by Ponzio in his book, *Semiotica e dialettica*, 2004.

Thomas A. Sebeok and his "Global Semiotics" have also been at the centre of Ponzio's attention for a good many years now. Ponzio sponsored Sebeok's numerous visits to Bari University for encounters with our graduate and postgraduate students from the mid 1980s, and has contributed significantly to the dissemination of Sebeok's research and writings in Italy. In addition to promoting the Italian translations of his works, Ponzio has also authored two monographs on Sebeok (with S. Petrilli): *Sebeok and the Signs of Life*, 2001, and *I segni e la vita. La semiotica globale di Thomas A. Sebeok*, 2001. With Sebeok (and S. Petrilli), Ponzio also co-authored the volume, *Semiotica dell'io*, 2001.

Among Italian scholars Ponzio has focused on the work of his mentor, the philosopher Giuseppe Semerari (1922-1996), the semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and the philosopher of language Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909). His monograph *Ferruccio Rossi-Landi e la filosofia del linguaggio* appeared in 1988. Since then Ponzio has promoted new editions of Rossi-Landi's works with Bompiani, Marsilio and John Benjamins. The most recent was published in 2006, Rossi-Landi's *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*, originally published in 1985, just a few months before his death. This new edition is complete with an updated bibliography of Rossi-Landi's writings and an introduction by Ponzio entitled, "Carattere antropogenico del lavoro e riproduzione sociale" (pp. xv-xlix).

Moreover, in 2006 Ponzio created the Ferruccio Rossi-Landi web site (www.ferrucciorossilandi.com), attractively designed by Luigi Ponzio, which is currently in the construction phase as texts by Rossi-Landi and on him, or somehow relating to him, are added. From the perspective of its genesis, the idea of a web site was originally conceived in relation to the International Ferruccio Rossi-Landi Nework (IFRN), a section of the

International Society for Semiotic Studies formally founded in 1999. In addition to a bio-bibliographic note on Rossi-Landi, this web site also showcases a photographic gallery featuring him in different stages of his intellectual life, in the company of his prominent colleague Charles Morris (1901-1979), and of course Ponzio himself. The homepage also features a colourful caricature of Rossi-Landi by A. Ponzio. In 2004 for the excellence of his commitment as promoter and interpreter of Rossi-Landi's work, Ponzio was nominated honorary member of the Semiotic Society of Hungary and of the International Ferruccio Rossi-Landi Network. For further information concerning Ponzio's work on Rossi-landi, consult the essay by Jeff Bernard, "Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and a short history of the Rossi-Landi Network", available on the web site and now in a revised edition in the present volume.

In a brief bio-bibliographical note entitled "Sidelights", included in the volume *Augusto Ponzio 2002, bibliografia e letture critiche*, with his updated bibliography (year of his 60th birthday) and writings on him by various authors (now in this volume), Ponzio explains his interest for Bakhtin, Levinas, Marx, Rossi-Landi, Schaff in the following terms: "In his research on signs and language, he has developed from these authors what they share in spite of their differences, that is, the idea that the life of the human individual in h/er concrete singularity, whatever the object of study and however specialized the analysis, cannot prescind from involvement without alibis in the destiny of others" (p. 6)).

Ponzio's interpretation of the general science of signs, or semiotics, derives from his early studies in phenomenology, with particular reference to Edmund Husserl and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. His focus on the sense of scientific research, particularly general semiotics, is oriented by the Husserlian distinction between "exact science" and "rigorous science", theorized in "Philosophy as a Rigorous Science", and in *The Crisis of the European Sciences*, 1954. By contrast with the condition of alienated and false consciousness, Husserl teaches us to interrogate the sense of scientific knowledge for human beings, avoiding all forms of scientism and technicalism that separate the means of production from awareness of the ends. Ponzio develops this perspective with his concept of "ethosemiotics", "telo-" or "teleosemiotics", now "semioethics" (see *Fondamenti di filosofia del linguaggio*, 1994, *Semioetica*, 2003, and *Semiotics Unbounded*, 2005).

An important international discussion on Ponzio's intellectual work as a Levinas scholar took place in 2006, thanks to initiative by Paul Cobley, with a special edition of the journal *Subject Matters* entitled Augusto Ponzio, *The I questioned: Emmanuel Levinas: and the critique of occidental reason*. This presents Ponzio's essay "The I questioned" followed by responses from a series of noteworthy Levinas scholars: Adam Zachary Newton, Michel B.

Smith, Robert Bernasconi, Graham Ward, Roger Burggraeve, Bettina Bergo, William Paul Simmons and Annette Aronowicz.

3. *For a critique of the pars pro toto error, from decodification semiotics to interpretation semiotics*

In Italy the transition from decodification semiotics to interpretation semiotics began emerging in the early 1970s and is registered by Ponzio in *La semiotica in Italia*, 1976. The sign model proposed by "interpretation semiotics" is the heterogeneous result of dialogically relating various approaches to sign analysis, in particular theory of knowledge (Peirce), theory of literature (Bakhtin), and axiology (Morris). It is a dynamical sign model and is related to the concept of infinite semiosis, an open chain of deferrals from one interpretant to another in the great sign network. The logic supporting the relation among interpretants is not the logic of equal exchange, but rather of non correspondence, excess, giving without returns, that is, the logic of otherness. The interpretant sign says something more with respect to the interpreted sign to which it somehow responds. But the interpreted sign too has its own "semiotic materiality", that is, a margin of otherness with respect to the interpretant sign, by virtue of which it can resist the tyranny of monologic interpretation, as maintained by Ponzio in *Man as a Sign*, 1990. In the framework of interpretation semiotics the sign is always part of a sign situation in which all the components of semiosis are related to each other – sign vehicle (*signifiant*), meaning (s*ignifié*), referent, interpreter, interpretant and codes regulating sign systems – and are considered as different aspects of complex and articulate semiosic processes.

This terminology was first introduced by Ponzio in a bilingual text entitled "Segni per parlare di segni. Signs to Talk about Signs", included in the volume *Per parlare dei segni/ Talking about Signs* (with G. Mininni and M. A. Bonfantini), 1985, which since then has been reworked and republished both as an independent volume (1995) and as a section in various monographs. These include, for the Italian, *Fondamenti di filosofia del linguaggio* (with P. Calefato and S. Petrilli), 1994 (new edition 1999), *Metodologia della formazione linguistica*, 1997, *Enunciazione e testo letterario nell'insegnamento dell'italiano come LS*, 2001, e *Linguistica generale, scrittura letteraria e traduzione*, 2004, and in English in addition to numerous essays and the above-mentioned *Man as a Sign*, also *Signs, Dialogue and Ideology*, 1993, and (with S. Petrilli), *Semiotics Unbounded. Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs*, 2005. Ponzio observes that the general science of signs is related to

dialectics independently of how this term is used in semiotic discourse, simply because it ranges over a great plurality of different fields and disciplines. However, even more importantly, he also claims that semiotics is implicitly dialectic or dialogic not only because dialectics is studied by semiotics, or because semiotics interacts with other disciplines all of which are interconnected in the sign network, but because the relations that constitute the sign itself are "dialectic" and "dia-logic". The sign subsists as a triadic relation among object, sign and interpretant constituting a sort of cell which flourishes in the relation with other cells of the same type in an open-ended process of deferral from one interpretant to another.

From the perspective of his critique of the *pars pro toto* error, Ponzio believes that Sebeok's approach is emblematic. He appropriately introduced the expression "global semiotics" to indicate the expansiveness of sign studies, which he described as potentially unlimited by boundaries of any sort. With his global semiotics Sebeok takes his place in a semiotic horizon delineated by Charles S. Peirce (1839-1914), Charles Morris and Roman Jakobson (1896-1982), evidencing the limits of interpretations of the science of signs based on the *pars pro toto* fallacy, that is, the error of exchanging the part for the whole (see Sebeok 1998, 2001, 2003; Ponzio and Petrilli 2001, 2002, 2005). "Global semiotics" indicates a new trend in semiotics which has been evolving since the 1960s, fully endorsed by Ponzio, which extends the boundaries of semiotics practiced as semiology, providing an approach that is far more comprehensive. After Sebeok both the history of semiotics and our conception of the semiotic field has radically changed. It is especially thanks to him that semiotics at the beginning of the new millennium has broadened its horizons far beyond the vision of sign studies proposed in the first half of the 1960s.

Ponzio criticizes anthropocentric and glottocentric semiotic theory and practice identifying a major shortcoming in "semiology", the science of signs as conceived by Ferdinand de Saussure, in the fact that it is based on the verbal paradigm and is vitiated by the *pars pro toto* error – that is, it mistakes the part (human signs and in particular verbal signs) for the whole (all possible signs, human and nonhuman). Semiology is the "science qui étude la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale" (Saussure 1916: 26), but the general science of signs cannot be limited to the study of communication in culture, and to claim that semiology thus conceived is the general science of signs is a mystification. When instead the general science of signs chooses the term "semiotics" for itself, it takes its distances from semiology and its errors. Sebeok tags the Saussurean conception the "minor tradition" and promotes instead what he calls the "major tradition" as represented by John Locke and Peirce and by the early writings on signs and symptoms by Hippocrates and Galen. Insofar as it signifies,

the entire universe enters Sebeok's "global semiotics", as recites the title of the last book to have appeared before his death, in 2001. The human being is a sign in a universe of signs. Semiotics is the place where the "life sciences" and the "sign sciences" converge, which implies that *signs* and *life* converge, indeed, according to Sebeok "semiosis is the criterial attribute of life". It follows that a biosemiotic perspective is necessary for an adequate understanding of communicative behaviour.

