

# Semiotic dialogues

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## *Argumentative dialogues and non. Conditions of dialogic argumentation*

### *Dialogue and argumentation*

**Augusto:** The idea subtending our discussion on the relationship between dialogue and argumentation does not merely allude to the fact that each time we reason we do so in the context of a dialogic relationship with another person, even when this other person is our own interior double self through which we evaluate the validity of a given argument.

Nor, on considering the relationship between dialogue and argumentation, are we particularly concerned with the fact that dialogue implies argumentation more or less explicitly.

In my opinion the problem is far more complex and compels us to shift our attention from dialogue-argumentation to its conditions of possibility. Understood in such terms our problem concerns the foundations, thereby implying a discussion along the boundaries interconnecting the study of argumentation — or *logic* —, *dialogue analysis* and *semiotics* in what may be described — if the expression is allowed me — a 'semiodialogic' perspective.

Two authors whom I believe are fundamental for the adequate development of such a perspective are Charles S. Peirce and Mikhail M. Bakhtin.

**Susan:** I'd add another two names, that is, Victoria Welby and Charles Morris. In my opinion both Welby's theory of meaning, or 'Significs' — as she chose to call it — as well as Morris's 'axiology' are rich in precious suggestions for a fuller understanding of the problem we're now discussing. But since you're an expert in Peircean semiotics Massimo, I'd like to know what contribution you believe may come from Peirce in a study of the relationship between dialogue and argumentation. Do you agree that Peirce, as Augusto maintains, can help identify the characteristics of dialogue in argumentation.

**Massimo:** With reference to texts that are dialogues on a formal level, that is, an exchange of "rejoinders" between more than one interlocutor, the following typology may be proposed on the basis of the structure of action and, therefore, of verbal action: 1) dialogue considered and experienced as an end in itself; 2) dialogue functional to attainment or operative dialogue; 3) reflection dialogue for the definition of problems, objects, ends.

This typology is quite obviously based on Peirce's model for the tripartition of sign aspects. Bearing this renown model in mind, let us remember that: firstly, a sign may be considered isolatedly in itself; or, secondly, in its dependency on the object; or, lastly, in the *ratio* of its relationship with its object.

Similarly to the tripartition of dialogues already proposed by Augusto and myself (cf. Bonfantini/Ponzio 1983 and 1986), the sign-object-interpretant triad is an application of the three categories recognized by Peirce (*CP* 2.227) as the 'quasi-necessary' matrixes of semiosis.

In my own version (cf. Bonfantini 1987b), I broaden these three categories into the 'precategorical principles' of the 'three faces or qualities of A Priori'. The three faces are the three faculties or modalities necessary and sufficient to living beings for interaction in objectuality: sense, desire, praxis.

**Augusto:** Yes, these are some of the aspects of the issue under discussion I was referring to, which no doubt make the connection between theory of dialogue, theory of semiosis and theory of argumentation necessary.

A common denominator linking these three theories, or, better, these three aspects implied by *semiodialogic theory* is *interpretation*.. Interpretation, in fact, plays a central role in dialogue as much as in semiosis and argumentation.

Well then, to evidence the connection of argumentation and semiosis to dialogue is to evidence the dialogic character of interpretation insofar as interpretation is not only identification, recognition but also 'answering comprehension', an expression adapted from Bakhtin. In other words, together with the *identification interpretant*, which is the aspect we stop at when considering meaning in terms of the *signifié* understood in the Saussurean sense and, therefore, in its dependency on the 'code', we must also consider the interpretant of answering comprehension which does not merely limit itself to identifying signs but responds to them dialogically, takes a stand, makes a choice, and therefore implicitly involves reference to values, habits, norms of behavior, stereotypes, ideologies (cf. Ponzio 1994).

This is why a typology of dialogue must begin with a typology of action, as Massimo says. Nor is it incidental that a typology of action should correspond to a typology of signs, as in Peirce, or to the three categories or, rather, as Massimo says, the 'precategorical principles of the three faces of A Priori'.

*Logic, dialogic, axiology*

**Massimo:** Yes, it's important that a typology of dialogue should be developed in relation to a typology of action. All signs are semiotic acts: the rejoinder in a dialogue still to be defined as to how it will proceed. A dialogic rejoinder is always an *interpretandum*, an interrogation. An abduction begins with an interrogation, a question, the subject-interpretant remembers or invents a possible answer, an interpretant and assumes it as a hypothesis. An example: why is the ground wet? Well, I recall that when it rains the ground gets wet. I assume that it has rained as a hypothesis. The ideas assumed, or better the judgements that recall them tend to associate with each other, to gravitate into a synthesis: they come together as two premises and form an implication. And this is induction. An example: premise: it's raining, and the ground is wet; conclusion: that it's raining results in the ground getting wet. These implications, these mental habits, remain inside us as mechanisms ready to enter into action as soon as the right *case* presents itself. Like a bow when you position the arrow and let it go. The bow that shoots the arrow and the physiological phenomenon called the reflex arch are invested with the inexorability of deduction. That it is raining *involves* the ground getting wet; but it's now the case that it's raining; therefore, the ground will get wet. This is the prevision that necessarily springs from the premises. Any idiot, as Holmes would have it, is capable of making such mechanical previsions; even computers, we might add. All the same they must be put into motion. It seems to me that even deduction involves a gap between premises and

conclusion, that is, it involves some form of distancing with respect to mere repetition, and, therefore, perhaps even deduction has something dialogical about it.

**Susan:** What you're saying, Massimo, would seem to confirm the opportuneness of putting together Peirce and Bakhtin, in other words, of putting together 'semiotics of interpretation' and 'philosophy of dialogicality', an association proposed by Augusto on several occasions throughout his writings. But, Augusto, thinking about sense in terms of answering comprehension and dialogicality, such that reference to a code obviously cannot offer an acceptable account of sense, what I'd like to know is how Bakhtin contributes to our understanding of such mechanisms.

**Augusto:** The logic that makes sense comprehensible is a *dia-logic*. The comprehension of sense always implies dialogically structured argumentation. Sense is always an answer to a question, a sort of rejoinder in a dialogue where question and answer do not simply involve information exchange, but far more than this, values and valutative orientations. The kind of question we intend calls for a pragmatico-valutative standpoint, just as the answer involved in comprehending sense also requires a standpoint, whether implicitly or explicitly.

The question and answer logic in which sense is decided escapes the limits of monologicality. By question and answer I do not intend the absolute and impersonal abstract categories of *Logos*, but rather concrete aspects of dialogue. Differently to monological sign relationships, which would not seem to have spatio-temporal and axiological limits, or, which are situated in the space-time of monological discourse, dialogical question and answer relationships have a precise and diversified spatial, temporal and axiological collocation, which determines the degree of *irreducible otherness* with which such relationships are endowed.

I believe Bakhtin's main contribution to the problem of the conditions of possibility, to the foundations of dialogical argumentation lies in his approach, in the terms just described, to the problem of sense (cf. Ponzio 1993a).

**Susan:** Well, as I was saying earlier, a connection could be established between the problem of dialogue and both the work of Victoria Welby and Charles Morris. The latter, in fact, each researched into the interrelation between signs, values and action and, therefore, between semiotics, axiology and pragmatics evidencing the importance of such interrelation in cognitive processes and in praxis. Values are vehicled by signs, or, better, signs are the material out of which values are created while the opposite is not necessarily true — not all signs necessary involve values, such as signs in the nonhuman animal world, or signs forming our genetic codes, etc. — and signs and values in their turn relate to behavior.

Morris divides 'meaning' into 'signification', the object of semiotics alluding to the condition of 'having meaning', on the one hand, and 'significance', the object of axiology alluding to the condition of 'being meaningful' or 'significant', on the other. Welby also makes a similar distinction with her own tripartition of meaning into 'sense', 'meaning' and 'significance'. In both cases the term 'significance' underlines the connection of signs and meaning to values and therefore to human behavior.

Both Welby and Morris study sign action, particularly *verbal* sign action, as the place of production of knowledge and truth values. But beyond this sign action is considered as the place of production of ethic and esthetic judgement and, therefore, of the capacity for critique and responsibility. This implies analysing signifying processes intended in a broad sense in situations where dialogical potential is at its highest and, therefore, where the answer required for the

comprehension of sense is grounded in the logic of otherness, as Augusto says, and calls for a standpoint.

**Augusto:** This connection you're highlighting between values, signs and argumentative dialogue Susan makes 'ethosemiologicals' even more appropriate than 'semiologicals' as a means of indicating the founding theoretical perspective in which to analyze the conditions of dialogic argumentation.

**Susan:** Yes, there's no doubt you're right. Indeed, to study meaning in relation to value, that is, to study signifying processes from the point of view of significance means to assume the responsibility of interrogating the value of meaning beyond its systemic articulation. This implies the critical effort of examining *à la Kant* the "conditions of possibility" of meaning as well as attempting *à la Marx* to recover the sense for man of semiosis considered, following Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (cf. 1992), as 'social reproduction'.

To study meaning as the production of significance, that is, to put together signs and values also implies doing what Marx does with his critique of merchandise, that is, deconstruct sense to evidence the action of signs and communication relationships between things in production processes instead of just considering 'facts', 'things' or 'relationships between things' independently of such processes. It also means to restore human sense to things and facts by critically revealing the linguistic and social alienation processes to which the human person is subject in daily signifying and communicative practices.

Especially when dealing with the problem of 'significance' Welby (cf. 1983, 1985) is referring specifically to the problem of responsibility which she considers as structural to the production of signs and meaning. She uses the term 'significance' to refer to the overall signifying power of signs and therefore to value producing processes active in semiosis, being the result of the human person's involvement in the life of signs both at the cognitive and emotional levels as well as at the level of praxis.

As regards the connection between values, signs and action, referred to by you Massimo earlier on, it's worth remembering that as early as 1964, in a book entitled *Signification and Significance*, Morris related a typology of values to a typology of action. Values are classified as 'object', 'operative' and 'conceived values' and are made to correspond to the subdivision of action, respectively, into 'perceptual', 'manipulatory' and 'consummatory action'.

