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*Abstract*

*The search for an appropriate introductory text about the explosion of the sign network in the era of global communication is a daunting one. Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, whose individual and collaborative work in this area is well known and highly respected, have produced one – Semiotics Unbounded: Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs. In this expansive volume, the co-authors have produced a treatise that provides a comprehensive historical overview of the sign and semiotics that demonstrates that the sign is both open and related to 'otherness', hence its title. Furthermore, this book relates the co-authors' approach to significant contemporary problems including those of everyday life. This review article discusses why Semiotics Unbounded is an ideal choice for a twenty-first century course on a global interpretive semiotics.*

*Keywords: Sign network, global communication, global semiotics, C. S. Peirce, Victoria Welby, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Charles M. Morris, Thomas S. Sebeok, Ferruccio Rossi-*

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\* Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio. *Semiotics Unbounded: Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs*. Toronto Studies in Semiotics and Communication. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2005.

*Landi, Umberto Eco, Modelling, writing, otherness, predicative judgment, argumentation, communication, dialogism*

Co-authored by two of the most esteemed semioticians in the world today, the present volume is a landmark work that provides the reader with a lucid, articulate, and comprehensive discussion of semiotics, signs, and sign networks from a global interpretation perspective with special attention to its theoretical forebears. Susan Petrilli, Associate Professor of Semiotics at the University of Bari, teaches and carries out research in the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis, where she conducts research on a wide range of subjects including sign theory, subject theory, theory of meaning and language, communication theory, problems of ideology, and translation. Her web site (Petrilli 2007) offers a complete overview of her abundant academic contributions to the field of semiotics. Augusto Ponzio, Full Professor of Philosophy and General Linguistics and Head of the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis at the University of Bari, engages in an equally extensive range of research including philosophy of language, general linguistics, semiotics, and theory of literature. The only way to appreciate the scope of Ponzio's research profile is to consult his two web sites (Ponzio 2007a,b). On these two sites, the viewer will find a cornucopia of information about his extraordinary scholarship during the past four decades.

This volume is dedicated to Thomas A. Sebeok (November 9, 1920 - December 21, 2001), the renowned US semiotician who spent his entire academic career at Indiana University in Bloomington, where he served as the Chair of the Indiana University Research Center for Language and Semiotic Studies, Professor of Anthropology, of

Uralic and Altaic Studies, and a fellow of the Folklore Institute. He was also named "Distinguished Professor", the highest distinction awarded to a Professor at Indiana University. Dr. Sebeok was intimately involved in all aspects of the development of *Semiotics Unbounded* until his death in Bloomington, Indiana, December 21, 2001 (p. v).

The complete title of this work (*Semiotics Unbounded: Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs*) captures and synthesizes the essence of Petrilli and Ponzio's vision of semiotics and signs. Moreover, the jacket photograph by Jason Stitt, a dangling rope consisting of three individual multiply braided strands, cut and separated at the bottom end, constitutes a stunning visual metaphor for the semiotic methodology that the co-authors develop and embrace. The tripartite rope symbolizes a Peircean triadic approach to semiotics as opposed to Sapir's dyadic one. In particular, Petrilli and Ponzio view semiotics as an open-ended interpretive enterprise in which networks of signs interconnect and interact to provide an expansive and open-ended set of potential meanings. Theirs is an enlightening and innovative approach to the study of signs, albeit one that is firmly rooted in the historical foundations of this interdisciplinary.

In their preface, Petrilli and Ponzio make some important observations that are worth citing here. In addressing the borders of semiotics, they note that '[t]he boundaries of semiotics are determined by the nature of its object of study – that is to say, by the nature of signs' (p. xvii). In particular, the boundaries have been extended by including both the human and the non-human, and in Sebeok's conceptualization of semiotics as 'global', i.e., 'sign processes coincide with life' (p. xvii). Furthermore, semiotics' boundaries are also determined by its relationships with other sciences. In a brief

historical overview of semiotics' relationship with other sciences, the co-authors state that:

Semiotics is an extremely wide-ranging field that crosses into many disciplines. Precisely because of this, and given that we must take into account progress in the sciences – "human", "natural", and "logico-formal" – semiotics must be ready to renew itself and to interrogate the very methods and categories it employs. Semiotics is unbounded, and so is the object of its studies – the sign network. This leads to the subtitle of the book: *Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs*. (p. xxii)

In their enlightening prefatory overview of the organization of the text, Petrilli and Ponzio note that the introduction ('An Excursion into Semiotics') might have been labeled 'Semiotics for Beginners' (p. xxii) because it is intended to provide the reader with basic semiotic concepts designed to help understand signs. In it, the co-authors outline their particular approach to the study of signs by interrogating '... the trajectories followed by semiotics and its objectives' (p. xxii).