In the context of global communication understood as converging with life, dialogism, a major theme throughout all of Ponzio's research, is not reduced to the exchange of rejoinders among interlocutors, but indicates the permanent condition of intercorporeal involvement and reciprocal implication among bodies and signs throughout the semiosic universe. The vital condition of biosemiosic dialogism is a necessary condition for the emergence of more specialized forms of dialogue in the sphere of human semiosis. For example, Bakhtin distinguishes between "formal dialogue" and "substantial dialogue", as Ponzio underlines in *Tra semiotica e letteratura*, 1992 (now 2004). From a biosemiotic perspective *modeling*, *communication* and *dialogue* presuppose each other and together form the foundation and condition of possibility for life to flourish in its multiplicity and specificities, including the human, over the entire planet. In such a global framework communication cannot simply be understood in terms of message transmission from emitter to receiver, though this is one of its possible manifestations. Far more pervasively, communication coincides with semiosis, therefore with life, and presupposes the universal condition of dialogical interrelatedness and interdependency among signs forming the great biosemiosic network that is life over the planet.

Theorization of the relation between "interpretant signs" and "interpreted signs" in terms of dialogism, active participation, and otherness, presents a particularly original aspect of Ponzio's research. He also insists on the interrelation between the level of sign interpretation and the ideological level of discourse, maintaining that language and ideology cannot be separated. Contrary to the dualism established by Noam Chomsky between "experience" and "competence", Ponzio – in line with modern conceptions after Kant – describes experience as a series of interpretive operations, including inferential processes of the abductive type (Peirce). Through interpretive operations the subject completes, organizes, and relates data which otherwise are fragmentary and partial. As such experience is innovative and qualitatively superior by contrast with original input. Ponzio bases his view of experience and competence on his theory of interpretation. From this perspective experience and competence converge and thus conceived do not need to be integrated with an innate

supplement, a natural piece of equipment inherent in the human infant. Ponzio develops his critique of Chomsky through a series of studies including *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (1973, enlarged French edition, 1992) and *Filosofia del linguaggio 2*, 1991; and returns to the problem of linguistic competence and knowledge generally, "Plato's problem", as baptized by Chomsky in 1985, in more recent publications including *Il linguaggio e le lingue*, 2003, and *Linguistica generale, scrittura letteraria e traduzione*, 2004.

Furthermore, research on the relation between semiotics and ideology (with Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and Adam Schaff) also led to greater attention during the 1980s on the relation between signs and values, including linguistic, economical, and ethical values. Charles Morris made an important contribution in this connection by explicitly theorizing the relation between signs and values (see *Signification and Significance*, 1964). By contrast with a strictly cognitive, descriptive and ideologically neutral approach which has largely characterized semiotic studies, semiotics today must recover the axiological dimension of human semiosis, and commit to a global reconnaissance of man and his signs as proposed by "semioethics", a neologism which has its origins in the early 1980s with "ethosemiotics", and was introduced as the title of a volume in 2003 (co-authored with S. Petrilli), as *Semioetica*.

4.   *From semiotics back to semeiotics and on to semioethics*

The origin of semiotics may be identified in medical semeiotics or symptomatology following Sebeok, thereby contextualizing the general science of signs in a tradition of thought that originates with Hippocrates and is developed by Galen. In addition to knowledge about the origins (agnition), to relate semiotics to the medical sciences and the study of symptoms implies to recover the ethical instance of semiotic studies. In other words, it means to recover the ancient vocation of "semeiotics" (symptomatology) for the health of life. And given that semiosis and life coincide (Sebeok) – life globally over the entire planet, the ancient vocation for the health of life as practiced by "semeiotics" is a vocation for the general science of signs. From this perspective semiotics is also "semioethics".

As anticipated above, this is an original proposal made by Ponzio (with S. Petrilli) in a monograph of 2003, *Semioetica*, followed in English by *Semiotics Unbounded,* 2005, and *The Semiotic Animal*, 2005. Semioethics is not intended as a discipline in its own right, but as a perspective, an orientation in the study of signs. This ethical bend to semiotics also results from Ponzio's ideal dialogue with Levinas and Bakhtin, from the early phases of his studies.

Semioethics is also an answer to the question regarding the destiny of semiosis, proposed by Sebeok in "Semiotis and Semiotics: what Lies in their Future?", 1991. The intention is to evidence the responsibility of semiotics towards semiosis, consequently proposing that Sebeok's "global semiotics", which is founded in the general science of signs as conceived by Peirce now be developed in terms of "semioethics". This is a far cry from dominant trends in twentieth century semiotics that reduce the study of signs, verbal and nonverbal, to a question of message exchange viewed separately from historico-social relations of production processes, and from the relation between signs and values. Since the time of his critical groundwork in the 1970s with such books as *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (1973), *Filosofia del linguaggio e prassi sociale* (1974), *Dialettica e verità* (1975), and *Marxismo, scienza e problema dell'uomo* (1977), Ponzio has evidenced the inadequacy of such trends, which imply a view of the human subject reduced to mere exchange value.

Ponzio theorizes the "unifying function of semiotics", identifying three aspects of this function: the "descriptive-explanatory", the "methodological", and the "ethical". Semiotics must not only describe and explain signs, it must also search for methods of inquiry and of the acquisition of knowledge, and furthermore make proposals relative to human behaviour and social programming. Obviously, as the general science of signs semiotics must overcome parochial specialism, that is to say, any form of separatism among the sciences. The ethical aspect of semiotics is projectual and should include proposals for the critical orientation of human practice generally, covering all aspects of life from the biological to the socio-cultural, and paying attention to reconnect that which is considered and experienced as separate. As anticipated above, the terms introduced to designate the ethical trend in semiotics include "ethosemiotics", "telo" or "teleosemiotics" (from "telos" = end), and most recently "semioethics", defined as follows in *Semiotics Unbounded*: "*Semioethics* reflects the idea of semiotics recovering its ancient vocation as 'semeiotics' (or symptomatology), with its focus on *symptoms.* Semioethics concerns itself with the 'care for life', but from a global perspective whereby semiosis and life coincide" (Ponzio and Petrilli 2005: 562).

The capacity for criticism, social awareness, and responsible behaviour must be central themes in semiotic studies that wish to interrogate not only the sense of science, but the sense of life for man. Developing Sebeok's standpoint and proceeding beyond him as he researches the ethical dimension of semiosis, Ponzio evidences the semioethical implications of global semiotics for education, particularly for the comprehensive and critical interpretation of

communication under present-day conditions, that is, communication in globalization, global communication.

5.   *Communication, life and the destiny of semiosis*

Communication is not possible without signs, just as the study of communication is not possible without the study of signs. Therefore, all sciences of communication must be founded in a general science of signs or semiotics. Today's world is the world of "global communication", to understand which calls for an approach that is just as global: "global semiotics" associated with "semioethics" is capable of providing this. The world today is characterized by a new computer-driven Industrial Revolution, by global free markets, and thus by the pervasiveness of communication throughout the entire production cycle (production, exchange, consumption). Communication is now being exploited for capitalist profit. As Ponzio observes in *Semiotics Unbounded*: "This is a danger for communication: we are at risk of destroying communication itself, understood as the possibility of life throughout the entire planet" (2005: 230). With advanced stages in globalization, the risks today are increasing. If semiosis is to continue and therefore life, these risks must be identified and communicated to others (especially the younger generations). We need a sense of global responsibility, just as global as the social system that is overwhelming us. This means to understand the connection between communication and life, as Sebeok's "global semiotics" or "semiotics of life" teaches us. His planetary perspective lays the conditions for an approach to contemporaneity that is capable of transcending the limits of contemporaneity itself, which from a semioethical perspective is the condition for the assumption of responsibility without alibis. These issues are dealt with by Ponzio in his monographs on Sebeok and well as in such books as *La comunicazione*, 1999, and *I segni tra globalità e infinità. Per la critica della comunicazione globale*, 2004.

In a world governed by the logic of production and market exchange where everything is liable to commodification, humanity is faced with the threat of desensitisation towards the signs of unfunctionality and ambivalency: from the signs forming the body to the seemingly futile signs of phatic communication with others. Capitalism in globalization is imposing ecological conditions that are rendering communication between self and body, self and the environment ever more difficult and distorted. These issues are analysed by Ponzio in *Il sentire della comunicazione globale*, 2000, and in *Semiotica dell'io*, 2001 (co-authored with T.S. Sebeok and S. Petrilli). If we are to improve the quality of life, it will be necessary to

recover these signs and their sense for life. As a part of this project, a task for semioethics from the perspective of narrativity is to reconnect rational world views to myth, legend, fable and all other forms of popular tradition that focus on the relation of human beings to the world around them. Most interesting from this point of view is Ponzio's book, *L'elogio dell'infunzionale*, 1997 (new edition 2005). The third function of semiotics, the ethical, is rich with implications for human behaviour: the signs of life that we cannot read, do not want to read, or no longer know how to read must be fully recovered in their importance and relevance to the health of humanity and of life globally.