Furthermore, from the viewpoint of the relationship between the sign and its interpretant, a correspondence may also be established between these three types of value and three types of action, on the one hand, and the 'index', 'symbol' and 'icon', respectively, as established by Peirce in his typology of signs, on the other. Infact, *object values* (stereotypes) relate to objects indexically, that is, according to the law of necessity. The relationship of *operative values* (ethical, juridical, religious norms) to objects is of the symbolic type: it is based on a convention. *Conceived values* (ideologies) express a relationship of similarity corresponding to the sign condition where iconicity dominates.

#### *Typology of arguments and typology of signs*

**Massimo:** As I was implying earlier when I suggested that even deduction involves a minimal degree of dialogicality given that it too involves a gap between the premises and their conclusion, I think it's a good idea to examine the relationship between argument type or inference (induction, deduction, abduction), the typology of signs (symbol, index, icon) and dialogicality.

**Augusto:** A relationship may indeed be established between inferential argumentation and Peirce's sign typology especially if we consider his tripartition into symbol, index and icon in terms of the degree of dialogicality and otherness implied in the relationship between interpretant and interpreted.

In symbols the relationship between the interpreted and interpretant is regulated by a habit and therefore it is conventional; in the index it is regulated by causal necessity and therefore it is constrictive; in the icon it is regulated by similarity and therefore by the principle of reciprocal autonomy.

This also applies to argumentation if we consider the relationship between premises and conclusion as a relationship between interpreted and interpretant signs. In induction the relationship between the premise and the conclusion is of the symbolic type, it is based on a habit. In deduction it is of the indexical type given that the conclusion is a necessary derivation from the premises. In abduction the relationship between premises and conclusion is of the iconic type, that is to say, of reciprocal autonomy, and this implies a high degree of inventiveness together with a high risk margin for error. Abductive processes are highly dialogical and generate answers that may be considered as the most risky, inventive and creative.

As already demonstrated in detail in a paper published in 1983 (Bonfantini/Ponzio 1983), the degree of dialogicality in the relationship between interpreted and interpretant is minimal in deduction where once the premises are accepted the conclusion is compulsory. Inferential processes also remain unilinear in induction where identity and repetition dominate even though the relationship between premises and conclusion is no longer compulsory. On the contrary, in abduction the relationship between argumentative parts is dialogical in a substantial sense and, in fact, very high degrees of dialogicality may be reached and the higher the more inventive becomes reasoning. Abductive argumentative procedure is risky, that is, it is mainly tentative and hypothetical leaving a minimal margin to convention (symbolicity) and mechanical necessity (indexicality). Abductive inferential processes — in which iconicity prevails — involve transcending the logic of identity and equal exchange and generating sign processes at high levels of otherness and dialogicality.

**Massimo:** Well, Augusto, single rejoinders and explicit reasoning — even the most isolated rejoinder always implies whole pieces of reasoning or argumentation — take on each time they are used a different sense from context, that is, from the situation, the communicative game of the moment.

This is true, firstly, of dialogues *in praesentia*. Though more or less explicitly argued but in any case identical even from the point of view of intonation, the rejoinder "This dish is tasteless" will mean something different, that is, will be interpreted differently, for example, in the two following typical situations: 1) if uttered by myself while at table with the family my wife will interpret it as a request of adding a little salt; 2) if uttered by myself as a member of a jury in a cooking competition the others present will interpret it as a negative verdict on the quality of the cook's performance.

There's no doubt that in more standard, more routine attainment dialogues the rejoinder, whether argued or not, receives its color from the situation, from the communicative game. Similarly to cinema, as in Kulesov's experiment. A close up of an isolated actor. He watches attentively. The same close up. Followed by a shot of a dead child expresses compassion. The same close up. Followed by a shot of a delicious dish of steaming roast, expresses hunger.

Rejoinders, sentences, transitions, musical cadences, sequences do not necessarily occur in a continuous communicative game. Just as on television or at the cinema. They can be recorded. As in a book or on video. In that case you can go back to them, think about the sharpness, or about the stupefying obtuse sensuality of the details. Relaunch the semiosis of the fleeting moment caught up once again, beyond dialogic obviousness, in the open dimension of persemiosis. For example in a conversation *in praesentia* on a videoessay used for artistic purposes and/or as a report.

*To argument, to signify, to simulate*

**Susan:** This makes reasoning dialectical. No doubt dialectics is also the art of persuading through deceit or the art of finding a solution to problems by playing the illusionist game and putting contradictions together in a synthesis. But dialectics is also positive in its effort to overcome the obvious, that is, in its effort to amplify and problematize. As to computers, I doubt we can say they're capable of dialectical reasoning, they're not dialectical and are incapable of lying. What do you think, Massimo?

**Massimo:** We sometimes think computers can simulate man's thought processes. Or even go further than man's thought processes. Perhaps by correcting iniquities or conciliating human conflicts and contradictions in the light of some superior design. Just as in the suggestive science fiction novel by our friend Giampaolo Proni: *Il caso del Computer Asia*.

But the fact is thinking is contradictory in itself. And not even love implies synthesizing and annulling contradictions, but accepting and even welcoming contradictions. Computers don't feel, think, hate or love. They don't reason dialogically. They don't think. They calculate. This is the point. We all know this.

But in reality whoever says that computers can simulate man is thinking that man can simulate computers. By becoming cold, still, indeed, static, free of problems, unidirectional.

Thinking means being capable of lying and of deceit, of dialectics and of diairetics. One divides into two and two conjugate and/or oppose each other and/or devour each other. They don't melt into each other. Through exercises of displacement, struggle and problematic conjugation of contradictory perspectives, we work toward moments of increasing harmony. But, Augusto, I want to ask you a question. How can dialectic in the plural escape what would seem to be the recurrent destiny of gerarchies and totalitarianisms.

*Dialogic and dialectic*

**Augusto:** This problem brings us back to the question of the centrality of dialogue in argumentative reasoning, that is, reasoning that has not stiffened into the defense and reproduction of identity but is open and available towards otherness.

Bakhtin (1975, It. trans. 1979: 365) evidenced how unilaterality, ossification, rectilinear and unilateral dialectics derives from sclerotized dialogue. Monological, unilinear and totalizing dialectics is necessarily orientated towards a sythesis and a conclusion and as such calls for a *critique of dialogical reason* (cf. Ponzio 1994: 79-106). From this point of view Bakhtin is a main point of reference also because the whole of his research, including his most recent paper of 1974 on the methodology of the human sciences, concentrates on the same problem faced by Sartre in his *Critique de la raison dialetique*: that is, whether the knowledge and understanding of man by man not only implies specific methods but a *New reason*. This, however, cannot be understood in terms of a new relation between *thought* and its *object* as Sartre believed (cf. 1960, It. trans. 1963: 13). In

fact, Sartre's dialectics remains wholly inside the limits of monological dialectics given that he reduces the relation of otherness to a relation of identity and of reciprocal objectification: dialectics between *for self* and *for others* is dialectics in totalizing consciousnesses, where the tendency is to affirm one's own objectifying view.

The critique of dialogical reason is the critique of the category of Identity, which is the category currently dominating in Western thought and praxis. In the perspective of identity where sense is made to coincide with partial and limited interests only mystification is possible: and this is true whether we are speaking of the identity of an individual, group, nation, language, cultural system or of a very large community such as the European or the entire Western world or the United Nations.

The category of Identity dominates today not only because of the *concrete abstractions* constructed on it, which form the *Reality* we experience: such concrete abstractions as Individual, Society, State, Nation, Truth, Knowledge, Equality, Justice, Freedom, circumscribable and definable Responsibility, Need, Equal exchange, etc., which are 'internal' to today's overall system of social reproduction; but also because the system itself is actually grounded in the category of Identity which tends to assert itself structurally and constitutively as Universal in a worldwide Production, Market and Consumption process. The logic of concrete abstraction in the current process of social reproduction is the logic of Identity. And the category of Individual with its rights, obligations, responsibilities; of Society with its interests; of State with its Politics adhering as much as possible to Reality; of Equal exchange with its needs, all obey the logic of Identity.

The places of argumentation internal to the order of discourse are the places of the logic of identity. Our forms of Reason, which include the reasons of war even if in the form of *extrema ratio* which makes war itself seem legitimate, just, legal; our Reason inclusive of the reasons of elimination — from emargination and segregation to extermination — of the other, is the Reason of Identity. Its logic is asserted by barricading, isolating, expelling or exterminating the other thereby allowing for the construction of the concrete abstractions in which it is founded. This includes the Individual which must firstly sacrifice its own otherness to itself in order to assert itself as identity.

The critique of Reason and argumentation thus intended requires a *point of view that is other*. This requires preliminary *recognition of the other*, or, rather, recognition of the fact that recognition of the other is an *inevitable imposition* (cf. Ponzio 1995a). Recognition of the other not as a concession, a free choice made by the Individual, the Subject, the Same, but as a necessity imposed by alienation, the loss of sense, by the situation of *homo homini lupus*. The situation of *homo homini lupus* consequent and not mythically antecedent to — Hobbes' fallacy! — the concrete abstractions of State, Politics, Law.

*To argument, to announce, to denounce*

**Susan:** It seems to me that we must aim at overcoming specialistic separations giving rise to lying in the form of not saying something, which is a form of concealment in itself. Self-limitation is lying. All discourses, no doubt, have a provisional conclusion and inevitably come to a close; but such an ending cannot be definitive or exhaustive.

**Massimo:** I remember being struck several years ago by Aldo Capitini's criticism of the specialism and antidemocratic formalism of institutions, by his criticism of the closed reasoning of corporations and of whoever greedily capitalizes on knowledge and power.

He was thinking of those socially oriented centres where one learns the art of discussion and administration, the art of eliminating and putting all presuppositions out of play. With everyone participating in the discussion without prohibitions and self-limitations. And therefore without keeping silent and without lying.