*Semiotics Unbounded* consists of an Introduction plus three parts: (1) 'Semiotics and Semioticians'; (2) 'Modelling, Writing, and Otherness'; and (3) 'Predicative Judgment, Argumentation, and Communication'. This review essay will address the Introduction in some detail prior to a sequential examination of its the three major sections. Because of its importance to the work as a whole, more space will be dedicated to the introductory chapter since it sets the scene for the entire work by establishing a

sound theoretical basis for the work as a whole. Furthermore, discussion of this volume will utilize various citations from the book itself in order to best represent the views and intentions of the co-authors. It is the intent of this review article to view this volume as an introductory guide to global semiotics – one which teachers may use as a basic text in semiotics courses as well as a *vademecum* for students. This review essay considers *Semiotics Unbounded* from the perspective a professor in search of a textbook for an introduction to global and interpretation semiotics.

At the end of the preface (p. xxv), the co-authors note their specific contributions to this text:

Susan Petrilli: chapters 1, 2, 4, and 10; sections 3.2, 5.3, 6.2, 6.3, 7.1-1.2, 7.2, 8.2, 9.1.2-1.5, 11.3, 12.1.

Augusto Ponzio: sections 3.1, 5.2.1, 5.2.5, 5.4, 6.1, 6.4, 7.1.3-1.6, 8.3, 9.1.1, 9.2, 9.3.1-3.2, 9.3.4, 11.1-11.2.

Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio: introduction, sections 5.1, 5.2.2-2.4, 8.1, 9.3.3, 9.4, 11.4, 12.2.

Given their history of collaboration in semiotic research, Petrilli and Ponzio have co-authored an *opus magnum* of historic proportion, and this volume will certainly become a classic in semiotic research. The text, as noted in the prefatory statement, '... has been entirely reworked from texts in Italian assembled by the authors, revised and expanded with new sections as part of a unitary research project, and translated by Susan Petrilli, who assumes all responsibility for any imprecision or equivocation with respect

to the texts by Augusto Ponzio' (p. xxiv). It should be noted at this juncture that the reviewer is familiar with the original versions of both authors and the translation is both excellent and faithful to the intent of the original documents.

### **Introduction: An Excursion into Semiotics**

As Petrilli and Ponzio note in the preface, the introduction '... is laid out much like a dictionary, as a series of twelve entries that explain some of the concepts and facts that are most necessary in any discussion of signs (or rather sign processes) and semiotics' (pp. xxii-xxiii). In their overview of sign processes, the authors seek to provide more than a glossary. Rather, this introductory excursus into the interdiscipline of semiotics is an attempt to demonstrate to the neophyte and the practicing semiotician alike the need for an 'interpretive' semiotics as opposed to a 'decodification' semiotics (p. xxiii), or 'code and message semiotics' (p. xviii). Because of its importance to the entire book, it is worth devoting a good deal of this review article to the basic tenets set forth in this introductory chapter. In what follows, the twelve component parts of the introductory chapter shall be addressed *ad seriatim*.

Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.1. Two Meaning of Semiotics') observe that semiotics has two referents, namely, the *specificity of human semiosis*, and the *general science of signs* (p. 3). In a concise summary of the meanings of the term, the authors elect to consider the expression 'symbol' with reference to its twentieth century uses. With reference to Bakhtin (1974), the authors point out that the symbol '... cannot be circumscribed to an immediate context; rather, it relates to a context that is remote and distant, and this is what accounts for its opening to alterity' (p. 5). They further note that Sebeok (2001) was

responsible for the significant expansion of semiotics into 'global semiotics' which has allowed for semiotics' maximal scope via his noteworthy critique of anthropocentric and glottocentric semiotics.