From a global semiotic perspective human semiosis is only one special sphere of sign activity interconnected with all the other spheres of semiosis forming the great sign network. Studies in biosemiotics evidence how this sign network converges with life in its multiplicity of different forms proliferating over the entire planet. Semiotic studies must account for all terrestrial biological systems, from the sphere of molecular mechanisms at the lower limit, to a hypothetical entity at the upper limit christened "Gaia", which is Greek for "Mother Earth" – a term introduced by scientists in the late 1970s to designate the entire terrestrial ecosystem that encompasses the interactive activities of the multitudinous life forms on Earth. As Sebeok stated in allusion to the fantastic worlds of *Gulliver's Travels*, semiosis spreads over the Lilliputian world of molecular genetics and virology through Gulliver's man-size world, and finally to the world of Brobdingnag, of Gaia, our gigantic bio-geo-chemical ecosystem. As anticipated above, in the face of such expansion, another question is whether semiosis extends beyond Gaia? A "beyond" understood not only in terms of space but also of time. Is semiosis possible beyond Gaia, outside it, and beyond this gigantic organism's lifespan?

Well before the advent of global communication in today's capitalist and globalized society, that is, before the spread of the communication network at a worldwide level through progress in artificial intelligence, technology and support from the global market in socio-economic terms, global communication was already a fact of life. From a biosemiosic perspective global communication characterizes the evolution of life from its origins, and is a fact of life we cannot ignore, if life, including the human, is to continue flourishing globally as inscribed in the very nature of sign activity. Human communication is part of a global biosemiosic network where all life forms are interrelated and interdependent upon on all others. Instead, global communication understood in terms of today's global socio-economic system investing social reproduction in all its phases – production, circulation and consumption –, that is, global communication understood as the expression of corporate-led

capitalist globalization, is neither inevitable nor desirable, and even threatens to destroy life on earth as we know it, as denounced by its oft devastating effects over the entire planet.

6.   *Modeling, metasemiosis, responsibility: from the "semiotic" to the "semioethic animal"*

As a biological organism the human being flourishes in the great biosemiosic network interconnectedly with other biological organisms populating the biosphere. All life forms are endowed with a capacity for *modelling*, which determines worldview, *communication* and *dialogism*. Following Sebeok, Ponzio embraces the hypothesis that the human modelling system is endowed with a species-specific capacity for "metasemiosis", "semiotics", "language", or "writing". Here Ponzio understands "writing" as "writing *ante litteram*", an a priori, characterized by *syntactics,* and not as transcription or translation of oral verbal signs into written verbal signs. These terms designate the human modelling capacity, which precedes and is the condition for human communication through verbal and nonverbal signs (see, for example, *I segni e la vita*, chapter 2).

On the basis of this species-specific characteristic human beings are described as "semiotic animals" as recites the title of a book by Ponzio, co-authored with John Deely and S. Petrilli, *The Semiotic Animal*, 2005. And as we have seen, human life forms not only flourish in the biosemiosic and metasemiosic dimensions, but also in the "semioethic" dimension of the great global sign network. As a "semiotic animal" the human being is endowed with a capacity for critique and creative awareness of the other. This implies a unique capacity for responsibility. The semiotic animal presupposes the global biosemiosic condition of intercoporeal dialogical interconnectedness, to which all life forms in the great geobiosystem called Gaia are subject, and as a "metasemiosic animal" is also a "semioethic animal". The semioethical dimension provides the key to a full understanding of the nature and the extent of our involvement with all other living beings in the semiobioshpere, therefore of the measure of our responsibility as human beings for the health of semiosis, of life, over the entire planet.

It should be clear by now that the expression "semiotics" refers to both the *specificity of human semiosis* and to the general *science of signs*. Under the first meaning, semiotics relates to the specific human capacity for *metasemiosis*. In the world of life which converges with semiosis, human semiosis is characterized as metasemiosis – that is, as the possibility of reflecting on signs. We can approach signs as objects of interpretation indistinguishable from

our response to them. But we can also approach signs in such a way that we can suspend our responses to them so that deliberation is possible.

At the beginning of his *Metaphysics*, Aristotle correctly observed that man tends by nature to knowledge. From this observation, we can continue that human beings tend by nature to semiotics. Human semiosis, anthroposemiosis, presents itself as *semiotics*. Semiotics as human semiosis or anthroposemiosis can scour the entire universe for meanings and senses. However, the history of ideas tells us that semiotics, when approached this way, threatens to "absolutize" anthroposemiosis and, through oversimplification, identify it with semiosis itself.

Under the second meaning, semiotics is the study of signs. Some scholars have conceived semiotics as a discipline or science (Saussure), other as a theory (Morris), still others as a doctrine (Sebeok). As a field of study, semiotics can embrace the world of organisms, or the living world (Sebeok), or the entire universe insofar as it is permeated with signs (Peirce). In such cases it emerges as 'global semiotics'. Or, conversely, we can restrict its range to verbal and non-verbal human semiosis. In this latter case, we risk developing a limited and anthropocentric approach to semiotics (see *Semiotics Unbounded*, pp. 3-4).

As a semiotic animal the human being is endowed with the capacity to suspend action and deliberate, therefore with a capacity for critical thinking and conscious awareness. Therefore, by contrast with other animals, the human being is invested biosemiosically and phylogenetically with a unique capacity for taking responsibility, for making choices and taking standpoints, for creative intervention upon the course of semiosis throughout the biosphere. This means to say that human beings are endowed with a capacity to care for semiosis, for life, in its joyous and dialogical multiplicity. In this sense the "semiotic animal" is also a "semioethic animal".

As the specificity of human semiosis, "semiotics" is a condition for responsible and polyphonic living. This implies the capacity for *listening* and *dialogical interrelation* among differences, for hospitality towards the other in each and every one of us, as much as towards the other beyond self, as clearly emerges in *Semiotica dell'io*. As Ponzio teaches us, otherness is not a condition we concede out of generosity towards another, but is structural to life itself, a condition for life to flourish. Otherness implies dialogism and is connected with the unfunctional. And, in fact, another leitmotif throughout Ponzio's writings concerns his conceptualisation of life in terms of the right to otherness, unfunctionality, improductivity, by contrast with values associated with dominant ideology regulating corporate-led globalization. With his praise of unfunctionality, Ponzio repeats that life is the right to otherness and excess, with Peirce and Sebeok, "the play of musement", to the unfunctional and the improductive, to

unindifferent difference, with respect to social roles, human rights and individual identities as established by the order of discourse regulated by the logic of identity and equal exchange.

7. *Signs of the properly human: otherness, excess and the unfunctional*

To lose sight of the unfunctional dimension of semiosis means to lose sight of the otherness dimension of signs. Semiosis that is functional is semiosis of identity. And signs that are functional to identity are signs of difference, in the sense of signs that differ from other signs, that fix difference, and reduce signs to the status of signals. But as Ponzio explains in *I segni tra globalità e infinità*, semiosis implies difference understood as deferral, *renvoi*, openness to alterity. Therefore unfunctionality is structural to semiosis making it impossible to reduce semiosis to a two way process based on the logic of equal exchange, of equal returns. Ponzio describes semiosis as an irreversible process towards the other, which transcends the logic of equal exchange between the signifier and the signified, and finds its highest expression of signness in expenditure without a counterpart, without gain, therefore in excess. The specificity of human semiosis cannot be reduced to the status of signality. If this were the case, sign interpretation would simply be reduced to decodification and identification. On the contrary, to recognize the specificity of signs in their capacity for unfunctionality and alterity means to situate signs in a chain of interpretants that is open and dialogic. Such logic, or better dia-logic, acknowledges that signs and sign relations are regulated by the creative logic, or dia-logic, of responsive or answering comprehension, and not merely by the logic of identification.

Global communication today more than ever before is based on equal exchange logic, that is, on the logic of identity, which is associated with defence of the rights of the subject, of human rights based on short-sighted self-interest. Instead, a critique of communication reduced to such terms calls for an understanding of the concepts of otherness and excess. The dimension of excess is refractory to the logic of identity which is always ready to sacrifice alterity, one's own and that of others. We must recognize the logic of otherness and accept the dimension of the unfunctional, or non-functional, the unproductive, the logic of the gift without return, of excess as a structural dimension of human semiosis and irrevocable condition for an adequate critique of communication.

By contrast with the ideology of functionality, productivity, competitivity as fostered through social roles based on the logic of identity, the "properly human" is best connoted in terms of the propensity for the unfunctional, the unproductive, excess regulated by the logic

of so-called "absolute otherness", to evoke Levinas. The properly human is capable of unindifferent difference, that is, of differences that are not indifferent to each other, differences that interrelate dialogically and are reciprocally responsive to each other, as Ponzio maintains in *La differenza non indifferente. Comunicazione, migrazione, guerra,* 1995, new edition 2005. The logic of absolute otherness cannot be reduced to the logic that regulates social roles and identities, but, on the contrary, transcends them. Roles and identities are differentiated on the basis of the otherness relation, but this is a question of "relative otherness". In semiotic terms "relative otherness" can be associated to Peirce's "index", and is connected with "relative", "special", or "limited responsibility", to evoke Bakhtin's terminology. Instead, "absolute otherness" can be associated to Peirce's "icon", and is connected with the condition of "unlimited responsibility", which does not allow for indifference towards the other.