But in such situations the decision taken is put into parentheses. If, instead, a decision must be taken, or at least decisions must be proposed, we must be able to count on a procedure. One that ensures a conclusion. Provisional, not totalizing, but perentory.

**Susan:** So what do we do, Massimo? Deal with everything? If, on the one hand, specialistic separations, self-limitations are forms of lying and deceit, on the other, wouldn't dealing with everything be a form of (vain) pretension, typical of totalizing and systematizing knowledge?

**Massimo:** Argumentation and/or dialogic procedure must favor the relevance of communication, the exaggeration of reports, the local efficaciousness of action: communication as a means of acting on the spot.

The criterion that must dominate is expressed by the word 'now'. I know there's a lot we must do, countless evils in the world, numerous decisions to be made by discussing them. I know all this very well. But I am forced to decide that I must now struggle to solve those evils that I believe need to be solved most.

The Kantian maxim concerning the need to question the universal validity of the law regulating one's actions is no doubt still valid. But turned upside down: in a pragmatic perspective. And it doesn't begin with fixed principles. But rather from the moment we make a choice. From the exemplarity of possible action. What would the consequences be if no-one were to intervene in such a situation? If everyone follows my inertia? Or if, instead, the style of my decision and of my action is repeated?

Therefore, to proclaim and apply the motto 'the end justifies the means' is hypocritical, a deferral that destroys the present and the future.

In reality, the means justifies the end. To put the fleeting moment to interest reinforces the habit of industriousness and makes the utopia of the future city 'legitimate' without stiffening it into a consolatory and ideological end of (hi)story.

### ***Tv is dead. Dialogue and new media communication***

#### *The television crisis*

**Massimo:** TV is dead but video is already born!

**Susan:** Would you explain this paradoxical 'slogan' you've been using a lot lately in your articles, lessons and conferences?

**Massimo:** Great disorder under the sun: an excellent situation! What I'm saying is TV is dead, but the reign of video is born: recordings, videocassettes, video essays, inquiries, reports, and denunciations through selfmanaged and economical television films. Long live the media system crisis as the crisis of the centrality of television. Life is wonderful as long as you can get your bearings and understand things and as long as you have a project to avoid dying.

**Susan:** To avoid dying of what and to understand what?

**Massimo:** To avoid dying of boredom or of television contamination. And above all to understand that there's no point for intellectuals, the press or the public in tediously hovering around the deathbed; there's no good in it for anyone.

**Susan:** I doubt that we'll survive the television crisis by proposing new television programs. What we ought to do is work together on a social project for 'new and more human programs'. This expression was first introduced by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi who began critically demystifying the communication network as early as the 1960s, when he in fact demonstrated that all human behavior is programmed behavior insofar as it is communicative behavior, that is, sign behavior. What we must realize is that programs, programming and social projects are closely connected, and that the more the capitalist production system develops the more such interconnection becomes closer and even more necessary.

**Massimo:** The television crisis, in fact, is not the crisis of programs or of technical services. That the palimpsests should improve or worsen is not important. It's not the RAI's crisis in Italy or of some other television channel in some other country. The crisis concerns all television, whether in the 'public' or 'private' sector, whether centralized or totalizing, or, as they say, 'generalizing'. The crisis of television communication is the crisis of social functionality. And this is experienced as a crisis of glory and prestige, and therefore of one's investment of libido, attention, and audience.

TV, centralized national state, automobiles, oligopolistic world market: a gang of dinosaurs. They have aged before our very eyes. Though at the height of their power, they're hardly loved. They promise the world, but in fact maintain very little. They are systems for the supply of goods and services which prove to be authoritarian and out of people's control. They have caused a terrific increase in the swarm of interactions. They colonize and contaminate us in time and space. Above all, they are a source of pressure and constraint: they're not at our service.

There was talk of a fiscal crisis as well as of a crisis in the possibility of governing nation states, and the break up of a near future Middle Ages was theorized. And here we are. No doubt there has been an increase in revolts led by autonomous and local movements roused by the will to independence and by the desire of control over one's own most immediate environment. But ecology of the mind also means to choose and control communicative games. Information, culture, all the entertainment you want, enjoying it alone, if not in company, with friends.

**Augusto:** 'Communicative games': a pertinent 'object' in semiotics, our specific point of view. As to television communication, I doubt that any one of us is particularly interested in a specifically sociological analysis or in an analysis from the viewpoint of the psychology of mass communication. And it's not a matter of professional choice. The fact is that without studying signs there's no way of understanding anything about programming, projects, ideologies. The whole system of social reproduction is made possible by communication and, therefore, by signs, verbal and nonverbal signs. What semiotics should do is examine signs as a constituent part of the processes they belong to. Such an approach puts into evidence the effective connection between communication and ideology — and between the disciplines that deal with them both at the foundational level as well as at the level of general theory: semiotics as the general theory of signs and as theory of ideology. On examining communication in the process of social reproduction to which it belongs, we must not only consider it in relation to systems of sign exchange, but also of sign production and consumption. And as part of the totality of social reproduction, ideology must also be viewed in its necessary relationship with sign systems.

*Television communication in the verbal and nonverbal marketplace*

**Massimo:** I agree entirely. Our perspective is semiotic. Though of course our approach to semiotics has changed perspective, or better, the approach to the kind of semiotics we practice has undergone a general, fundamental change in theoretical attention. And I'm not talking about semiotics of the code or of codes...

**Susan:** ...which Rossi-Landi had already amply criticized in his 1961 book, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, ironically naming it 'postal package semiotics'. Nor is it a question of 'semiotics of marketing'. The latter, in fact — on losing its critical function toward the "verbal and nonverbal market", as theorized by Rossi-Landi in *Language as Work and Trade* (1968), that is, toward the production, exchange, and consumption of merchandise-messages and messages-merchandise — ends up becoming semiotics of marketing in the sense that it puts itself at the service of the market and becomes dependent upon it. A critical analysis of television communication just cannot be expected from this kind of semiotics. It in fact goes hand in hand with TV (whether state or private) given that it is subject to the market, which is fundamentally a publicity market; it works for the market. I'm thinking of that relatively recent phenomenon whereby semioticians sell their work as consultants for publicity agencies which tend to privilege television as their main and most effective communication channel.

**Augusto:** These days, anyone wishing to gain consensus for one's 'resistable rise' needs to be in control of communication, above all newspapers, the press, but even more so television. However, these days one must also have control over the marketing semiotician. You both mentioned Rossi-Landi, and I too wish to remember him. After all, Rossi-Landi's pioneer research deserves due consideration given its central importance for a semiotic-critical approach to mass communication. Rossi-Landi defines the dominant class 'as the class that holds control over the emission and circulation of verbal messages in a given community' (1972: 203-204). As I was saying, today's Arthur Ui must necessarily make use of television and, differently from Brecht's Ui, who consulted an actor from the theatre, today's Ui must necessarily resort to an advertising agent, and, specifically, an expert in the semiotics of marketing in order to learn the tricks of the trade in correctly presenting oneself to the public. Nor is this hypothetical, for indeed we're talking about reality. Television and publicity are so closely connected that they have become interdependent, but television depends on publicity economically, and both depend on whoever controls communication. All television programs are part of the same network, of the same text, that is to say, of the publicity network. Anyone wishing to speak to the public must enter this network. Not only has politics been televised; not only has televised political discourse become a publicity spot, but the political message itself has become a photogram in the ongoing publicity sequence. Here then is a possible role for semiotics, which nowadays it is effectively carrying out: semiotics at the service of persuasion, whose strategies are no longer concealed, at the service of the televised circulation of messages, of marketing. And, alongside this, we have an approach to semiotics that discusses codes, meanings, communication, and signification, referential and nonreferential semantics, while leaving aside the pragmatic dimension of semiosis, and all in the name of a delusive and 'impossible neutrality', to recall the title of a very topical book by Massimo Bonfantini.

*Centrality of pragmatics and typology of dialogue*

**Massimo:** That's right, that's why I was talking before about the need for a general and fundamental shift in theoretical attention. And I'm talking about the shift that has already taken place in semiotics from the centrality of semantics to the centrality of pragmatics. From meaning to sense. In short, from the vehicled message to the semiosical act. From looking only at what is said

to how, to whom, and why it is said, why that act communicates, wants to communicate, and in fact does communicate.

Briefly then, centrality of pragmatics, specificity of the modality of expression and signification, but also multimediality and poliedricity in the semiosical act and its interpretation. These are the three main characteristics of our new approach to semiotics as it finds expression in a volume edited by myself with Arturo Martone, *Specchi del senso/ Le semiotiche speciali* (1991) which I consider as a possible manifesto.

**Augusto:** And another manifesto published in the same book series (significantly entitled *Semiosis: Il senso e la fabbrica dei testi*), edited by Massimo and myself together with Jeff Bernard and Janos Kelemen, is dedicated to Rossi-Landi's research: *Reading su Ferruccio Rossi-Landi: Semiosi come pratica sociale*.

**Susan:** I'd like to return to the question I put to Massimo at the beginning concerning the death of TV and the birth of video. Has this change toward pragmatics got anything to do with the claim to the death of TV and the paradoxical birth of video communication from its ashes. And if pragmatics does have something to do with it all, in what way?

**Massimo:** Pragmatics certainly does have a part in it all and I'll tell you why. Thanks to the move toward pragmatics, it is now possible to analyze television communication fully, highlighting the current forms of depersonalization and alienation, but also identifying the concrete possibilities of reappropriation and disalienation.

A text I base myself on and which I wish to refer to is in fact another dialogue, this one too with Augusto, *Il dialogo sui dialoghi* (1986). In this volume we distinguish between substantial dialogicality and dialogicality on a purely formal level, that is, a type of dialogicality that is not determined by the dialogic form of the text but by the degree of dialogicality in that text apart from whether or not it takes the form of a dialogue. Having done this, we then proceed to proposing a typology of dialogue.