For the co-authors ('1.2. Protagonist: The Sign'), the basic elements of the sign consist of the *interpreted* and the *interpretant* through a relationship in which the '... interpretant makes the interpreted possible' (p. 7). According to Petrilli and Ponzio, Peirce's triadic sign involves the following elements:

(1) *something objective* (not necessarily a physical object), pre-existent, autonomous, in this sense "material" with respect to interpretation (the Object, in Peirce's terminology); (2) the *interpreted*, that is, this same object insofar as it "has meaning" (the Sign, in Peirce's terminology); and (3) the *interpretant*, through which the object receives a given meaning. (p. 7)

In their discussion of the sign ('1.3. Stooge: The Interpretant'), Petrilli and Ponzio remind that reader of Peirce's conceptualization of the sign as 'infinite semiosis' (p. 9) with the result that '... the meaning of a sign is a response, an interpretant that calls for another response, another interpretant. This suggests ... the dialogic nature of sign and semiosis. A sign has its meaning in another sign, which responds to it and is in turn a sign if there is another sign to respond and interpret it, and so on ad infinitum' (p. 9). The co-authors proceed to discuss the fact that an icon, index, or symbol are determined by the relationship of the sign and the interpretant. Likewise, abduction, induction, and deduction, are decided by this same association.

Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.4. Pragmatism as Pragmaticism') refer to pragmatism, Peirce's 'pragmaticism', as a 'set of doctrines and methods' (p. 11) employed in his writings. In particular, it is '... a function exercised by verbal and non-verbal signs. It follows that the study of signs and of verbal language in particular is the condition for understanding mind' (pp. 11-12; cf. Morris 1932). For Peirce, pragmatism had nothing to do with James' use of this term, rather, he associated it with the logic of abduction and the theory of inquiry.

Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.5. The Verbal Sign's Influence on Semiotics') periodically remind the reader that Sebeok contributed significantly to the transition from 'code semiotics' to 'interpretation semiotics' (p. 13). More specifically, Sebeok (1994, p. 105) argues that the relationship between semiotics and linguistics is one in which the former is superordinate and the latter subordinate.

In their discussion of signification and significance ('1.6. Signification and Significance'), Petrilli and Ponzio allude to a progression from *semiotics of communication* to *semiotics of signification* to *semiotics of significance* (pp. 14-15; Barthes 1982). In the case of the latter two, both Charles Morris and Victoria Welby distinguish between *signification* and *significance*. Welby (1985 [1911], I: vii) created the neologism 'significs' which she defined as 'the study of the nature of significance in all its forms and meanings'. Petrilli and Ponzio specify that '[t]he term "significs" takes account of the everyday expression "What does it signify?" with its focus on the sign's ultimate value and significance beyond semantic meaning' (p. 15). Thus, for Welby, significs has triadic reference: (1) Senses; (2) meaning; and (3) significance and corresponds to Peirce's Interpretant, Dynamical Interpretant, and Final Interpretant.



The co-authors ('1.7. Signification and Denotatum') point out that '[a]ll signs signify – that is, all have a significatum – but not all signs denote' (p. 16).

Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.8. Beyond the Verbal Sign Paradigm') note that Sebeok's criticism of phonocentrism and glottocentrism derives from his concept of modeling (Sebeok 1994, pp. 117-127; Sebeok and Danesi 2000; Danesi and Valdman 2004). 'Modelling' as a concept appears in Sapir's (1962) discussion of cultural and linguistic 'patterning'. The term modelling has also been used by the Moscow-Tartu school represented by A. A. Zaliznjak, V.V. Ivanov, and V. N. Toporov. Sebeok (1994, p. 118) refers to Lotman's (1977 [1967], p. 95) discussion of a modeling system as "... a structure of elements and of rules for combining them that in a state of fixed analogy to the entire sphere of an object of knowledge, insight or regulation. Therefore a modeling system can be regarded as a language. Systems that have a natural language as their basis and that acquire supplementary superstructures, thus creating languages of a second level, can be appropriately be called secondary modeling systems'.

As Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.9. Subject and Alterity') state, '[m]odern linguistics has broadened its scope thanks also to research on language in the fields of philosophy of language and semiotics. However, the epistemological paradigms adopted from the philosophical tradition with the rise of linguistics have tended to remain the same. In particular, the notion of the speaking *subject* has not sufficiently interrogated' (pp. 19-20).