According to Ponzio, the properly human is grounded in the relation of dialogical intercorporeity among unindifferent differences and finds expression in the capacity for absolute otherness, unlimited responsibility, unfunctionality and excess with respect to the functionality of social roles and identities. The properly human implies the condition of vulnerability and exposition to the other. The places that best evidence the properly human are the places where time is articulated in terms of the relation to the absolute and unfunctional other, the unproductive other; the time of death, aging, disease, of friendship and eroticism, the time of mothering and nurturing, the time of aesthetic discourse, of creativity and innovation, the time of scientific progress, of the play of musement, of the ephemeral, of the ineffable, of giving without returns. This is the time of excess with respect to closed identities and equal exchange logic, the time of dialogical detotalization and proliferation of differences that cannot be recruited and put at the service of the World as it is.

For an adequate understanding of semiosis and communication it will be necessary to distinguish among the different functions of the sign. The modalities of logical inference, the dialogical dimension of semiosis, and the critique of ideology inevitably call for analysis in a semiotical key. Indeed, analysis with a claim to adequacy must recognize the sign nature of such phenomena as the starting point. However, a description of signs in terms of functionality is not enough. We must also understand the broad margin of unfunctionality structural to signs if we wish to account for the innovative, inventive and creative dimension of semiosis, and heighten our capacity for critique and responsibility. Such issues are theorized by Ponzio in his volumes of the 1980s and 1990s, most recently: *Tra semiotica e letteratura. Introduzione a Michail Bachtin* (1992), *El juego del comunicar. Entre literature y*

filosofia (1995), *I segni dell'altro. Eccedenza letteraria e prossimità* (1995), *Che cos'è la letteratura* (1997), *Semiotica della musica* (with Michele Lomuto, 1997), *La coda dell'occhio: letture del linguaggio letterario* (1998), *Fuori campo* (with S. Petrilli, 1999), *Enunciazione e testo letterario* (2001), and *Views in Literary Semiotics* (with S. Petrilli, 2003), where the perspective on language is that offered by literature, that is, literary language. This aspect of Ponzio's research was evidenced by the subtitle of the International Colloquium organized in 2002 to celebrate his sixtieth birthday: "Logic, dialogic, ideologic. Signs between Functionality and Excess".

8.   *Logic, dia-logic, ideo-logic*

Ponzio addresses problems of logic, ideology, and dialogism from a semioethical perspective and in a direction that we may describe as propositional and projectual. A special issue of the journal *Semiotica* (edited by S. Petrilli), published in 2004, collects papers occasioned by the International Colloquium just mentioned, organized at Bari University, February 2002 (under the auspices of the International Association for Semiotic Studies), under the general title *Ideology, logic and dialogue in semioethic perspective* to evidence this particular aspect of Ponzio's research. Both this issue of *Semiotica* and the theme of the Colloquium, "Logic, dialogic, ideologic. Signs between Functionality and Excess", were intended to signal problems that have always been central to Ponzio's research on "ideology", "logic" and "dialogue".

"Logic", "dialogue" and "ideology" indicate a triple dimension in the life of signs evidenced both by the natural sciences and the human sciences, the interrelation between which is considered as irrevocable by general semiotics. "Logic", "dia-logic" and "ideo-logic" imply the human sign capacity for excess with respect to function, and render the sign independent from need and necessity. This opens the way to desire, inventiveness, creativity, and unfunctionality in light of which the human being emerges as an end in itself, as a value that cannot be reduced to the mere status of means.

Ponzio has dedicated numerous essays to the problem of logic and to the relation between formal logic and dialectical logic and between dialectics and semiotics. Important to signal in relation to this particular aspect of his research is his Italian translation from the Latin of a 13th century volume by Petrus Hispanus (1205c-1277) (alias Pope John XXI), *Tractatus. Summule logicales*. The Italian volume presents itself in the form of a handsome bilingual annotated edition of the Latin original, under the title *Trattato di logica. Summule*

logicales, 2004. This volume by Peter of Spain is one of the most important available in Medieval logic. It may be considered as the point of arrival of a tradition of thought on problems traceable to Plato and Aristotle, and the point of departure of subsequent trends in Medieval philosophy. It is also an important point of reference for philosophical-linguistic and semiotic theories of our own day, whether directly (as in the case of the father of American semiotics, Peirce, who had studied Peter of Spain thoroughly), or indirectly.

In Ponzio's description the *Tractatus* by Peter of Spain orients logic in the direction of the dialectics of probability, theorizing dialectics as a dialogic art that aims to formulate probable opinions. In other words, the *Tractatus* considers problems of logic, today also recognized as problems of philosophy of language and semiotics, from the perspective of dialectics, its main interest, asserting the fundamentally dialectic character of logic. Understood as dialectics logic is at once *dia-logic*. *Dialogos* is at last recognized as constitutive of logos. Dialectics is based on the probable and is the inevitable condition for all reasoning. As writes Peter of Spain, reported by Ponzio:

Dialetica est ars ad omnium methodorum principia viam habens. Et ideo in acquisitione scientiarum dialectica debet esse prior.
Dicitur autem '*dialetica*' a '*dia*', quod est *duo*, et '*logos*', quod est *sermo*, vel a '*lexis*', quod est *ratio*, quasi *duorum sermo* vel *ratio*, scilicet opponentis et respondentis disputando. Sed quia disputatio non potest haberi nisi mediante sermone, nec sermo nisi mediante voce, omnis autem vox est somus, – ideo a sono tamquam a priori inchoandum est (*Tractatus*, I,1).

Dialetica disputatio est que ex probabilibus est collectiva contradictionum (Tractatus, VII, 6).

As emerges from the passages above, the meaning of the term "dialectics" is given in the relation with the term "dialogue". The terms ………… (dialectics) and ……..…… (dialogue) derive from the same etymology (…………..: to reflect, doubt, speak, discuss). In his introduction to the volume under discussion, Ponzio maintains the following standpoint: "The ancient juxtaposition in argumentation between 'dialectic place' and 'sophistic place' underlines the antithesis between effective dialectics, which is also dialogic, and false dialectics which is monologic". Such considerations evidence the contribution that *Tractatus* can make today to the study of argumentation and the techniques of persuasion: for example, to found a critique of rhetoric and rhetorical tricks used to reach general consensus. In *Tractatus* reflections relative to semantics are conducted in the framework of dialectics founded in dialogue. The idea of dialectics that is open to encounter among different voices, to plurivocality, has important consequences for our conception of meaning, another major

theme in *Tractatus*. And even if all sciences must be reconducted to dialectics insofar as "dialetica est ars artium, scientia scientiarum; sola enim dialetica probaliter disputat de principiis onnium aliarum artium", this does not imply monologic reductionism. On the contrary, Ponzio, maintains that it is a question of recognizing "the dialogic foundation of methodological principles and of research in all fields of knowledge".

9. *Detotalization, a dialogic-dialectic research method*

In 2004 Ponzio published a volume entitled *Semiotica e dialettica* presenting a selection of his papers specifically dedicated to the relation between semiotics and logic, semiotics and dialectics. His studies in this volume centre around such figures as Peter of Spain, but also Marx, Peirce, Bachtin, Levinas, Rossi-Landi, Schaff, and Sebeok, and explore different fields of study including knowledge theory, logic, linguistics, mathematics, cybernetics, quantistic physics, political economy, and ethics renewed in the direction of what Levinas has indicated as the "humanism of otherness" by contrast with the "humanism of identity" (see his *Totality and Infinity*, 1961 and *Otherwise than Being*, 1974). The broad thematic range of this book by Ponzio is also determined by the fact that the essays in it cover approximately forty years of ongoing research, remembering his early monographs *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale*, 1973 (new ed. 2006), *Persona umana, linguaggio e conoscenza in Adam Schaff*, 1974 (new edition 2002), and *Dialettica e verità*, 1975.

"Dialectics" is a philosophical concept involving various disciplines – logic, epistemology, language sciences, mathematics, physics, biology, political economy and the other social sciences. This is so not only because dialectics is studied by each of these disciplines, but also because the latter are dialectically interrelated. From this point of view Ponzio establishes a connection between dialectics and Rossi-Landi's research method, which he describes as a "detotalizing method". In fact, Rossi-Landi critiques the *pars pro toto* error, that is, the error of exchanging the part for the whole, the error of interpreting that which is interrelated and interdependent as something that is isolated and self-sufficient (see Rossi-Landi, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*, reedition 2003). Rossi-Landi qualified his method as dialectical and applied it to his study of signs. And in fact Ponzio reminds us that a book that Rossi-Landi had planned to publish collecting essays from the entire course of his research was entitled *Dall'analisi alla dialettica*.

Bakhtin, the twentieth century philosopher of dialogue and otherness, used a similar method for his research: he associated different (and sometimes very distant) fields and

objects of study through a procedure characterized by displacement and opening rather than by englobement and enclosure. This method is dialogic in the real sense of the term, in the sense that it recovers the connection (vital to dialectics) with dialogism. His method may be described as a dialogic/dialectic method, that is, a "detotalizing method". Bakhtin placed the prefix "meta" in front of the word "linguistics" to describe his approach to the study of (verbal) language (see *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 1963). But this prefix can be extended to all disciplines that come into play in his research, which he described as specifically "philosophical research", as critical research focused on conditions of possibility.