**Augusto:** The present dialogue, like the preceding just remembered by Massimo, is of the 'cooperative-investigative type', and I think I can make a contribution to this particular dialogue by briefly expounding the typology of dialogue which Massimo and myself proposed in our book in 1986.

The criterion used for our typology was the following: from a pragmatic point of view, any verbal action at all, dialogues included, may either be considered as being an end in itself, or as having an instrumental function. In this case it is a means to an end, or — a third possibility — it may be intent upon determining and evaluating ends and means (see Bonfantini 1981). Consequently, we distinguished between three types of dialogue:

(1) Dialogue as an end in itself, that is, conversation or entertainment dialogue. In other words, this kind of dialogue refers to talking for the sake of talking, to dialogue with a phatic function and may in turn be divided into, (1.1) 'conformative-repetitive dialogue', and (1.2) 'diverting dialogue'. An example of variant (1.1) was identified precisely in certain types of television communication that tend toward repetition and are obedient to hyperdetermined compositional-instructional rules and to just as hyperdetermined decodification itineraries.

(2) Dialogue functional to attainment, which may in turn be divided into: (2.1) 'exchange dialogue' and (2.2) 'competition dialogue'.

3) Cooperative or reflective or investigative dialogue. Referring to the degree of substantial dialogicality as the criterion for differentiation, this type of dialogue may be divided into the following (with a progressive increase in the degree of dialogicality from the first to the third): (3.1) 're-discovery and revelation dialogue', (3.2) 'research and construction dialogue', (3.3) 'exploration and problematization dialogue'.

**Massimo:** Good. Let's now shift our attention specifically to the communicative channel, given that our conversation is specifically concerned with television media. Well then, from this point of view, we may distinguish between three different modalities in the dialogic relation:

(1) *Interpersonal dialogicality*, (1.1) in praesentia or (1.2) in absentia, the latter in the form of written, telephonic, or television communication.

(2) *Dialogicality with replica*, (2.1) required and foreseen as part of the communicative game, or tolerated, or conceded, or (2.2) indirect or unforeseen.

(3) *Intermedial or hypertextual dialogicality*.

To regain possession over the communicative channel and to shift away from television communicative games, we may talk of transformative dialogicality as metatextual dialogicality in praesentia. Through documentation, the support of images, the filming of an event, of an interview, etc., this enables continued use of the means of communication, for the case in question, the video, as a way of reinforcing communication in praesentia.

**Augusto:** No doubt it's a question of eliminating dominion of the communicative channel over the message as it occurs in today's system for the reproduction of communication, that is, communication for the sake of communication. On the contrary, communication must reacquire its use value as related to interpersonal dialogicality, critical awareness, and disalienated praxis.

**Susan:** But doesn't that simply imply wanting to take over television channels once again and therefore acknowledging television a certain predominance in the current media system?

**Massimo:** Quite the opposite I'd say. What I'm promoting is the use of video in praesentia, communication in praesentia, a metatextual dialogicality in praesentia, by contrast with pseudocommunication at a distance as carried out by television. You know, the same objection was raised by another person after he read my *Morte Tv: Nascita del video* (cf. Bonfantini 1993). This is the dialogue that took place between us word for word:

READER: It's my impression that by concentrating on pragmatics one cannot help but recognize the decisiveness of media and above all of TV in the making of history: the sense of history and the reality itself of history. Obsolescence or death of TV as you maintain, Bonfantini, indeed! On the contrary, I think Furio Colombo is right.

ME: Who? Lieutenant Colombo?

READER: Stop joking and listen to me! Furio Colombo is right when he writes that differently from the past, TV today englobes concrete reality. Listen to this (from "Panorama", April 26th 1992): "The change consists in the following. In the past, reality developed outside television and television was intent upon demonstrating its usefulness by hitching onto true facts and showing them. These days, reality only happens on television and anyone left out is ready to do anything to hitch onto that luminous ship [...]. Anything outside television is useless. Why? Because we cannot live without an idea of the world. But we don't have an idea of the world. What we have instead is an uninterrupted sequence of images, and we have no intention of giving them up, we cannot."

ME: Yet it's just this imposed and abstract, 'uninterrupted sequence of images', a sequence that is shamelessly deceptive as regards everyday life, and so poor with all its shows and various forms of entertainment, that makes TV an almost unbearable pastime even though it is almost free. But thank goodness, all this is coming to an end at last just like the gramophone, record player, and tape recorder, at least as far as listening to music is concerned, while the use of radio has been limited; similarly, videorecorders and videocassettes are perhaps already on the point of thwarting and reorganizing television, at least as far as seeing films, discussing documentaries, and making investigations is concerned.

### *Semiotics and critique of television communication*

**Augusto:** The focus on the relationship between dominant forms of communication (television included) and the world in the dialogue you just reported Massimo, seems important to me. The world is indissolubly tied to politics, already as a projection, a plan, as the space for the satisfaction of needs, to politics as a totalizing overview and functional system, as the strategy of productivity, efficiency, as adhesion to reality, as a guarantee of the *conatus essendi*, as mediation of the interests — in Latin *inter-esse*, which plays on the concept of being — of both the individual and the collective subject, as the awareness and management of *becoming*, starting from a realistic view of the present and through readaptation to the present by the past, as economy of the lasting, of the persistent, of the progressive in *being*, *essere* in Italian, at any cost. Even at the cost of war, the *extrema ratio* of war, war considered as part of the world, which is foreseen by it, is part of its logic, of the ontology of the *conatus essendi*. The world foresees war given that, being constitutively based on identity, it exploits that which is other for the maintenance, reinforcement, duration, and expanded reproduction of the same. The world is ready, it is prepared for the sacrifice of otherness. The connection between World, History, Reality, Identity, Truth, Force, Reason, Power, Productivity, Politics, War is inscribed in our experience, in our mentality as Westerners. And it is a connection that has always been exploited and exasperated by capitalism, even more so these days. Communication functional to the reproduction of this social system extends and consolidates this connection. And as a powerful means of communication, television is used in this sense as well. How else can we explain the important role carried out by television in triggering off the Gulf War and in its development? This war marks a decisive phase in recent history as a kind of watershed between a period that begins from the Second World War and is still characterized by widespread refusal of war, and another period, today's, characterized by its suitability to the ideo-logic of capital and by its assent to war as a just and necessary way of asserting peace, the rights of identity, and of difference.

**Susan:** That confirms our considerations made at the beginning of this conversation on the relationship between semiotics and the critique of television communication. The latter being a critique, as I was saying, aiming at the development of new and more human programs. The demystification of ideologies, just as much as of such notions as Reality, Subject, Reason, Truth, is only possible through a critique of signs which is able to account for the production, exchange and circulation of signs as this cycle takes place in the global process of social reproduction. Such a project is committed to the development of a new and more conscious form of humanism, which not only focuses on the sign dimension of man (as semiotics has done so far; and an enormous contribution in this sense was made by Peirce), but also on the human dimension of signs (as established by a project conceived and developed by such figures as Marx, Welby, Bakhtin, Schaff, Lévinas, Rossi-Landi). I include Marx for his having evidenced, through his critique of political economy, social relations among human beings where it was thought that there merely existed relations among things and reified relations among signs. Therefore, a possibility is that the fact of people meeting face to face thanks to video by contrast with television, as pointed out by Massimo, could help towards reconstituting and developing the human in things, instruments, and signs.

These days the danger of submitting passively to social programs that mask widespread forms of 'refined oppression' under mystifying banners which are paradoxically mistaken for liberating practices, is increasing. The widespread effects of mass communication and, therefore, of ideology, or as you say Augusto, of the dominant ideo-logic supporting the whole multi-medial communication network, represent this kind of danger. The conjunction between telecommunications and informatics is favoring expansion of this network at a planetary level, which is producing a form of sociocultural reality without precedents from the viewpoint of the messages teaming in it in terms of quantity, immediacy, and diffusion. Use of television itself is now characterized by the proliferation of a great plurality of channels and services, and by the possibility of zapping through the various programs and of creating one's own intertexts. A direct consequence of advanced technology and of the intensification of sign traffic is the superimposing of messages. This also implies translating and evaluating such progress in terms of alienation of the human subject, in terms of mystification and fetishization of its linguistic and nonlinguistic products made ready for the market. The more message production is redundant, the more the individual as a critical subject is suffocated despite its active participation in such production processes. Even those subjects who would seem to be immune from the effects of the so-called electronic revolution variously contribute to the expansion of the world 'sign marketplace' (see Sebeok 1987) in which consciousness and praxis are separated in a productive cycle whose end is production itself.

With reference to the problem of the status of the subject considered as a user-consumer, the obvious truth is that such developments in the communication network, which inevitably attract all of us, do not necessarily imply higher levels of critical awareness, creativity, responsible participation, or 'freedom'. Quite the contrary: the risk of remaining trapped in this communication network, which becomes increasingly oppressive the more it expands, is enormous. Such questions as the following immediately come to mind: What is the real nature of the relation between the use of electronic devices and the user-consumer? Does the subject construct his or her own texts or, rather, is the subject reduced to passively submitting to the products offered by the sign market, to operating as a function of an institutionalized system, of socio-economic production processes conceived in the interests of whoever in fact owns and controls the communication network?

*From a passive relationship with media to an active and operative relationship*

**Massimo:** Audio and video cassettes are at our disposal far more than the market would want. They're easy to produce at low costs or by sharing costs. It's still easier for books: think of the pocket-size, easy to handle, low cost classics. But this kind of media, together with well chosen recordings of radio and television programs, are the most suitable in aiding social communication *in praesentia*, discussions in cultural clubs, lessons in schools and in professional courses, and lastly in aiding local political activity in exerting pressure and contributing to projects and control.

A crisis is taking place in the media system which could turn out to be beneficial. The crisis I'm alluding to consists in a shift in focus. From the centrality of the continuous and vertical flux of radio and television to the centrality of multimedial recordings and recombinations. From a passive relationship with media to an active and operative relationship. And perhaps parallel to this, from a delegating democracy to a participating democracy: communication as a way of acting on the spot.