In their discussion of subject and alterity, the co-authors define the latter as:

... the existence of something on its own account, autonomously, independent of the I's initiative, volition, consciousness, or recognition. From our perspective, alterity is synonymous with materiality understood as objectivity. The world of physical objects is other with respect to the I. One's own body, the body of each and every one of us, is other in its autonomy from volition and consciousness. But the most "other" of all is the person other person in his or her irreducibility, refractoriness to the I. Assassination is proof of the other's resistance and of the I's checkmate, of his or her powerlessness .... (pp. 20-21)

To be sure, the twentieth-century philosopher who has made substantive contributions to the issue of alterity is Emmanuel Levinas (1997 [1979]) and so well explicated by Ponzio (1996). Bakhtin (1929, 1963), likewise, has addressed this same subject.

The co-authors of this book ('1.10. Word and Dialogue') also address word and dialogue when they define dialogue in the following way:

[Something that] [m]ay be dominated by the logic of identity *or* by the logic of **alterity**. With the former, dialogue tends to reconfirm perspectives, interests, and values and therefore is dialogue only in the formal sense. With the latter, dialogue is characterized by the readiness to interrogate perspectives, interests, and values so that nothing is preconstituted, prefixed, and guaranteed. This is substantial dialogue. (p. 560).

Dialogue in its sense of verbal communication between two or more interlocutors, according to Bonfantini and Ponzio (1986) has a tripartite set of functions with subdivisions.

- (1) *Dialogue as an end in itself*
  - (1.1) *Conformative-repetitive dialogue*
  - (1.2) *Diverting dialogue*
- (2) *Dialogue functional to attainment*
  - (2.1) *Exchange dialogue*
  - (2.2) *Competition dialogue*
- (3) *Cooperative or reflective or investigative dialogue*
  - (3.1) *Rediscovery and revelation dialogue*
  - (3.2) *Research and construction dialogue*
  - (3.3) *Exploration and problematization dialogue* (p. 25)

Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.11. Dialogue and Inference') discuss the connection between interpreted signs and interpretant signs. First, there is induction that may be described as 'the relation between the premises and the conclusion ... determined by habit and is of the symbolic type' (p. 26). Next, there is deduction in which the '...relation is indexical, the conclusion being an unavoidable derivation from the premises' (p. 26). Finally, there is abduction in which '... the relation between the premises and the conclusion is iconic – that is, it is a relation of reciprocal autonomy. This makes for a high degree of inventiveness as well as a high margin of risk for error' (p. 26).

The co-authors reiterate that abductive inferential processes are the kind through which hypotheses are framed (p. 27). They cite Peirce (CP5, 172) who says that:

'[a]bduction is the process of forming an explanatory hypothesis. It is the only logical operation which introduces any new idea; for induction does nothing but determine a value, and deduction merely evolves the necessary consequences of a pure hypothesis. Deduction proves that something *must* be; Induction shows that something *actually* is operative; Abduction merely suggests that something *may be*'.

Abduction, Petrilli and Ponzio note (p. 27), involves risk because of the ever-present prospect of error. Nevertheless, this form of reasoning, when correct, may yield results that are '... innovative, inventive, and sometimes even surprising' (p. 27).

Finally, Petrilli and Ponzio ('1.12. Inferences and Categories: Semiotics, Logic, Ontology') note that '[a] sign can be taken as something *in itself*, or as something in relation *to something else* (its object), or as a go-between (mediating between its object and its interpretant)' (p. 28). As a result of these observations, Peirce developed a set of correspondences, namely, firstness, secondness, and thirdness to describe universal phenomena. In Peirce's semiotic system, firstness consists of three components: qualisign, icon, and rheme. Secondness is comprised of another set of three elements: sinsign, index, and dicisign. Finally, thirdness has yet another three features: legisign, symbol, and argument (Danesi and Perron 1999: 73-75). The co-authors note that the categorical triad of firstness, secondness, and thirdness correspond to abduction,

deduction, and induction in logic and to icon, index, and symbol in semiotics, and to agapasm, anancasm, and tychasm in ontology (p. 28).

This introduction is a remarkably lucid and succinct presentation of the quintessential components of Petrilli and Ponzio's complete articulation of a global interpretation semiotics. In this regard, it forms the theoretical core of the entire work.