Throughout his writings on Bakhtin, in particular his monograph, *Tra semiotica e letteratura* (now 2004), Ponzio observes that Bakhtin's research method and his broad interests in relation to the human sciences are ultimately associated with the question of value. Values are necessarily expressed through signs, a fact which contributed to Bakhtin's interest in the general science of signs or semiotics. The detotalizing method he devised enabled him to push his research into signs and values beyond the conventional boundaries of any one single discipline. His approach was capable of radical criticism and was intended to orient praxis. In his investigation of the dialectic/dialogic processes through which signs and values are produced and made to circulate, Bakhtin in fact opposed the tendency to reify both. Bakhtin's immediate concern was with aesthetic or artistic value, especially the literary. However, since he identified aesthetic value in the categories of otherness and outsideness, he necessarily addressed other types of value as well.

Ponzio evidences Bakhtin's treatment of value from the perspective of ethics, having theorized the relation between "art" and "answerability" as early as 1919. If we agree that the source of artistic or aesthetic value is the category of other and not of self, as averred by Bakhtin in "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity", another early paper of 1920-1923, then we must also accept that artistic value as such necessarily involves issues of an ethical order centred around the problem of otherness. According to Bakhtin literature is the place of experimentation for values and their functioning in interpersonal relationships, therefore literary writing can best explore values pushing them to an extreme limit beyond the limits of social convention.

10. *Philosophy of language, dialogism and interpretation*

Ponzio promotes philosophical and semiotic investigation into the sciences of verbal and nonverbal languages in terms of heteroglossia, polylogism, reciprocal otherness and

dialogism, in contrast with tendencies dominated by monolingualism, monologism, the logic of identity, the imposition of unquestioning authority. The dialogic and detotalized approach to the life of signs involves experimenting the dialogic nature of the word. Ponzio's approach to language keeps account of the struggle between centripetal forces and centrifugal forces operating in language, the condition of "dialogic plurilingualism", "multi-voicedness", "heteroglossia", polylogism characteristic of language and languages, cultures and ideologies and of the relations between them. For Ponzio "of language" in the expression "philosophy of language" does not only imply language understood as the object of study by philosophy, therefore philosophy applied to language, but also language that philosophizes, that is, language as a philosophical perspective. Even when research conducted by the language sciences is oriented monologically and regulated by the centripetal and unifying forces of linguistic life, we cannot eliminate the original philosophizing immanent in language, that is, the constitutional dialogic heteroglossia of language. Philosophy in general (and not just philosophy immediately concerned with language) and general semiotics operate from the perspective of dialogic heteroglossia inherent in language.

Dialogic heteroglossia is an a priori and transcendental condition for philosophical reflection, indeed for all forms of critical consciousness. Such issues have been addressed by Ponzio in many books dedicated to the problem of dialogism: *Dialogo sui dialoghi* (with M. A. Bonfantini), 1986, *Dialogo e narrazione*, 1991, *Signs, Dialogue and Ideology*, 1993, *Scrittura, dialogo e alterità tra Bachtin e Lévinas*, 1994, *Sujet et altérité. Sur Emmanuel Lévinas*, 1995, *I tre dialoghi della menzogna e della verità* (with M. A. Bonfantini and S. Petrilli), 1997, *La revolución bajtiniana. El pensamiento de Bajtin y la ideologia contemporanea*, 1998, *Basi, Significare, inventare, interpretare* (in collab.), 1998, *Philosophy of language, Art and Responsibility in M. Bakhtin* (with S. Petrilli), 2004, and most recently, *I dialoghi semiotici. Sul dialogo, sulla menzogna e la verità, sui nuovi mass-media, sulla retorica e l'argomentazione, sulla testualità e la discorsività, sull'ideologia e l'utopia 1982-2006* (with M. A. Bonfantini and S. Petrilli), 2006.

The language of literature (especially when a question of genres such as the novel) offers the possibility of examining dialogism beyond its limited scope in ordinary language. Following Bakhtin, Ponzio not only revives the connection between linguistic value and aesthetic value, but also between aesthetic value and the value of the human person considered in terms of alterity beyond the logic of identity. Such issues have also been addressed by Ponzio in *Views in Literary Semiotics* (with S. Petrilli), 2003.

The dialogic character of semiosis evidences another aspect of the relation between semiotics and dialectics. As a philosophical concept dialectics has always been related to dialogue since Plato's time, even if interpretations of these concepts may diverge. Bakhtin critiqued false dialectics for producing monologic discourse and the sclerosis of dialogue. Instead dialectics is necessarily dialogic which leads to Bakhtin's "critique of dialectic reason". Reading together Bakhtin and Levinas, Ponzio formulates his own original proposal for a "critique of dialogic reason", which provides a theoretical basis for his critique of today's social reproduction system, what he calls globalized "communication-production". Ponzio first introduced the expression "critique of dialogic reason" in an Italian essay published in 1992, "Critica della ragione dialogica", and has since been reworked in various publications, including, *Semiotica e dialettica* (pp. 241-256). *I segni tra globalità e infinità* and *Semiotics Unbounded* are among his most recent works on such issues.

The latest presentation of Ponzio's research on signs and dialogism is available online in a series of eight lessons in English organized for the "Semiotic Institute on line", 2006, on invitation from Paul Bouissac. These lessons have now been re-arranged into a series of five chapters forming his book, *The Dialogic Nature of Sign*, it too published in 2006, maintaining the style and intonation of the original lessons. Each of these chapters examines different aspects of the relation between semiosis and dialogism, as indicated by their titles: "Dialogue and Alterity" (ch. 1), "Dialogue and Sign" (ch. 2), "Logic as Dia-logic" (ch. 3), "Dialogism and Biosemiosis" (ch. 4), "For a Critqiue of Dialogic Reason" (ch. 5).

After presenting his definition of the expressions "dialogue" and "dialogism", Ponzio constructs his original analysis of the relation between sign and dialogue keeping account of Bakhtin, Peirce who also analyses the relation between sign and interpretant in terms of *dialogue*, Levinas, but also other authors including Morris, Rossi-Landi, Sebeok, etc. Ponzio's starting point is the presupposition which concludes chapter 1, that, "any sign situation, sign process, or semiosis is a dialogic process" (p. 12). Therefore dialogism is not a prerogative of discourse. Not only verbal signs, but any situation or *semiosis* is a relational process presenting different degrees of dialogism. In other words, the relation between *sign* and *interpretant* is dialogic and is so at different degrees.

From such a perspective dialogue is neither formal dialogue, the place of encounter and exchange of ideas, nor the dialectical resolution of contradictions in synthesis, but rather exposition to the other, involvement with the other, intercorporeity in relations where differences are dialogically responsive to each other. Moreover, not only does Ponzio keep

account of Bakhtin's conception of dialogue, he also establishes a relation between the extralocalized dimension of his "great time" and Levinas's concept of "otherwise than being".

Reading together Peirce and Bakhtin (see Bakhtin-Voloshinov 1929; Ponzio 1984, 1985), Ponzio theorizes the relation between "interpretant signs" and "interpreted signs" in terms of dialogism, active participation, and otherness, presenting a particularly original aspect of his research. The sign is a dialogic relation between the "interpreted sign" and the "interpretant sign", which may be an "identification interpretant" or an "answering comprehension interpretant". The work of the "identifying interpretant" consists of recognizing the sign in terms of its phonemic or graphic configuration, semantic content, morphological syntactic structure. Instead, the "answering comprehension interpretant" focuses on the pragmatic dimension of signs. Moreover, signs present different degrees of dialogism, of plurivocality and univocality. The signal is a univocal sign to the extent that it presents a relatively low degree of plurivocality or dialogism. From this perspective, the "identifying interpretant" is connected to the signal, code and sign system and enables recognition of the sign, that is, identification of something as significant, as meaningful. Instead, the "answering comprehension" interpretant is the specific interpretant of the sign, that which interprets what Bakhtin-Voloshinov identifies as its sense or actual meaning (see Voloshinov 1929: 100). This second type of interpretant does not simply identify the interpreted, but rather expresses its properly pragmatic meaning, installing with the interpreted a relation of involvement and participation. The answering comprehension interpretant responds to the interpreted and takes a stand towards it. In "Semiotics between Peirc and Bakhtin", 1984, Ponzio associates Bakthin's concept of active or answering comprehension with Peirce's "dynamical interpretant".

In chapter 2 of *The Dialogic Nature of Sign*, 2006, Ponzio posits two axioms. The first reads as follows: "2.1. The sign is something which calls for a certain response, according to another something, i.e. the interpretant" (p. 13). This is supported on the basis of Peirce's triadic analysis of the sign: "From the perspective of Peircean semiotics, by contrast with Saussure's *semiology*, anything may become a sign if it is interpreted by an interpretant as something which stands for another something under some respect, its object, by which that sign is mediately determined given that it is capable of determining an interpretant" (*ibid.*).