But the press will have to take a clear stand regarding communication functions and strategies if we are to reach such a happy conclusion to the media crisis. What we need is less entertainment and more reports; less government affairs and more society; less gossip and more contemporary history. But above all what we need is very little TV.

**Susan:** And yet there's just so much TV these days. And it contributes to transforming everything into merchandise, it contributes to reification functional to the market and to revival of the productive-communicative cycle, and not only because of its connections with publicity.

**Augusto:** Reification: *fluidification* is better. What radio and television provide, as observed by Anders (1992), doesn't take on the form of an object or of property, but rather remains *fluid*. This is true of telematics as well. What is provided is absorbed in the same fluid in which it flows outside the factory. In this sense, the word 'transmission' is symptomatic, designating, as it does, two meanings in a single word: both the act of transmitting as well as the object transmitted. What we are owners of is the apparatus used to transmit the merchandise, not the transmitted merchandise itself. 'Stated in the form of a paradox', says Anders, 'we are sovereigns of a mere passivity. [...] Figures not less comical than the Stirnian "owners of their own hunger", scorned by Marx' (Anders 1992: 48). 'The term "reification", used to describe the trends characterizing the past century or so, will no longer suffice to characterize the situation today. We're now on the threshold of a new phase, a phase in which, viceversa, the form of the thing is avoided, the fluidified thing. Or at least a phase in which fluidification of the object will be as characteristic as reification of the nonobjectual. I propose we use the term "liquidation" to indicate this state of affairs which as yet has been forgotten by theory' (*ibidem*).

According to Anders, recorders and videocassettes don't contradict the production cycle's interest in producing its products 'in the liquid state'. All the same, he is forced to admit that such inventions are not 'created in the interests of production', but of those consumers who want to own their transmissions in just as solid a form as books and paintings, even though this is not possible for the consumer without the help of capital. As soon as the chance is sensed of producing new merchandise, capitalistic industry is ready to exploit it, 'even if the new product contradicts the principles of production' (Anders 1992: 49). It is precisely this contradiction of audio and video cassettes that can be turned around to the favour of 'social communication *in praesentia*', as you were saying, Massimo, 'for a transformative dialogicality', for a 'metatextual dialogicality *in praesentia*'.

### *Lying and dialogue*

**Susan:** Massimo was saying before that what he was describing as 'communication as a way of acting on the spot' is a form of communication that is inherent in 'participating democracy'. What is he talking about exactly? And what is the relationship with information, the news service, including television?

**Augusto:** That's a formula I've already heard Massimo use in another one of our dialogues - you see, our dialogues are so numerous that it now seems to me that we do nothing else but 'hold dialogues'. And, in fact, every time we meet, which doesn't happen a lot, we look for the opportunity to work together on some issue we are both interested in, taking advantage as best we can of the possibility of communicating *in praesentia*. I'm now thinking of a dialogue part of which we held in Naples, another part in Novara, and another in Milan, our *Dialogo della menzogna* (Dialogue on lying). One of its main theses is that lying these days is no longer based on keeping things hidden, and this is thanks also to the power of media and to the preponderance of images. Just think of the techniques used by dominant information services. Intangibility based on secrecy is no longer possible in a culture aspiring to 'transparency', to glassiness - 'glass things do not have an "aura". Glass is the special enemy of secrets' (Benjamin, *Experience and Poverty*, 1933). The impossibility of gaining awareness and of intervening transformatively on things and situations which, on the contrary, must be preserved, concealed and handed down is obtained by organizing things so that to see does not mean to understand, which, if anything, is impeded. 'The destructive

character' (Benjamin) of the present day, of the present day equal to current society as it is characterized by production for the sake of production, by communication for the sake of communication, shows, unveils, has its own constitutive obscenity. Destructive work needs a public, witnesses, says Benjamin. The succession and overlapping of information in the name of 'transparency' and to the satisfaction of a sort of widespread 'voyeurism' makes it possible to level reality on appearance and destroys the very notion of control by public opinion. The possibility of attention is replaced by confusion, the possibility of scandal by inurement, comprehension by misunderstanding. Indeed, says Benjamin (*The Destructive Character* 1933), in the end one lets oneself be misunderstood, which eliminates gossip, and this happens because people don't want to be misunderstood; more exactly, the destructive character requires a continual provocation to misunderstanding. But I'll now repeat more or less word by word what was said in the dialogue just mentioned so as to avoid modifying my discourse, as I'm doing now, in the light of subsequent thoughts and readings:

**Massimo:** Lying, as I was saying, no longer plays on secrecy, on concealing things — simply because it can't. On the contrary, it plays on the fact that showing does not necessarily imply thematizing, which, if anything, is impeded. The facts can be discovered, but there's a trick for impeding the kind of thematization which affords knowledge of the truth. These days — as the case of 'externalization' shows — we do not make use of secrets, diplomacy, concealed blackmail, dissimulation in the full sense of the term. On the contrary, externalization is preferred, even in the form of blackmail, allusion to the possibility of revelation. And in any case, externalization does not necessarily imply making reports, but if anything is part of the mechanism of lying.

So, the problem is not that of making reports and unmasking things, but of which thematizations should be privileged with respect to others. It's not a question of 'transparency', a word which seems to offer a decisive formula. While there's so much talk about 'transparency', this ends by levelling reality on appearance without revealing anything significant at all. With its multitude of messages the strategy of transparency aims at disconcerting the citizen and tends to destroy the notion of control by public opinion. I don't know whether you've noticed, but it's no coincidence that we've been speaking less and less about 'public opinion' in the past few years, and more instead about 'audience' and luckily about 'absence' as well. As Michele Serra jokingly says, 'absence is increasing'.

**Augusto:** What can we set against the levelness of transparency and the silence of ostentation, 'externalization' as an alternative to the monological character of a lying dialogue?

**Massimo:** To return to what I was saying before on the importance of choosing what should be thematized, as against ostentations and revelations made either directly or indirectly to distract from thematization and impede the choice, it's not a question of honest dissimulation, whether justifying or not the strategy of deception by lying.

**Augusto:** No doubt! It's a question of making the choice of what to thematize as dialogically participative as possible.

**Massimo:** We ought to ask ourselves, therefore, whether we want to go as far as inverting the Machiavellism of 'the end justifies the means: therefore I can lie' with 'the means justifies the end, I know the world is full of evil..., but I'll now only work on what now seems to me to require an immediate solution'. I won't be objective, impartial, but rather I'll be mendacious even in this, since I don't mention anything else. But given that it is important for each of us to emphasize what our priorities are in a common action, I insist on thematizing a particular aspect. This could help us to leave behind that sort of voyeurism between citizens and power characteristic of our times and to get free from overevaluating representation, transparency, the possibility of observation, ostentation, undifferentiated ostentation... What we must do is oppose an authentically dialogical choice to the inertia of representation and to an abundance of themes which end up concealing each other in communication at a distance as well as in voyeuristic communication, substitutive dialogues and discussions as proposed on television. These days, it's not so important to establish whether or not we can tell the truth, whether or not facts should be reported, whether or not it is legitimate to reveal given truths and conceal others, whether or not we should recommend sincerity, since it seems to me that the game is another. Against a repetitive, ritual and commemorative conception of truthful procedure, today we must insist:

(1) on thematizing information, on the possibility of going to the bottom of what have been identified as priority thematizations, without fearing to use exaggeration, which, in fact, is useful in achieving this end: yes, exaggeration as against omission, concealment, mystification; and, furthermore,

(2) on the use of information and on its connection to practical power, great or little as it may be, to routine with others and therefore to dialogic exchange in order to create a different condition as we are already experiencing it here and now, convivially: communication for acting on the spot...

**Augusto:** which is a slogan you already used in your book, *Semiotica ai media*. It means moving away from what we have classified as the dialogue of attainment where interlocutors aim at achieving their own advantage, at maintaining and reconfirming their own identity. We could make another distinction in lying discourse as well as in externalizing discourse beyond the superficially positive connotations of 'lying to a good end' or 'altruistically', or of 'making reports', 'showing', 'revealing', 'telling the truth'. On the contrary, we might consider which of these orients discourse away from attainment and reconfirmation dialogues and, therefore, away from the category of identity, opening to otherness and substantial dialogicality...

**Massimo:** yes, an investigative and propositional dialogue or a convivial and entertainment dialogue or, better still, a dialogue in which these two types of dialogue converge.

There now, that's how we reasoned in our *Dialogo sulla menzogna* held between January and February 1992.

### *Television and keeping a good conscience*

**Susan:** Organizing interpretative and transformative work groups seems really important to me, especially remembering that interrelation between the dominant cultural system and capitalism involves the production of both verbal and nonverbal signs. And this is particularly important today considering the phase we have now reached in social reproduction. Far from being a mere metaphor, the expression 'cultural capital' now corresponds to reality. Linguistic and nonlinguistic work produces and develops cultural capital and, similarly to all capital producing processes, an increase in cultural capital is achieved through the production of surplus value and therefore through surplus work (cf. Rossi-Landi 1968, 1992; Ponzio 1992). The fact is that not only does all this take place without the subject being conscious of the ends of his or her most basic activities, but often he or she is not even aware that such activities may be defined as work. As Rossi-Landi says:

We can admit that man erogates his work-force even without being aware of doing so for some end and therefore without being aware of the fact itself that he is working. The end pursued may be supra-individual in that it is imposed by a social program which remains unconscious. In these cases *work is distinguished from activity insofar as it executes programs that are indifferently conscious or unconscious. As Marx says mankind does not know it but does it* (1971: 22).