### **Semiotics and Semioticians**

Petrilli and Ponzio state that the first part of this work addresses '... the problems that Peirce left on his desk ...' (p. xxiii). In each of its seven chapters, the co-authors discuss the work and contributions of Charles S. Peirce, Victoria Welby, Mikhail, Bakhtin, Charles Morris, Thomas A. Sebeok, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, and Umberto Eco in order to lay the theoretical foundation for the semiotic project and related issues that they set forth in the rest of this book. What makes this first part interesting is the fact that Petrilli and Ponzio not only examine the positions of these seven giants of semiotics, they also 'interrogate the reader' (p. xxiii) through a dialogic relationship.

Part one of this book, as previously noted, identifies the seven figures in the science of signs who have contributed most to the development of the theoretical model developed in *Semiotics Unbounded*. The presentation of the concepts and ideas of these seven semiotic luminaries is both thorough and precise. Since the theoretical ideology of all seven are so well known and well established, this review article will not offer a retrospective reexamination of Petrilli and Ponzio's insightful discussion of that work. Rather, it will provide a succinct overview of this section of the book, and it will note

how the work of these seven semioticians affected Petrilli and Ponzio's own semiotic model.

*Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914)*

In this chapter, Petrilli and Ponzio cite Peirce's now classic definition of sign structure from 1897) and reproduced here:

A sign, or *representamen*, is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity, It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. (p. 37; CP 2.228).

In the rest of this chapter, the co-authors synthesize the comprehensive and influential body of work generated during his lifetime. In their concluding commentary to the Peirce chapter, Petrilli and Ponzio remind the reader that their approach to semiotics is not a decodification but rather an interpretation approach along the lines of Peirce, Bakhtin, and Barthes (cf. p. xviii). They further note that:

The sign model that we are proposing is a heterogeneous expression of the results that have been developed in different contexts and related dialogically: interpretation theory (Peirce), dialogism (Bakhtin), otherness (Levinas), significs (Welby), and semiotics related to axiology (Morris). Furthermore, our sign model

also accounts for research on the relationship between semiotics and ideology (Rossi-Landi, Schaff)' (p. 78).

*Victoria Welby (1837-1912)*

Lady Victoria Welby's contribution to semiotics is, of course, her 'significs' which Petrilli and Ponzio define in the following way:

A neologism coined by Welby for her special approach to the study of signs in all their forms and relations. This approach transcends pure descriptivism and gnoseological or logico-epistemological boundaries in the direction of axiology and the study of the conditions that make meaningful behaviour possible. (p. 563)

In their biographical note, Petrilli and Ponzio point out that Welby has a 'relatively low profile in semiotic studies, yet she made an important contribution to the theory and to our understanding of the sign' (p. 134). It is in this regard, that Welby merits the well-deserved attention accorded to her. In particular, her two highly influential essays (Welby 1893, 1896) continue to resonate today as well as in Petrilli and Ponzio's formulation of their semiotic model.

*Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895-1975)*

Petrilli and Ponzio (Ponzio and Petrilli 2000) have both contributed to our knowledge of the influential work of Bakhtin, a philosopher of language and a philosophical theoretician of literature who believed that neither discipline could be

separated (Bakhtin 1984 [1963]). Petrilli and Ponzio label Bakhtin's research approach a 'detotalizing method' (p. 154), i.e., Bakhtin '... associated different and (and sometimes very distant) fields and objects of study through a procedure characterized by displacement and opening rather than by incorporation and closure. This method is dialogic in the real sense of the term, in the sense that it recovers the connection (vital to dialectics) with dialogism' (p. 165).

*Charles W. Morris (1901-1979)*

Morris's (1946; see also Rossi-Landi, 1953) approach to semiotics is both behavioristic and pragmaticist (see pp. 10-12). It is one in which semiotics is viewed as an all-encompassing science that embraces all aspects of life. For Morris, semiotics is a 'science of behavior' (p. 167). Morris's behavioristics is a precursor to anthrosemiosis as well as Sebeok's (1965) zoosemiosis, all of which are part of biosemiosis.

*Thomas S. Sebeok (1920-2001)*

Clearly one of the most prolific and consequential scholars of semiotics of the twentieth century, Sebeok has influenced this volume in many ways. His substantial and influential work included semiotic phenomena as modelling systems (Sebeok and Danesi 2000). As Petrilli and Ponzio point out that 'Sebeok's approach to the "life of signs" was "global" or "holistic" and could be immediately associated with his concern for the "signs of life" (p. 205). Co-author Petrilli has provided brilliant translations of Sebeok's seminal works into Italian (Danesi 1992a,b, Nuessel 2000). Sebeok was instrumental in the liberation of



semiotics and opening it up to its full potential. In this sense, Sebeok's indelible stamp is manifest in every page of this volume.