Ponzio cites the following passages from Peirce's *Collected Papers* in support of his standpoint: "A Sign, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the

same Object" (*CP* 2.274). Therefore, a sign stands for something, its object, by which it is "mediately determined" (*CP* 8.343), "not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea" (*CP* 2.228). However, a sign can only do this if it determines the interpretant that is "mediately determined by that object" (*CP* 8.343). "A sign mediates between the *interpretant* sign and its object" insofar as the first is determined by its object under a certain respect or idea, or ground, and determines the interpretant "in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object, corresponding to its own relation to the object" (*CP* 8.332).

The interpretant of a sign is another sign, which the previous sign creates in the interpreter. The interpretant sign is "an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign" (*CP* 2.228). Therefore the interpretant sign *cannot be identical* to the interpreted sign, it cannot be a repetition, exactly because it is *mediated*, interpretive and as such it is always new. As to the previous sign, the interpretant is a *response* and as such it inaugurates a new sign process, a new semiosis. In this sense it is a more *developed sign*. As a sign the interpretant determines *another* sign that acts in turn as an interpretant: therefore, the interpretant opens to a new semiosis, it develops the sign process, it is a new sign occurrence (see also Petrilli 1998: ch.1). Indeed, each time there is a sign occurrence including the "First Sign", there is a "Third", something mediated, a response, an interpretive novelty, an interpretant. It follows that a sign is constitutively an interpretant. The fact that the interpretant (Third) is in turn a sign (First), and that the sign (First) is in turn an interpretant (already a Third) places the sign in an open network of interpretants: this is the Peircean principle of infinite semiosis or open-ended chain of interpretants (*CP* 1.339).

Most important is Ponzio's definition of the meaning of sign in terms of a *response*, an interpretant that calls for another response, another interpretant (see also his paper, with S. Petrilli, "Sign vehicles for semiotic travels", 2002). All this implies *the dialogic nature of sign and semiosis*. "A sign has its meaning in another sign that responds to it and is, in turn, a sign if there is another sign to interpret it and to respond to it, and so forth, in an open process *ad infinitum*" (Ponzio 2006: 14). Therefore a sign is a dialogue between an interpreted and interpretant, and semiosis is an open dialogue among various interpreted and interpretant signs.

This leads to Ponzio's second axiom: "The sign is firstly an interpretant, that is, a response" (*ibid.:* 14). In Ponzio's terminology the fundamental terms constituting a sign include the "interpreted" and the "interpretant" in a relation where the interpretant makes the interpreted possible. For a sign to subsist, there must be an interpreted sign and an interpretant sign, in other words, an object that acts as the interpreted of an interpretant. According to

Peirce the minimal relation for something to be able to act as a sign is triadic. In Ponzio's description the three faces of the sign reduced to its minimal terms are the following:

1) *something objective* (not necessarily a physical object), i. e. preexistent, autonomous, in this sense "material" with respect to interpretation (the Object in Peirce's terminology);
2) the *interpreted*, that is, this very object insofar as it "has meaning" (the Sign in Peirce's terminology);
3) the *interpretant* by virtue of which the object receives a given meaning (*ibid.:* 15).

The "interpreted-interpretant" relation is a *triadic* relation. The interpreted implies the object of interpretation, so that this expression must always be understood as a relation among "object-interpreted-interpretant". The interpreted becomes a *sign component* because it receives an interpretation, but in turn, the interpretant is also a sign component with the potential to engender a new sign: therefore, where there is a sign, there are immediately two, but given that the interpretant can engender a new sign, there are immediately three, and so forth, as described by the Peircean concept of "infinite semiosis" or unending chain of deferrals from one interpretant to another. Another important description of Ponzio's sign model is available in his monograph on Sebeok, *I segni e la vita*.

In accordance with Peirce who reformulated the classic notion of *substitution* in the medieval expression *aliquid stat pro aliquo* in terms of *interpretation*, *the sign is firstly an interpretant*. In fact, the Peircean terms of the sign include what may be called the *interpreted* sign on the side of the object, and the *interpretant* sign in a relation where the interpretant is what makes the interpreted possible. To analyze the sign starting from the object of interpretation – the interpreted – means to start from a secondary level. In other words, to start from the object-interpreted means to start from a point in the chain of deferrals, or semiosic chain, which cannot be considered as the point of departure. Nor can the interpreted be privileged by way of abstraction at a theoretical level to explain the workings of sign processes. For 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 interpretive 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 firstly an interpretant means to say that *the sign is firstly a response*. We could also say that the sign is a reaction: but only on the condition that by "reaction" we mean "interpretation" (similarly to Morris's behaviourism, but differently from the mechanistic approach, see Petrilli 1999). The sign is firstly an interpretant, a *response*

through which something else is considered as a sign and becomes its interpreted, on the one hand, and which is potentially able to engender an infinite chain of signs, on the other.

As emerges from Ponzio's approach, dialogue cannot be reduced to the exchange of messages between a sender and a receiver communicating about something. The semiosic process is dialogic in its entirety. "Dialogic" may be understood as *dia-logic*. The *logic* of semiosis is *dia-logic*. The interpretant as such is "a disposition to respond", an expression that does not only describe the dialogic interaction between a sender and a receiver, but also the dialogic relation between an interpretant and an interpreted. Connected in this way dialogue and semiosis converge, not only in the sense that *dialogue is semiosis* but also that *semiosis is dialogue*.

11.   *On ideology*

The problem of the order of discourse concerns both interior and exterior discourse and is examined by Ponzio from a "semiodialogic" perspective, where *logic* and *semiotics* intersect. Semiosis and argumentation are interconnected dialogic behaviours. The common denominator is "interpretation" understood not only in terms of identification, but also of "answering comprehension". This implies that in human semiosis to interpret is also to respond dialogically, to take a stand, account to…, and account for…, all of which involves values, habits, norms, stereotypes, and ideologies. The order of discourse is connected to power and ideology. Logic is understood as the *ideo-logic* of a given social system and of the individual who is part of that system. Social reproduction generally is made of verbal and non-verbal signs. Therefore, according to Ponzio, the study of ideology and the problem of moral and legal responsibility should also be dealt with from a semiotic perspective given that programming, projects, ideologies, individual verbal and non-verbal behaviours are made of signs.

Ponzio's studies on ideology begin in the early phases of his research in semiotics and philosophy of language. For Ponzio to study the relation between semiotics and dialectics, or better semiotics and dialogic also means to examine the concept of dialectics as interpreted by Marxism beginning with Marx and Engels (1820-1895). Reflection on signs can contribute to freeing the concept of dialectics from interpretive errors made in the name of Marxism. Schaff's work is exemplary from this point of view and is studied by Ponzio in several essays and two monographs on him. This Marxist philosopher has evidenced the relation between semantics, logic, knowledge theory and Marxist humanism, and critiqued recurrent

misunderstandings such as the belief that "dialectical contradiction" and the "principle of non contradiction" contrast with each other.

In addition to Marx, Schaff, and Rossi-Landi, Ponzio has dedicated numerous monographic studies to Bakhtin and his approach to ideology. In *Freudianism*, 1927, it too published under the name of Voloshinov, Bakhtin distinguishes between "official" and "unofficial ideology". This distinction plays a central role in his interpretation of Rabelais (see his monograph *Rabelais and His World*, 1965). Bakhtin interpreter of Freud maintains that the unconscious is made of sign material, including verbal signs. On this basis and given the relation of interdependency between language and ideology, any opposition between the unconscious and consciousness is considered to be of an ideological order.

Regarding ideology, it is important to note that although he returns to Marx and Engels, Bakhtin invests the term "ideology" with a different meaning from the one encountered in *The German Ideology*. For Bakhtin, ideology does not mean false consciousness or distorted thought *tout court*. Rather it indicates a social tendency, a social project connected to a particular group, a specific class. It can just as easily be oriented in the sense of innovation, revolution and science as of occultation, mystification and conservatism. The only definition of ideology ever explicitly formulated by Bakhtin in his writings is included in a footnote to "What is Language?" (1930, signed by Voloshinov) and reads as follows, though the scope of his analysis cannot be reduced to this definition alone: "Let us agree to call the totality of life experiences, which reflect and refract social life, and the exterior expressions directly connected with them – the ideology of life" (Voloshinov 1930, Eng; trans.: 108).

The expression "behavioral ideology" is used to refer to official and unofficial ideology, to inner and outward speech permeating human behaviour. Unofficial ideology relates to all of that which is other at the ideological level with respect to accepted, official ideology; it concerns all that which is contradictory; it covers such human expressions as dreams, myths, jokes, and witticisms as well as all verbal components of pathological formations. The less the distance between dominant ideology and inner speech, the more easily the latter will be transformed into outward speech. The greater the discrepancy between the "official conscious" and the "unofficial conscious", the greater the difficulty in transforming inner speech into outward speech and the greater the degree of otherness, relativity and disintegration with respect to the unity and integrity of the ruling system, of dominant ideology.

There are different levels of consciousness and ideology, though there is no difference in principle: difference is determined by different degrees in elaboration of the contents of

consciousness – that is, by variations in the capacity to employ social materials and instruments, which are sign materials and instruments. The contents of the individual psyche and of culture as a whole all belong to the same generative process; the production structures of individual consciousness and of more complex ideological formations are fundamentally the same. Different levels in consciousness and ideology correspond to different levels in sign elaboration, in verbal elaboration. For this reason, in *Freudianism* the claim is that the same methods developed by Marxist theory to study complex ideological structures constituting a given culture can also be used to study elementary sign expressions and the lower levels of individual consciousness.