An immediate consequence of such a situation is what may be referred to as the 'invisibility' of ideology, determined by its functionality to the development of capital. Another consequence is the 'imperceptibility' of exploitation due to its dissemination throughout most of our activities. We're justified in saying that we are currently going through an exceptionally difficult phase as far as the critique of ideology and analysis of social alienation are concerned. These days cultural reality is amply regulated by the interests of multi-media capital. So it is no coincidence that such issues are quickly set aside by proclaiming the 'crisis', or even the 'end' of ideology, and by judging such expressions as 'alienation', 'class interest', and 'social exploitation' as outdated. This is why it is important to construct different communicative situations, by acting on the spot or on the scene, as Massimo says. We must act directly on the mechanisms regulating the production cycles for the reproduction of cultural capital, and to do this we need a pragmatic perspective on the signs of ideology and culture in general. But until we defeat popular consensus achieved through mass-media, especially television, this kind of intervention will be ineffective. From this point of view, the power of television was recently and very effectively demonstrated by the Gulf War. As pointed out by Augusto, this occasion was significant in showing just how quickly support can be gained through television for an idea or a project, even if initially unpopular. In this case it was a question

of gaining popular assent to war considered as a decisive means for the resolution of divergencies at an international level and for 'imposing' peace.

**Augusto:** The case of the Gulf war is emblematic for an understanding of how ideas are communicated through the press and particularly through television, in this case the idea of war considered as just, necessary, legal, and legitimate; it also affords an understanding of the role played through television by intellectuals, journalists, political commentators, historians, philosophers in spreading an idea which not long beforehand seemed anachronistic — the distinguished Noberto Bobbio is frequently mentioned by Massimo and myself in our dialogues. The point was to set war against 'madness', which in these cases is always the madness of 'others', to support the reasoning for war. How this idea of war was accepted so quickly by public opinion, or better by the 'audience', as Massimo was specifying previously, can only be explained in terms of the powerfulness of television. And we must remember that, as far as Italy is concerned, war is in net contrast with art. 11 of the Constitution; on an international level it contradicts the Helsinki Convention; and at a world level it caused the the UN, whose main task is to keep peace in the world, to assent to the Orwellian slogan (from *1984* ), 'war is peace'. Television not only made assent to war possible, but also direct participation in it at a world level. From this point of view, even though the war was mainly conducted by the United States, the Gulf war was in a true sense a world war. Never has any war achieved such a high level of involvement and responsibility despite the widespread assumption of responsibility characteristic of 'good conscience'. When I talk of 'assent's, I have a broad range of its meanings in mind: support, apology, acceptance, passive consensus, inert non refusal; in any case complicity and responsibility.

An idea that circulated a lot during the Gulf war with the 'well-meaning intention' of working for 'counterinformation' was that, in reality, there were two wars: a real war and a make-believe war; a war that was fought, that was made of death, blood and wreckage, and a war watched on the TV screen where all we could see were the tracks outlined by so-called 'intelligent' bombs directed against 'military targets', with no traces of dying people, blood or wreckage. In truth, I believe there was only one war, and the 'make-believe' war was structural, of crucial importance to it. Another vitally important part in making this war successful was played by ourselves, as telespectators. In this guise, we too took part in the real war (in spite of our good conscience) by taking up our 'posts' in front of the television screen, and therefore with our more or less active consensus, with our passive acceptance of war, and, above all, with our pretence of being only neutral, uninvolved spectators: in this sense, we all played a part in making sure we got death, blood, and wreckage. As telespectators, then, we too fought the Gulf war; and we continue fighting it, reproducing war in the same places as well as in other parts of the world. And a large part of the responsibility in reproducing this cycle goes to the television show offered by the Gulf war and its promotion of the idea of war as being legitimate and necessary.

### *Exaggeration and critique of common places*

**Massimo:** No doubt you're right. And in any case, as another reader, one of my students, understood my message in *Morte TV e nascita del video*, 'all this is going through a mortal crisis. The macroindustry of the world supermarket, the dinosaurs, as you say, go ahead with the serial production of automobiles and goods which are always the same and increasingly the same for everyone...!'

**Augusto:** ...'conventional' and 'nonconventional' weapons included. Let's not forget there exists a world supermarket for weapons and for 'drugs' as well, this being the 'literal' logical consequence of addiction to the daily 'metaphorical drug' of mass media, of the 'entertainment' and 'free-time industry'...

**Massimo:** '...it goes ahead copying and distributing, transmitting "live", from the studios, from the stadium, from buildings, satellites, always the same images. The attempt is to convince us that this is an offer of opulence and truth, of transparency and democracy. And that in any case we are obliged to believe this because there is no other God but television and the market. But, in truth, people consider this monotonous message as being pragmatically inadequate, "unhappy". In a time of ecological crisis we need ductile and differentiated instruments of knowledge and actions, wide-ranging and effective operations, communications that serve for making decisions and acting on the spot, and not one-to-many emissions for self-confirmation/consolation, or to get a bit of information, or, as they say, to "form an opinion".' That's how my reader-student expressed himself. He got full marks for his exam, thirty plus!...

All this is part of what I was indicating before as the primacy of pragmatics, which means understanding that sense is something you construct. Truth is not something there ready for us to shoot live. It needs cutting and editing.

**Susan:** Massimo mentioned the use of 'exaggeration' as an expedient in focusing and concentrating attention, as an antidote to widespread distraction, and as a way of channeling attention through stereotypes and 'common places'. Exaggeration, I'd say, also in the sense of shifting meaning, deconstructing obvious sense, plain meaning, and constructing new meanings, new interpretants, new metaphors, as Victoria Welby says, thereby translating and betraying meanings taken for granted and considered obvious. From this point of view, I find intriguing the attempt made at counter-information by the Mexican Zapatists in Chiapas with a communiqué entitled: 'Subcommander Marcos is more than just gay'. This is their reply to the news communicated by 'The San Francisco Chronicle' about Marcos's homosexuality, exploited by the pro-government Mexican press to cause a scandal:

*About whether Marcos is homosexual*

Marcos is gay in San Francisco, black in South Africa, an Asian in Europe, a Chicano in San Ysidro, an anarchist in Spain, a Palestinian in Israel, a Mayan Indian in the streets of San Cristòbal, a gang member in Neza [a huge Mexico City slum] a rocker in the National University [a folk music citadel], a Jew in Germany, an ombudsman in the Defense Ministry, a communist in the post-Cold War era, an artist without gallery or portfolio...A pacifist in Bosnia, a housewife alone on Saturday night in any neighbourhood in any city in Mexico, a striker in the CTM [the giant pro-government union federation, which virtually never authorizes strikes], a reporter writing filler stories for the back pages, a single woman on the metro at 10 p.m., a peasant without land, an unemployed worker... an unhappy student, a dissident amid free-market economics, a writer without books or readers, and, of course, a Zapatist in the mountains of southeast Mexico.

So Marcos is a human being, any human being, in this world. Marcos is all the exploited, marginalized, and oppressed minorities, resisting and saying, 'Enough!' (from 'Monthly Review' 46, 1994).

*The 'video essay'*

**Augusto:** The idea of 'cutting and editing' proposed by Massimo seems particularly important, and it is probably fundamental for an understanding of the anti-television role to be carried out by what he is calling the 'video essay'. Massimo you discussed this with my students at the University of Bari during a semiotics lesson; semiotics being the discipline, as we were saying at the beginning, which is fundamentally involved and called into question in our discussion.

These days the permissiveness of communication programs and of dominant ideologies makes the development of critical awareness even more difficult, to the point that the era of the 'end of ideologies' has been proclaimed and the social systems connected with them are welcomed as acceptable forms of human relationships. Semiotics itself has largely lost its critical function, has

been broken down into the various applied semiotics and has generally put itself at the service of the development of communication and, in some cases, of consensus within the established order (from marketing to election campaigns).

And yet, the need for critical awareness is growing stronger, as much as it is difficult to achieve. This is an inevitable reaction to the widespread and unbearable condition of false conscience and social alienation in the customary behavior of everyday life.

**Massimo:** We need cutting and editing and we need dialogue among people, interpretants and media. Cutting and editing and replay are the basis of recorded video.

The 'video essay' — I could perhaps claim to be its inventor, if not its prophet as well — as I was saying, the video essay puts together the characteristics of the 'essay' genre with the instrumentation offered by recorded video. The 'essay', both as inaugurated by Montaigne and as it was used by his successor, Bacon, is both subjective and experimental in character, useful for research and investigation, with overtones that may be more or less polemical. The essay is different from the 'treatise', which is impassive and prescriptive, as well as from 'scientific memory', which is characterized by intentional objectiveness and the search for unquestionable truth relative to the theme under consideration. The essay may also be distinguished from another genre, though it comes near to it, much used by the followers of the Enlightenment, what in English is called inquiry. This genre is taken up and used again, and not incidentally, by a contemporary author and representative of the enlightenment, Bertrand Russell. Furthermore, the 'essay', *essai*, also generally expresses commitment on an ethical level, the taking up of a stand, the assumption of responsibility toward the social, contemporaneity. It privileges hypothesis with respect to prescription. The video essay is a modified version of the essay mixed with the characteristics of a report and, furthermore, is based on the contextualization of communication *in praesentia*. This allows for the dialogization denied by television communication by which we are treated as spectators and not as interlocutors in a dialogue. And this dialogical void or impossibility characterizing television communication is certainly far greater than that attributed by Plato to the written text, with which it is always possible to install some form of dialogue or live discussion, especially if an essay or dialogue. The written text is susceptible to active interpretation, and, at the same time, it can resist or confirm other interpretative possibilities with respect to that which claims to be unique, definitive, or which often, because of such an attitude, proves to be aberrant. Videorecorders present the advantage, similarly to the record or tape, of being able to go backwards, of being able to listen to or see given pieces again and to concentrate our attention on them. Thanks to such technology, sound messages and images are no longer effimera, but have become more like written texts which can always be read once again. It's not a question of giving over to technological optimism and determinism by exalting today's technological potential, but of being capable of exploiting the dialectics between the development of productive forces and the social relationships of production discussed by Marx and thematized by Rossi-Landi as well in his studies on signs and ideologies. On one hand, the videorecorder, with its potentialities, makes us independent from television communication; on the other, it contributes to a new style in the creation of political subjectivity and antagonism, which doesn't necessarily do away with the preceding and is closely connected to ecology, the environment, to direct administration and to localism. The video essay makes possible reports on a given issue related to concrete reality, to the determination of a place, offering the opportunity of documentation, interviews, use of images, music, etc., and with the advantage of discussion *in praesentia*, of being able to return to a sequence, of blocking a photogram, etc. The video essay is dialogical to the extent that it may be used as a basic text, a stimulus text for discussion, presenting itself as a mixture of communication *in praesentia* and at a distance. Differently from films or commentaries of sporting events, video essays are not conceived for fruition as entertainment, nor as documentaries which we could associate to a treatise. Video essays favour dialogical interaction

in the direction of research, inquiry and collaboration, and of transformative interaction. Playing on the term in Italian, the video essay, 'saggio', is also *saggio*, that is, 'wise', being endowed with dialogical and pragmatic wisdom, *saggezza dialogica e pragmatica*. And in this sense, it fits in perfectly with the project for a *Semiotica ai media* (Semiotics to the media) — this being the title of a book by myself remembered above by Augusto: 'ai media', 'to the media' in the triple sense of semiotics applied to the media, semiotics that addresses media polemically and critically, but also in the sense that semiotics is flavored by interaction with mass communication, as when we say 'a pistacchio flavored icecream' ('un gelato al pistacchio'). What we are proposing, then, is a new approach to semiotics based on the primacy of pragmatics, an approach promoting a new form of dialogicality, flavored by the new techniques of communication both at a distance and *in praesentia*, or, as we were saying above: communication as a way of acting on the spot.