In this chapter, Petrilli and Ponzio refer to Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909) who influenced Sebeok's work on lying and deception in the animal world (Sebeok 1986; Vailati 1911). Sebeok's interest in lying in the non-human animal world was related to his long-standing commitment to debunking the notion that animals could talk in a literal sense.

Petrilli and Ponzio add to Danesi's (1998) discussion about Sebeok's global semiotics and its implications for education when they say that '... among the goals to be achieved by education should also be counted the capacity for criticism, social awareness, and responsible behaviour. Sebeok's semiotics of life is relevant to an audience of educators and pedagogical researchers owing to its implications for the comprehensive and critical interpretation of communication under present-day conditions – that is, conditions of globalization' (p. 229).

*Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985)*

Rossi-Landi's (1992) great work is *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*. For a comprehensive discussion of Rossi-Landi's significance, Ponzio's book (1988) about his contributions offers a lucid and informative discussion. Likewise, Petrilli's (1992) collection of Rossi-Landi's key essays has expanded the influence of that work to a larger audience. Petrilli and Ponzio encapsulate Rossi-Landi's approach to the philosophy of language and semiotics in the following terms:

Rossi-Landi described verbal language as a system of artifacts, and conceptualized other systems of artifacts in terms of *non-verbal sign systems*. This approach led him to expand the concept of linguistic production into *sign production*. When we apply such a framework, it becomes clear that concepts originally developed in fields other than the verbal – concepts such as "consumption," "work," "capital," "market," "property," "exploitation," "alienation," and "ideology" – can be applied to studies on language. In the same way, concepts developed in relation to studies on verbal language can be applied to non-verbal sign systems; thus, we can speak of *linguistic consumption*, *linguistic work*, *linguistic capitalism*, *linguistic alienation*, and so on. Rossi-Landi's research has laid the foundations for an approach to *general semiotics* that includes and unites linguistics with economics as well as with other social sciences. His views on human behavior have a universal application; they are also highly insightful and make it abundantly clear that in this globalized communication-production society, divisions among the sciences are untenable and in fact completely anachronistic. (p. 233).

The rest of this somewhat lengthy chapter provides a detailed elucidation of Rossi-Landi's approach to semiotics.

#### *Umberto Eco (1932-)*

No volume on semiotics would be complete without consideration of Umberto Eco's considerable contributions to its growth and evolution. Eco has contributed significantly

to interpretation semiotics within the Peircean framework. Clearly, Eco is a bridge between decodification semiotics and interpretation semiotics. In this regard, his vision of semiotics represents an important element in the model that Petrilli and Ponzio are advancing in this volume, namely, a global interpretive semiotics.

In this chapter, the co-authors make the following observations about meaning which are reflected in their own model of semiotics and sign production.

Meaning is described as a possible interpretive route in the sign network, one that interweaves with other interpretive routes that may branch out from the same sign. Once we depart from a sign where multiple meaning trajectories intersect, it is possible for us to choose and shift among alternative routes. Meaning emerges as a signifying route in a sign network, as an interpretive route that is well defined yet at the same time subject to constant amplification and variation thanks to constant dialogic contact with other interpretive routes. The indeterminacy, openness, and semantic availability of the sign is explained in terms of its contextualization in dialogic relations. (p. 338).

### **Modelling, Writing, and Otherness**

In Part Two and Part Three, Petrilli and Ponzio ponder the essential problems of semiotics in the twenty-first century (p. xxiv). Among the central issues addressed are modelling, writing (syntactics), and communication. Related matters include otherness, dialogism, and detotalization as a methodology. Each of these perspectives are examined from historical, planetary, and global perspectives.

In the first of the two chapters of this section ('Modelling and Otherness' and 'Writing and Otherness'), the co-authors note the pivotal role of dialogism, modelling, and communication in semiosis. Petrilli and Ponzio, in fact, introduce their own integrative perspective on a contemporary model of semiotics.