Bakhtin-Voloshinov's conception of the conscious-unconscious must be seen in relation to his sign theory as expounded in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929). The Bakhtinian sign model is neither based on the dichotomy between signifier and signified, nor on that between sign system and utterance (*langue/parole*). The central concept is interpreter response, that is, the interpretant. Also interpretation is not just a question of identifying the previous sign but is understood in terms of the act of answering comprehension. All this implies a concrete dialogic relation among signs based on reciprocal otherness. Semiosis or sign activity is engendered in this live relation – and not in the abstract relation among signs forming the sign system. Like Peirce, Bakhtin too believed that man is a sign, indeed the human conscious-unconscious is made of sign-ideological material that is mostly dialogically structured verbal material.

The problem of ideology is strictly connected to language theory. A good linguistic theory must be explicative and critical, but must not limit itself to a descriptive and taxonomic approach to language analysis. Linguistic theory must reckon with the social processes of linguistic production, which calls for a critical theory of ideology. Therefore it must theorize the relation between language and ideology, the problem of the ideological structures that determine linguistic production processes. If the relation between language and ideology is not theorized, if linguistic theory is not grounded in a theory of ideology and vice versa, neither will rise to the level of critique as Ponzio says in *Filosofia del linguaggio 2* (p. 7). On the basis of categories developed from Bakhtin, Voloshinov, Marx, Schaff, Rossi-Landi and Prieto, such as "language as work", "language as historical-social-ideological reality", Ponzio criticizes the reduction of linguistic use to behaviour or activity, and theorizes the human potential for truly creative (abductive) and critical interaction with the signs of language and culture at large.

12.   *The logic of identity: from World to War*

Ponzio has developed his critique of communication in such books as *La differenza non indifferente. Comunicazione, migrazione, guerra*, 1995 (new ed. 2004), *Elogio dell'infunzionale. Critica dell'ideologia della produttività*, 1997 (new enlarged ed. 2003) and *Metodologia della formazione linguistica* (1997), *La comunicazione*, 1999, *Il sentire della comunicazione globale*, 2000. His critique of communication is subtended by his critique of the logic of identity. With the instruments of the language sciences he proposes a critique of social programs aimed at subjecting science, education and socio-cultural experience generally to capitalist market logic, therefore to the logic of profit for the few based on exploitation of the many. In this theoretical framework the concept of "World" is associated with dominant ideology, the order of discourse, vulgar realism, ontology, being, subject, the lying rhetoric of political systems and mass media, all functional to a global and totalized world characterized by the tendency to reduce and level differences. Today's world is the world of global communication regulated by capitalist ideology, equal exchange market logic, by the drive for profit and control.

Communication understood as "communication-production" is communication totally adherent to the ideo-logic dominating present-day capitalist social reproduction. Communication in the globalization era is world communication not only in the sense that it extends over the entire planet, but that it accommodates the world as it is. Global communication in today's globalized world is a function of a world without a propensity for critique. However, in the face of a corporate-led globalized world special semioses, different languages and cultures continue to persist and can be interpreted as signs of the potential for critique and resistance.

Following Levinas and his phenomenological analyses, Ponzio theorizes a logical connection among World, History, Duration, Identity, Freedom, Donation of Sense by Intentional Consciousness, Individuality, Difference-Indifference, Self-Interest, Truth, Force, Reason, Power, Work, Productivity, Politics, War. This connection is inscribed in the worldview of Western culture. It has always been exploited and exasperated by capitalism from the outstart, and ever more so in the present-day global communication-production era, that is, in globalization. The term "world" indicates the time-space of ontology, consciousness, the subject, individual and collective identity, being, all of which are experienced as part of the World, as the place of signification of the World as it is. From this

perspective another logical concatenation is that which unites the concepts of Project, Narration, Ontology, Signification, Subject.

The World is connected with the realism of Politics which is associated with the ideology of totalization and functionality. Politics thus described implements the strategies of productivity and efficiency, is faithful to reality, mediates the interests of the subjects, and orients becoming according to a realistic view of the present. The present is defended at all costs, even to the point of accepting the *extrema ratio* of war, which belongs to the World, is part of it, is foreseen by dominant World "ideo-logic", to use another expression introduced by Ponzio. Ponzio relates war and work: war is manifest "collective work" (Marx) 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. Insofar as the World is grounded in the logic of identity, it is programmed for sacrifice of the other in the name of identity. From this perspective, peace is no more than an interval, momentary repose, reintegration of forces, respite, a truce which ensues from war, and which is functional to continuing war, preparation for war; just as the night, free-time, the time of rest is functional to returning to work, to the necessities of the day, the "madness of the day", says Blanchot. With respect to a World that exploits and functionalizes the other to its own ends, a World that defends the rights of identity, self-interest, that is ready to sacrifice alterity to identity, a World in which politics is functional to persistence in being and identity to the very point of acknowledging the reasons of war, Ponzio interrogates the possibility of establishing relationships that are not of this world, and all the same are of the material and earthly order.

13.   *Otherwise than identity: for the humanism of alterity*

The questions we must ask with Ponzio are those to which Levinas dedicated the entire course of his research: is there no other sense than being in the World and for the World?, can the *properly human* exceed the space and time of objects, the space-time of identity?, do there exist relations that cannot be reduced to the category of identity and are able to evade the subject-object paradigm, relations of exchange, equivalence, functionality, self-interest, productivity?, can we install interhuman relations that are altogether *other*, yet at once material and earthly, relations to which the body can open and respond?, is there another sense with respect to sense in the world of objects? Such questions orient humanism in the direction of the "humanism of alterity" as opposed to the all too familiar "humanism of identity" which has structured and regulated Western history so far.

The "humanism of alterity" is oriented by the logic of "absolute otherness" as understood by Levinas, or, better, the logic of absolute otherness is the condition of possibility for the humanism of alterity. The latter implies the capacity for "movement" without return to the subject, a movement which Levinas calls *œuvre*, exposition to alterity, hybridization of identity, evasion from the subject-object relation. *Hors-sujet* (Outside the subject) is the title of a book by Levinas; "hors-sujet" also in the sense of being off the subject, not responsive to thematization, representation. The humanism of alterity implies the capacity to interrogate the subject's good or clean conscience, human rights understood as the rights of self, identity in light of the rights of the other. The logic of otherness implies the capacity for critique with respect to Western thought which incorporates and legitimizes the reasons of identity, which is ready to sacrifice the other, even to the point of acknowledging the reasons of war.

In front of the face of the other, the I is taken to question. Through its nudity, exposition, fragility, the face says that absolute otherness can never be eliminated. The otherness of others resists to the very point of calling for recourse to homicide and war which are evidence and proof of the other's irreducibility. Another one, *autrui*, this other, says Levinas, puts the I into the accusative, summoning it, questioning, 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. In light of absolute responsibility, peace functional to war, peace intrinsic to war, a truce, is fully revealed in its misery and vanity.

Fuori luogo. L'esorbitante nella riproduzione dell'identico is the title of a book by Ponzio scheduled for publication within the next few months. The original concept of "fuori luogo", "hors lieu", "out of place", "exo-topia", "u-topia", indicates the singularity of each one of us, the self which cannot be reduced to the I, to the individual, identity. In Ponzio's description the singularity of each one of us, self by contrast with I, is inevitably involved in the relation with others, in a relation without alibis, without substitutes. In this sense self is unique, incomparable, irreducibly other. "U-topia" with respect to role, position, function, community, belonging, identity. "Out of place" means to be exposed, to find oneself in a position of exposition, vulnerability, without shelter, protection, justification, without excuses, without ways out, without utopism. Out of place means out of genus, gender, genre, not to belong, it implies evasion from the role of subject, from the individual, from subject agglomerates, from the community. Out of place implies out of the places of discourse, evasion from judgement, definition, from the stereotype, the name, from predication of being,

from the claim of closing with the other. Ponzio's "fuori luogo" like Levinas's "hors sujet", his "otherwise than being", implies a return to listening and hospitality, to the word that listens and makes a gift of time to the other and for the other. Out of place is the place of encounter with the other, of unlimited responsibility for the other, responsibility without alibis, unlimited answerability to the other. Noteworthy contributions by Ponzio to the problem of subjectivity, of the "I", include, *Sujet et altérité. Sur Emmanuel Lévinas* (1995) and *Semiotica dell'io* (2001).

The "properly human" can only be traced outside the space and time of ontology. It belongs to a dimension where interhuman relations cannot be reduced to the category of identity, to relations among predefined subjects and objects, or to relations of exchange, equality, functionality, productivity, self-interest. Ponzio explores the possibility of response in a dimension beyond being, in what with Levinas he calls "otherwise than being". By contrast with "being otherwise", the expression "otherwise than being" indicates the outside with respect to ontology, to the world as it is. This is a question of earthly transcendence with respect to the world, in a dimension of sense that is other with respect to the sense of the world. By contrast with the humanism of identity, another form of humanism is possible based on the logic of otherness, the humanism of alterity, of otherwise than being. These themes have been recently developed by Ponzio in his introduction to a series of essays by Levinas in Italian translation, collected under the title *Dall'altro all'io*, 2003.