### ***Dialogue on lying and dialogue on truth: rhetoric versus argumentation***

#### *The signs of rhetorical tricks*

**Susan:** 'Rhetoric versus argumentation'. The three of us agree then that rhetoric and argumentation must be juxtaposed. Negativity of rhetoric and positivity of argumentation. This would seem to be a classical position: very much *à la* Plato. But I do agree. Indeed, it's a question of sound common sense to accuse discourse of being *rhetorical* when it is not sincere, when it's messy on a logical level, egotistic, and when in the face of all this it still expects to persuade. Rhetoric is something you hear in the texture of discourse. It's like a trick you perceive before you actually discover it. But, Massimo, do you know how to trace the signs of rhetorical tricks?

**Massimo:** Ah, yes, an example comes to mind: it goes back to a few years ago when Craxi was still around and publicity was favouring his political party during the administrative elections in Capitalia-Italia. At the time a poster was withdrawn because of furious protesting by feminists and democrats. It pictured a bare chested girl who says in a balloon, 'I vote PSI, and you?', while coolly sipping coca-coca from a bottle through a straw. This is a great example of the tricks of rhetoric: in this case of ideological and cheating discourse, which here consists in combining the psychogogic impression of the example (the bare chested girl) and the quickness and hidden allusiveness of mental associations. Such a strategy gives rise to suggestive and efficient reasoning which is able to resist *so long as it is not questioned*.

**Augusto:** What do you mean by that? Don't you think that the logic of rhetorical and/or tricked discourse is different from the logic of efficient reasoning? Or are you implying rather that in the same logical context there's some improper, uncontrolled discursive transformation with the power to seduce because of its charm and the desiderability of the conclusion it persuades?

**Massimo:** Hmmm! The bare chested girl communicates by showing and therefore by offering herself, even if immaterially, appealing to the imagination and arousing appetites, while at the same time formulating an obviously rhetorical question: 'I vote PSI, and you?'. She is in fact communicating an associative-argumentative chain that runs something like this: 'I want you to vote PSI, like me, so we can be friends, or better still, *companions*; if you are my *companion*, you're also my *partner*; and I'm attractive, desirable and uninhibited; therefore if you want me and want to stay with me, even if only day-dreaming, symbolically (but which, as everyone now seems to be maintaining, is more real than reality, etc., etc.), then vote me, I mean, vote with me, vote PSI'. This kind of reasoning is fun and efficient until dialectics analyzes and ridicules it. But the rhetorical trick keeps its charm, perhaps even after it has been unmasked.

**Augusto:** My impression is that you're making things sound simpler than what they really are. My dear Massimo, what I mean is that rhetorical discourse as encomiastic and eulogistic discourse is not simply transgressive, fake and cheating discourse like commercial publicity. On the contrary, I'd say that this kind of rhetoric is an essential part of the rhetoric of institutions, the rhetoric of keeping a good and clean conscience and of defending values. This kind of rhetorical discourse safeguards the conscience with alibis, a conscience which finds justification in its appeal to axiomatic foundations, that is to say, in its appeal to identity, appurtenance, roles, the nation, or to the *esprit de corps*, to the duties of contracts and civil conventions, all of which serve to tranquillize us, to keep us in our places, protected by our reassuring guarantees and responsibilities. Rhetoric is pleasant and consoles us because it defends the 'fixing of beliefs and habits', as your Peirce says in his famous essay.

### *The information game*

**Susan:** No doubt rhetoric as false conscience consists in not questioning dogmas and idols, but in elaborating on them. And my impression is that rhetoric of the market and of consumption, of commercial publicity, leads us through chatter to being satisfied with daydreams, while the monologic propaganda of institutions promises salvation of the soul through deduction.

**Augusto:** Yes. But we mustn't forget that rhetorical devices are part of the information game: they have a part in winning consensus for stereotypes, in putting together stories, in presenting facts in order to make them acceptable.

It would seem that information with no other aim beyond informing, in other words, that information for the sake of informing, is wonderful, a noble mission. But, in truth, what this really means is that the sole end of information is to reproduce the information process through the consumption of information itself. As Ferruccio Rossi-Landi's principle of homology teaches us, information for the sake of information is no less than the other face of production for the sake of production.

**Massimo:** In the information sphere and in mass communication generally, rhetoric resorts to its habitual artifices, those we mentioned in relation to publicity and propaganda favoring given values and official institutions. The main device is that of *fixation*, which largely exploits the fascination of repetition. It consists in offering sense for the sake of consumption and not just for contemplation, choice and discussion. The facts are proposed to the public like pills and monotonous hamburgers served at Macdonalds; they're well packed into categories and frames; taste in publicity 'must never be questioned'...

**Susan:** Sorry Massimo if I interrupt and comment, and, maybe, who knows, even clarify what you're saying to yourself by remembering something that you said and wrote yourself. Well then, as to Plato, you once wrote, and have since repeated many times, that the extraordinary thing about his texts, at least his better ones, is the open harmony deriving from the interweaving: firstly, of dialogic displacement; secondly, of mythical interpretation or narrative; thirdly, of dialectic or logico-inferential skepsis. I believe that these three elements help to argument discourse. I also believe that in the three types of rhetorical discourse they tend to disappear: in apologetic discourse, dialogue is lacking; in publicity, the development of inferentiality is lacking; in information, narration is lacking: if it is present it is deprived of plots and adventures, reduced to the skeleton of a fabula without adornments.

**Augusto:** Ah, Ah! *A' la* Massimo better than Massimo, *à la* MAB better than MAB! I'll thank Susan for you, since you seem to be in a bit of a daze. But maybe you're thinking after all. I'll take

advantage and distract you both for a moment from this terrible classificatory triadomania at least, which I would go as far as saying is hyper-Peircean. What I want to do is lead you to the idea of unity, allow me this as a personal request, just this once. More exactly, I want you to reflect on the style that unites what are presumably three different types of rhetoric. In the last analysis, they are three styles of discourse at a distance, oriented from one to many. Therefore, they are modelled according to the logic of serial production and information. The aim of this kind of rhetoric is to achieve homologized, increasingly speedy and repetitive consumer behaviour: consumption of homologized news and information; of merchandise and fashion, which defer to each other, continuously citing and taking each other up again in monotonous alternation; consumption of values and attitudes with a tendency to diverge less and less. This is a trap we want to escape from, one day or another we ought to stop the productive cycle of daily information: *get uninformed and reflect*.

### *Rhetoric of definition and decodification*

**Massimo:** But Augusto we already have openings for reflexive and antagonistic communication, at least to some extent, I'm thinking of dialogue in presence: as I usually like to say, *communicating as a means of acting on the spot*. And I'd like to...

**Susan:** Massimo I love interrupting you and can't stop myself from doing it again. A part from anything else it's a way of not losing sight of our critique of rhetoric. And maybe because I'm a female and have seven lives and seven forms of intelligence like cats, not like you males that can only cope with one problem at a time, I'd like our critique of rhetoric to be articulate and multifarious, and not reduced to unity. Well then, what I wanted to say is that rhetoric also has a part in the sciences and in definitions.

An example of the rhetoric of definition is proposed by Rossi-Landi quoting from Benedetto Croce's definitions of art: '*Art is intuition or sentiment enclosed in an image or a particular theoretical moment of the spirit*'. A fake dialogue between the interpreted sign and the interpretant is established between the *definiens* and the *definiendum*, and this implies that certain terms considered as being well known dominate over unknown terms in need of a definition. Croce introduced the exchange value 'art as intuition, etc.' into the linguistic market, and the Croceans were then able to write, 'art, as we know, is intuition'.

**Augusto:** Yes, but as we know the rhetorical trick consists in producing, repeating, imposing convenient stereotypes for the sake of market consumption. We could probably claim that insofar as it reduces interpretation to decodification, *code semiotics* is a form of rhetoric: it uses the rhetorical trick of stopping deferral from one interpretant to another, while isolating and exalting just a small piece of the process. On the other hand, *interpretation semiotics* is grounded in the principle of aperture and adventure of dialogues and arguments.

**Massimo:** Nor does the *semiotics of sense production* as theorized by Kristeva and others leave room for argumentation, as I have already demonstrated in my paper on *Three tendencies in twentieth century semiotics*. What I mean is it doesn't leave room for the *intrinsic* dialogicality of argumentation. It is only in the pragmaticist perspective of interpretation semiotics that sense is never copied nor unveiled, but, rather, is continuously regenerated through argumentative adaptations and improvements. It's important — a question of ethics a part from anything else — for us to clearly bear in mind that sense, in communication and in life, is not and must never be what already exists, but a form of utopia left to inventiveness.