The co-authors reformulate Uexküll's (Posner et al., 1997-2004, vol. 1, pp. 447-456) notion of biosemiosis which Uexküll labels *semiosis of information of signification*, *semiosis of symptomatization*, and *semiosis of communication* (p. 344). In their revision of this typology, Petrilli and Ponzio note that:

1. The role of the interpretant in semiosis is emphasized.
2. The "inanimate quasi-interpreter" in semiosis of information or signification is described as the "interpreted-non-interpretant" (whereas in semiosis of symptomatization, the interpreted is an interpretant-interpreted, which does not arise specifically for interpretation as a sign; and in semiosis of communication, the interpreted is an interpretant-interpreted, which does not arise specifically for interpretation as a sign).
3. Semiosis is identified with the capacity for interpretation – that is to say, for response.
4. The importance of the pragmatic dimension in semiosis is confirmed.
5. Th. von Uexküll's definition of biosemiotics as "interpretation of interpretation", or in a word "metainterpretation", is confirmed and developed.  
(p. 345)

Sebeok and Danesi (2000: 196) define 'model' as a 'form that has been imagined or made externally (through some physical medium) to stand for an object, event, feeling, etc.'. They also define modeling as 'the innate ability to produce forms to represent objects, events, feelings, actions, situations, and ideas perceived to have some meaning, purpose or useful function' (p. 196).

Within their system, there are three types of modeling systems. The first is a primary model defined as 'a simulacrum of a referent' (p. 198). Corresponding to this is the primary modeling system defined as the 'instinctive to model the *sensible* properties of things (i.e. properties that can be sensed)' (p. 198). The second is the secondary model defined as 'either an extension of the physical form or meaning of a simulacrum or an indexical form' (p. 199). Again, corresponding to this is the secondary modeling system described as the 'the system that allows for indication of the extension of forms' (p. 199). Finally, there is the tertiary model defined as 'a symbolically devised form' (p. 201). Once again, corresponding to this is the tertiary modeling system characterized as the 'modeling system that undergirds highly abstract, symbol-based modeling' (p. 201). Throughout this chapter, the co-authors discuss at some length Bakhtin's (1929, 1963) ruminations about writing.

With respect to writing and dialogue, Petrilli and Ponzio observe that:

Compared with dialogism, writing is free from subordination to orality. Otherness and dialogism are not evidenced in the oral word, not are they evidenced in written genres (where writing is *transcription*); rather, they are evidenced in *writing* as disclosed in the genres of "indirect speaking" – that is, in literary

genres. Here, otherness is not subject to the order of discourse; on the contrary, otherness escapes that order through writing understood as indirect speaking, as speaking with reserve, as a distancing between the author and the text that gives rise to the "different forms of silence" such as parody and irony. (p. 388)

In their discussion of storytelling, the co-authors state that:

Global communication is subject to the global market, to the processes of general commodification that are characteristic of today's communication-production society. One of the distinguishing features of global communication is a tendency toward homogenization, toward a levelling of differences. Homogenization encourages the formation of identities, individualisms, separatisms, and egoisms of both the individual and the community order that are, to say the very least, simply delusory. These formations accompany and are complementary to the mechanisms of competitiveness, conflict, and mutual exclusion. Paradoxically, the search for identity excludes the logic of otherness. In fact, the kind of difference that is necessary for the assertion of identity, to self-assertion, is difference that is indifferent to other differences. The condition of indifferent difference is achieved by sacrificing otherness to varying degrees. We are referring here both to internal otherness, to that which identifies with difference internally, and to external otherness, the difference of others, *autrui*. (pp. 415-416)

In a most interesting section of this chapter, Petrilli and Ponzio discuss storytelling in the era of global communication with special attention to 'oraliture' (p. 415), a neologism of the co-authors (p. 417), which derives directly from the Black African culture including the African-American one.

### **Predicative Judgment, Argumentation, and Communication**

In the three chapters ('Understanding and Misunderstanding', 'Closed Community and Open Community in Global Communication', 'Global Communication, Biosemiotics, and Semioethics') of the third and final section of this book, Petrilli and Ponzio address predicative judgment, argumentation, and communication juxtaposed to global communication, community and communion.

It is in the final three chapters of the book, especially the last two, that Petrilli and Ponzio develop their model of interpretive semiotics. In essence, they expand the confines of the interdisciplinary of semiotics beyond its previous boundaries by '... developing, specifying, and applying much of the material introduced in Part One' (p. xxiv).