14.   *Prepolitical and prelogical alterity: before and beyond human rights*

In Ponzio's description the relation to the other is asymmetrical, unequal: the other is disproportionate with respect to the power and freedom of self. 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 transition from spontaneity to consciousness, from freedom as passive *jouissance* and self's happy spontaneity, to freedom as a right, and speaking that right. The rights and freedom of self are instituted in front of the need to answer to others, under the weight of unlimited responsibility for others. 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, in the need to justify the self's own existence, the self's presence, in a situation of responsibility without alibis and without escape from others. In the continued effort to reach a good and clean conscience, the self in the nominative, understood as the subject, as intentional consciousness, as speech, ensues from

interrogating the self and putting it into the accusative. Self's freedom, self's rights, so-called "human rights", established in defence of self summoned by the face of the other to account for its rights, established in defence of itself as an "I", all ensue from taking the self to question.

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, on differences indifferent to each other can backfire against self in the form of fixed and unflexible law, a legal system that is 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 defence, the realistic face of being, of self-interest of the individual and of the community. The I is open to blackmail from the impersonal order, the impersonal order of discourse, to the point of accepting the *extrema ratio* of war in the name of one's own freedom. The subtending reasoning is that violence can only be suppressed through violence.

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

The opposition of a nude face, the opposition of disarmed eyes, with absolutely no form of protection, and beginning from which self is constituted as responsibility, is not the opposition of a force, a relation of hostility, explains Ponzio in his introduction cited above. It is peace-loving opposition, where peace is not understood as suspension of war, violence withheld in order to be used more effectively. Instead, 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 – firstly "You shall not kill" – for the very fact of being a face. Endowed with 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 explicited in a formula.

Biblical prescriptions: "You shall love your neighbour 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). These 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 Levinas 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 Levinas 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 1990 to the English translation of Levinas 1934).

The situation of peace and responsibility in relation to the other, where individuals give themselves in their singularity, difference, non-interchangeability, unindifference, accountability precedes politics and logic, says Levinas. Politics and logic share the fact that they consider individuals as belonging to a genre, as equals. The relation of alterity is prepolitical and pre-logical. The I is obliged to keep faith to the relation of responsibility to the other and to relate to every other indifferently, therefore, to a singularity, but in relation to a genre, that is, mediated by a genre; the I is obliged to relate to the individual of a given system or group, whom as such is interchangeable with another individual, and from this perspective is indifferent to the I. 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, equalization of singularities with reference to a genre, insofar as these singularities belong to the same State as citizens. The relation to the other is mediated by institutions and juridical procedure, which generalizes and at once limits 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 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, responsible in an absolute sense: responsible like the hostage who must answer for something he/she did not do, for a past which was never his/hers, which was never present to him/her, as says Levinas in "Entretiens".

15.   *From fear for the other to fear of the other: justice, sociality, freedom*

The humanism of alterity inverts the Hobbesian concept of *homo homini lupus*: the State does not found personal responsibility towards the other but limits and defines it, while at once guaranteeing responsibility through generalization of the law. Conversely, responsibility for the other, unconditional, categorical, moral responsibility is not written and is not inscribed in the law. It does not coincide with State justice, which from this perspective 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, an appeal to humanity that is yet to be accomplished in the State.

In Ponzio's description fear of the other, the fear we experience of the other, ensues from the constitution of identity. The constitution of identity, whether individual or collective, requires separation from the other and delimitation of the interests of identity. On this basis is determined that which belongs to identity and that which does not, that which regards identity and that which does not – as much as the gaze of the other regards me always. Identity means to determine and limit responsibility, which is defined and limited responsibility. As such responsibility has recourse to alibis which enable the subject to circumscribe and limit its fear *for* the other, for the other's well-being. These limits are established by identity and constitute the background from which emerges the subject's fear *of* the other.

Identity is delineated on the basis of difference, but difference and identity also require indifference. Difference related to identity also relates to a given genre. 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 circumscribed, limited responsibility, a type of responsibility that is connected with a genre, that begins and ends in a genre, which has the function of guaranteeing identity. *From unindifference to the other to difference and relative indifference*: this is the trajectory delineated by Ponzio 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 – a reduction which 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. In Ponzio's words from "The I questioned":

The questioning of consciousness and its configuration as bad conscience is the basis of the I: the I starts from the accusative case, from responsibility without alibis for the other. Being in the first person, being myself, being "I", is having to answer for my right to be, being as bad conscience: being put into question, but also put to the question, being responsible. Language originates from having to answer for one's right to be, that is, from bad conscience. Having to speak, having to say "I": this is justification as regards the other. The essence of language is non-indifference, responsibility; it is "friendship" and "hospitality" (1991: 305). Identity is a combination of justifications. Bad conscience is non-indifference towards the other, fear for the other: a fear that goes back behind and despite my good conscience and comes to me from the face of the other. The rights of my identity originate in order to justify my 'being in the world' or my "place in the sun", my home.

According to Ponzio "fear *of* the other" implies fear that the subject experiences "of the other" understood as object genitive: the other constitutes the object of fear. Logic distinguishes the *object genitive* from the *subject genitive*, the other who is feared and the other who fears: object and subject. However, we have hinted at a third sense of the expression "fear of the other', which is fear *for* the other, but to understand this third sense we must abandon binary categorization, or polarization, as traditionally established in logic. In Ponzio's words from the same text cited above:

Following this logic and developing Levinas's discourse, the expression "of the other" may be designated, in our opinion, as an "ethical genitive". This third case of the genitive should be held 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'.

According to this third sense, fear of the other means to experience the other's fear, fear as experienced by the other, therefore, fear for the other. Here, we neither distinguish between subject and object, nor refer to community identity. That is, the relation among differences no longer implies community identification, indifference among identities and differences. On the contrary, the relation among differences is based on unindifference among differences, absolute otherness. Following this logic and developing Levinas, Ponzio introduces the original concept of "*ethical genitive*": the expression "of the other" may also be interpreted as an ethical genitive. Logic must take this third case of the genitive into account, the third sense in light of which the expression "fear of the other" may be disambiguated 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, *object genitive* and *subject genitive*, has reached paroxysmal degrees. However, in contradiction with the Hobbesian principle "homo homini lupus", fear of the other, fear in the transitive is not the starting point but the point of arrival ensuing from the constitution of identity. In Western history, identity has always prevailed over otherness, difference and relative indifference have always prevailed over non-indifference, relations among individuals belonging to the same genre, with ever more limited responsibilities has always prevailed over relations without alibis among singularities beyond the genre.

Capitalism has constructed its socio-economic reproduction 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 – to paroxysmal degrees, revealing a growing propensity for limiting and attenuating "fear for the other", unrelentlessly transformed into "fear of the other".

A paradox connected with global communication today in the present phase of development is the fact that social relations are ever more characterized as relations among individuals 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 difference 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 self-interests of identity, which are indifferent to each other. Indeed, the community so construed presents itself as a compact identity only so long as its self-interests require cohesion and unity.

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 regulated by relations of reciprocal indifference among differences and identities. Indifference and closure of the individual subject to the other, therefore the individual's fear of the other, ensues from creating barriers between public and private behaviour, between external and internal discourse, from separating roles, competencies, tasks, languages, responsibilities from each other and installing relations of mutual indifference among them. The logic of division and separation among the different selves forming the same subject, the logic of mutual indifference is thus perpetuated to the point of being considered the "normal" or "standard" way of conforming to the social system that subject belongs to.

Limits on individual responsibility, limits of the ethical-normative, juridical and political order, behaviour regulated by the laws of equal exchange, functions fixed by roles and social position, distinctions and divisions among individual identities sanctioned by law, identities and differences whose sphere of freedom and imputability is at once limited and guaranteed by law: none of this will succeed in undoing the intricate mutual implication between self and other. The relation between self and other is asymmetrical, therefore in the long run obsession for the other, involvement, and substitution in the self-other relation cannot be evaded. Responsibility for others is oriented: the other is elevated and taken upon one's own shoulders, so to say, in a relationship that is asymmetrical. 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.

But let us read Ponzio's own words from the conclusion of his essay of 2006, "The I questioned. Emmanuel Levinas and the critique of occidental reason":

> Like justice, freedom cannot be assumed as foundational to the rights of man, not only because freedom is itself one of man's rights, but also because it presupposes responsibility for the other man and is based itself on the prior peace of the relationship of one non-interchangeable individual to another, of unique to unique, of incomparable to incomparable. In other words, freedom is itself based on the relationship of the one *facing* the other, that is, of the I *for* the other.
> My own freedom starts in relation to the other who appeals to my irreducible and non-transferable responsibility. My freedom and rights, that is, the freedom and rights of any Identity, manifest themselves in non-indifference toward the other, in responsibility for the other, for the rights of alterity, prior to manifesting themselves as my freedom and rights, that is, as the freedom and rights of a particular Identity. These rights and this responsibility can never be exhausted given that it is not possible to extinguish our debt to others.

Another aspect of Ponzio's most recent research and writing is the dialogue currently taking place between the Bari-Lecce School and the Università del Secondo Rinascimento directed by Armando Verdiglione. In particular this dialogue concerns the relation between semioethics and ciphermatics, the term introduced by Verdiglione to indicate his own original conception of the life of signs and languages. To this aspect of Augusto Ponzio's research is testimony his most recent publication, of 2006, *La cifrematica e l'ascolto*.

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