### *Direct, indirect, and free indirect speech*

**Susan:** This reminds me of Vailati who in a letter to Victoria Welby insists on the usefulness of pedagogical expedients as a way of favouring critical and inventive dialogue. He says that 'to caricature' is one of the most effective pedagogical tricks at our disposal: being a matter of detecting the weak points of a discourse by using the word of others and making it ring with the voice of another who is making fun of it, parodies it. This is an ambiguous form of reported speech which is neither direct speech, nor comment on indirect discourse, but free indirect discourse.

**Ponzio:** Good Susan! On the other hand, as from studies on Flaubert's writings, in particular *Madame Bovary*, critical semiotics of the literary text has for some time rightly made a point of underlining, of underlining what? Well, ambivalence and ambiguity, causing sea-sickness in the reader resulting from skilful use of free indirect discourse. Who's speaking? Emma, Rodolphe, Flaubert? Which one of the three? All the three of them together? On examining discourses and texts it becomes obvious that not only must we pass from analytics to dialectics but also from dialectics to dialogics. If we proceed like this we'll capture the specific dialogicality of all discourses. Now Bakhtin ...

**Massimo:** All the same, Augusto, my impression is that when Bakhtin polemicizes against the single idealistic consciousness or the unity of consciousness, he over does it a bit, insisting on this concept almost monologically, and ends up throwing out the baby with the Hegelian dirty water. The baby of intentionality: the forms of *a priori*, of universal and constant operations, that is, exactly what puts us into the position of comparing and discovering differences. Unity and difference are opposed and at the same time imply each other: they are present in each other. Unity cannot exist without multiplicity. Nor can multiplicity exist without unity.

**Augusto:** Yes, you might have a point there. And perhaps this is how Plato's reply should be understood. But talking about dialogue and going back to Bakhtin I'm convinced that, even if you think he exaggerates, his influence is decisive. Nowadays, formal, external dialogue among media is not important. What we must stimulate is internal dialogue.

It's a matter of emphasizing and reinforcing the internal dialogic character of our own points of view, of showing up the ambiguity of the meanings to which we entrust our certainties, of evidencing the internal dialogicality inside the very words we use. Dialogue is structural to discourse, ensuing from the gap between the interpreted sign and the interpretant sign, a gap which no homologizing ideology could ever annul. And because of this dialogue is not the outcome of initiative taken by separate subjects but the condition itself for the subject to exist.

#### *Argumentation and simulation*

**Susan:** On the other hand, my impression is that the three of us in each of our three three-voiced dialogues, this being the third of the series — as I was saying, the three of us together always, and you two *seniores*, Augusto and Massimo, well, we've always, from the times of your two-voiced *Dialogo sui dialoghi* first version, Cadenabbia, October 1982 — as I was saying then, we've always insisted on the thesis that real dialogue, whether among various interlocutors or within a single consciousness, is genuine and antirhetorical when it implies discussion and debate, that is to say, when it is argued, and when it appeals to *the verosimilar*. This type of dialogue is careful to stop and as it were to simulate the reality of experience. Would you agree that contrary to rhetoric which favours *dissimulation*, we dialogicians and argumentators are for *simulation*?

**Massimo:** Quite frankly no, Susan. As already anticipated in my presentation — in Bari and in Milan — of the volume *Menzogna e simulazione*, a collective international enterprise, I now tend to consider this title as expressing an hendiadys. In other words, all lies are simulations because they

seem to be like the facts they are covering and completely distorting; and all simulations, exactly because they're verisimilar, because they copy but impoverish the reality of experience, are lies, as Plato has already taught us. Infact, simulation is not an active interpretation with the aim of transforming according to some project. The cult of computerological simulations is typical of the repetitive and inert culture of the postmodern: expression of putrefying capitalism.

**Susan:** You're not convincing Massimo. I agree that 'simulation' is a double word and even more so than others. But as a great supporter and innovator of icons and abductions you cannot refuse to allow that simulations, in metaphors and models, are the basis of inventions and projects. The relationship between argumentation and the verosimilar is also determined by the fact that, as amply demonstrated by Welby, 'one of the most splendid of all our intellectual instruments' is the 'image or the figure' (Welby 1911, 19852: 13). Its not an illusory question of eliminating figurative or metaphorical discourse to the advantage of so-called literal discourse, but of identifying and eliminating inadequate images that mystify relationships between things and distort our reasoning. 'We need', says Welby, 'a linguistic oculist to restore lost focussing power, to bring our images back to reality by some normalizing kind of lens' (cit.: 16).

**Augusto:** With all my affection for you, Susan, and my respects for your Victoria Lady Welby, this 'normalizing lent' worries me a bit. It reminds of the normalizing politics in educational discourse patronized by the European Commission. For example, in the *Green book on innovation*. Here, the only reference for innovation is the market, and the innovative character of the product is made to consist in its capacity to destroy products that are similar and that precede it on the market. An example: the compact disk thanks to which traditional records are now obsolete and useless, together with the rest of the stereo. And this has happened over a very short period of time, which is exactly what happened with the old gramophone. The relationship between inventiveness and destruction is revealing for anyone wanting to understand the 'ideologies' of todays society.

Massimo, as your club Psomega studies innovation and inventiveness, why don't you dedicate a seminar to demystifying the concept of 'innovation' circulating in Europe today. I'd be very happy to participate.

**Massimo:** Well, yes, no doubt... There's innovation and innovation. There are many capitalistic innovations that are wholly repetitive. Small variations in the absolute constancy of functions and effects. Take the case of the automobile. It has succeeded in a century to eliminate trams, the latter being both a far more civil and refined invention and far more favourable for socializing. And in spite of its devastating effect on the environment and on the quality of life, the automobile is now trying to get rid of trains in Europe as well. Yes indeed, my friend, we'll organize these seminars in Milan and in Lugano too...

**Susan:** Ah yes, my dear straying utopians. I stand with Victoria with my feet firmly on the ground, and to think that truth is the sister of verosimilitude. And now back to order and to our specific subject. Well then, two questions come to the fore at this stage: on a formal level, one concerns the way we can pick out the tricks used by false reasoning to seem true or at least valid and acceptable; the other concerns the possibility of finding means, in the sense also of discourse genres or, more generally, semiotic genres, which allow for well grounded and critical argumentation.

**Augusto:** As to the first question, a good basis and repertoire to begin with is no doubt Perelman's and Olbrechts-Tyteca's famous treatise on argumentation. But I wish to recall yet another, more ancient, work which I have studied very closely — Peter of Spain's *Tractatus or Summule logicales*. By comparison with other Medieval books in logic, it has the merit of presenting itself as a system

of definitions and dialectical rules, without involving a particular metaphysics. To deal with the first question posed by Susan, we'd start well by taking a close look at book VII, entitled *Fallacies*.

**Massimo:** The general and fundamental fallacy consists in taking or letting pass as a necessary *deduction*, in good or bad faith, what is no less than an *abduction* or more or less probable hypothesis. But once we have demystified discourse and once we have explicated all transformations, because ideology and rhetoric are deeply rooted in the quick, implicit and uncontrolled character of transformations, like the tricks of magicians, ..., yes, as I was saying once we've done this work *à la* Russell — good then, as Peirce warns and demonstrates irrevocably in *Thought-sign-man*, that is, in his important essay of '68, which we have translated and commented in the volume *Semiotica* —, the form of fallacious reasoning, reasoning by error, rhetorical falseness or madness, whatever the case may be, is absolutely no different from the form of valid reasoning. Error and madness do not lie in the *form*. We cannot avoid connecting thoughts in a perfect *form*. The error lies in maniac and consolatory fixation. In sticking to a single hypothesis without ever changing. Well then: when is an argument ideological, rhetorical, false? When accepting it implies being content with things as they are. When it gets swamped in repetition. It doesn't push you to changing the world, to putting it to trial in praxis. If reasoning does not need you, your practices, your action, but asks you only to be believed because that way everybody is happy, good then, that's when it's false. On the other hand, this is in perfect accord with the pragmatic maxim.

“Rhetoricae magistra” *Tv*

**Susan:** Well then, if this is the criterion, all media discourse, especially on TV, is false, because it doesn't call for action. All it wants is to be believed: money, votes, conformity.

**Augusto:** From the Baudrillard of *Critique du l'economie politique du signe* to our master Rossi-Landi, a whole tradition in humanistic and Marxist critique of media moves in this direction...

**Susan:** Yes, well, if I'm not mistaken in the last dialogue of the three included in *I tre dialoghi della menzogna e della verità*, the one where I too have a part, *Morte TV: nascita del video!*, Massimo proposes his hypothesis of a weapon against television: a kind of spiritual pick-lock inside the closed circuits of media; a genre he has invented, or at least he invented the name. I'm referring to his video-essay which offers an opening against television.

**Massimo:** The important thing is to understand that video-essays belong to a genre that goes *against* television: and is not *inside* television in the sense of being *with* television. Video-essays are communicated in cassettes through a monitor, through the television video, but not through the television communicative game: effemeral and irreversible transmission, one-to-many, on the basis of an imposed palimpsest. The video-essay, in its currently most common widespread use, which is domestic and private, is like a book or music on tape, something you choose by buying it or reproducing it, that you can study and study over and over again, as you please: going backwards, testing associations, stopping the tape. So, information is sedimented and calls you to dialogue: to discussion and inventive research. Scholars and enthusiasts have been studying film in this way for some time now. And the younger generations are now beginning to open their eyes to twentieth century history.

It's time we understand that a special social use of video-essays is imminent, involving denunciation, criticism, testimonies that move us to action. Video-essays, in the first place, act as a stimulus text for public discussions in cultural circles and in schools; and secondly, in the places of administrative and political discussions and decisions. I'm thinking of pamphlets on video. But we'll

talk more diffusely and more specifically about the semiotic theory, politics and esthetics of the video-essay some other time.

(Translation from Italian by Susan Petrilli)

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