Petrilli and Ponzio amalgamate their conceptualization of an 'unbounded semiotics' by integrating a wide variety of notions of predicative judgment, argumentation, and communication juxtaposed with global communication, community, and communion.

In their important critique of the reason of global communication (p. 478), Petrilli and Ponzio show that:

Global communication has modified space, distances, time, and – most importantly – our feelings and affections. As a consequence, we must begin to decipher the signs of the processes involved, identify the new courses followed by commodities, learn to read the messages produced by the global communication system, measure this system in terms of planetary extension and velocity, convert the criteria on which it flourishes into a new system of values, and so on. In other words, it is now time to reflect in a semiotic key on the new conditions of feeling and reasoning in the global communication system with the goal developing a *Critique of the Reason of Global Communication*. (pp. 478-479)

In their wide-ranging discussion of global communication (chapter 11), Petrilli and Ponzio contemplate the absolutely intriguing issues related to human-machine communication that involves the technological, the economic, and the semiotic.

In the final chapter of this book, Petrilli and Ponzio set forth their vision of global semiotics, biosemiotics, and semioethics. In this culminating chapter, the co-authors make the very significant point that:

As a unique semiotic animal [cf. Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio 2005] – that is, the only animal capable of reflecting on signs and communication – the human being has a singular responsibility toward life (which is comprised of signs and communication), which also means quality of life. More than *limited responsibility*, the type of responsibility involved is *unlimited responsibility* in the terms so far discussed – that is, *responsibility without alibis, absolute*



*responsibility*. Our responsibilities toward life in the global communication-production phase of development in late capitalist society are enormous, indeed unbounded, in the sense that when we speak of life, the implication is not just human life, but all of life throughout the entire planetary ecosystem, from which human life cannot be separated. As the study of signs, semiotics cannot evade this issue. Originally, semiotics was understood as "semeiotics" (a branch of the medical sciences ) and was focused on symptoms. Nowadays, the ancient vocation of semiotics as it was originally practised for the "care of life" must be recovered and reorganized in what we propose to call "semioethic terms. (p. 535)

In this final chapter, Petrilli and Ponzio advance their unbounded, semioethic, interpretive semiotics in a persuasive and convincing fashion.

This volume, indeed, reminds the reader of the roots of semiotics, while, at the same time, it expands this interdisciplinary by unchaining some of its previous constraints. In doing so, Petrilli and Ponzio provide their audience with a semiotics that is both open-ended and truly interpretive.

### **Concluding Remarks**

*Semiotics Unbounded* is indeed the *chef d'oeuvre* of two of today's most renowned semioticians. In it, Petrilli and Ponzio have synthesized their two collective lifelong research agendas into a brilliant, comprehensive, and complete statement of interpretive semiotics into a harmonic coalescence that is a remarkable *tour de force*. Indeed, this book should be a core holding in every semiotician's library. No review essay, even a

long one, is capable of representing the knowledge, wisdom, and sagacity of the two co-authors of this remarkable tome. Petrilli and Ponzio have set forth a far-reaching, effulgent, crystalline, and comprehensive overview of interpretive semiotics. In this regard, it represents a thought-provoking and highly stimulating presentation in the evolution of this interdisciplinary

As noted above, this review article on *Semiotics Unbounded* has been from the point of view of a professor who wants to use this volume as a basic textbook in an introductory course on semiotics at the university level. From that perspective, this book is an ideal choice because it is written by two distinguished and accomplished semioticians. *Semiotics Unbounded* contains everything that a college professor wants in a course text: (1) its comprehensive account of semiotics; (2) its historical synthesis of the major treatises in the field; (3) its innovative model of semiotics with a focus on the most important new developments in semiotics today, namely, a global perspective, an interpretive semiotics as opposed to decodification semiotics; and (4) its seamless integration of an enormous body of major scholarly research from these two eminent semioticians. This book is an ideal selection for an introductory course because of its comprehensive nature, lucid writing, and innovative conceptualization of the interdisciplinary.

This volume contains an extremely useful glossary (pp. 559-564), a comprehensive bibliography (pp. 565-596), a detailed index (pp. 613-630). It is worth noting that the bibliography features an extensive and impressive, albeit not comprehensive, listing of publications by Petrilli (pp. 593-596; cf. Petrilli 2007) and Ponzio (pp. 596-598; cf. Ponzio 2006a,b).

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