

## Strolling through Semiotics Unbounded\*

*Semiotics Unbounded. Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs*, by Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, 2005, refers to the entire history of modern semiotics focusing on several of its unquestioned classics and consulting a deeply impressive array of other pertinent literature in the field. Therefore, considering the size of the volume, it may appear at first sight that the authors intended to produce a kind of encyclopedic work. However, on a closer reading, if one goes into the detailed argumentation, it becomes quite clear that although such encyclopedic use is possible, and of course useful, it is only a necessary prerequisite for the authors to unfold a remarkably fruitful interplay of (re)sources and approaches, which in a sense I would like to term "genuinely intersemiotic" (and will explain this term later on).

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- Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio, *Semiotics Unbounded. Interpretive Routes through the Open Network of Signs*. Toronto, Toronto University Press, 2005, 630 pp.
  - Before proceeding to my appraisal of this epochal volume, I first want to make quite clear that I have known the authors Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio for many years personally, appreciate them very much as belonging among the leading scholars in semiotics, and know their work intimately. We have cooperated many times relatively to publications and congress organization. This seems to me almost unavoidable in a relatively small scientific community like our own, since Petrilli and Ponzio are the main protagonists of the semiotic center at Bari University, their Department being one of the major and doubtlessly most important institutions in the field, while I myself in my capacity as the Secretary General of the International Association for Semiotic Studies IASS-AIS since 1994 and Member of its Board already since 1989 had and still have not only the pleasure but the duty to communicate closely with the major representatives of the field. I have done so particularly with Bari group members since my own view on semiotics is close to theirs. I want to state, however, that I have read and reviewed the book in question as carefully and objectively as possible, and that my close acquaintance with the former works of the authors, and with themselves and their views, as exchanged in many discussions, has further contributed to my understanding of their aims and arguments. In other words, although the results of my reading and thus my recommendations are in fact very positive, I would seriously object to any claim that this is partial. Furthermore, I would also like to add that whilst on the one hand, the length of the present review article is due to the size of this monograph, on the other it reflects my true pleasure and interest in reading it, what's more, in *ante prima*, when still in the form of a manuscript (Vienna, June 2002).

*“Modern Semiotics”: the State of the Art*

To be able to support such line of argument, however, let me first give my assessment of the state of the art in modern semiotics, after far more than a hundred years of its development, and the conclusions I dare to draw from it. (By "modern semiotics" I understand its shaping as a coherent and continuous – as well as sometimes controversial – scientifico-philosophical discourse actually starting with Charles S. Peirce and leading to the semiotic community and its state of the art of today, being of course aware of the fact that semiotic thought as such appeared already in Antiquity, in medieval philosophy, in the renaissance and baroque eras, etc., and also in non-European cultures.)

If one reviews the different currents of contemporary semiotics, a kind of impenetrable tangle seems to unfold at first sight. However, order can be obtained by clarifying the principal features as well as background of the most noticeable and influential currents. As one of the best known examples to identify these currents (though underrating perhaps some more recent philosophical theories of sign and meaning, e.g. Quine's, Goodman's) let me thus shortly revisit Winfried Noeth's classification in the first edition of his famous *Handbuch der Semiotik* (1985), distilling distinct currents such as (my comments in brackets): 1a) and b) two main currents: semiology and/vs. general semiotics; the first is linguistic-structuralist, the other is the sign-philosophical Peirce-Morris-paradigm; then he mentions 2) a functionalist semiotics (Martinet, Mounin, Prieto; in my view, clearly structuralist, too); 3) Marxist semiotics (could as well function as part of a more comprehensive socio-semiotics, Marxist, or Marxian, as well as non-Marxist; think, as to the latter, e.g. of Alfred Schuetz); 4) phenomenological semiotics (indeed one of the "philosophical" subcurrents). In 5) he subsumes diverse "schools", e.g.: Prague School (structuralist, too), Moscow-Tartu-School (structuralist), Paris School (structuralist), Stuttgart School (Bense's, clearly Peircean), a so-called socio-semiotic structuralism (i.e. W.A. Koch, departing from structuralism, more recently rather bio-evolutionary, while essentially remaining structuralist), and an action-theoretic approach (Trabant; tending, in my view, toward socio-semiotics). Then follows 6) poststructural(ist) semiotics, in particular exemplified by Derrida's grammatology and Kristeva's *semanalyse* (the first an "extremist" structuralist, the latter a multi-influenced borderline case). - No biosemiotics at large, or no zoosemiotics, for

instance, thus we should add them here (in later editions of the handbook, they indeed appear). That is, as to some more or less exposed "movements", Noeth's observations, though incomplete, may have been helpful in 1985, the date of publication of his volume.

In contradistinction, it seems to me rather recommendable, however, to go further and to suggest a more fundamental and therefore diminished typology based on the general points of departure of the different currents and schools mentioned. In this perspective, the two mainstreams have to be acknowledged as the same like Noeth's, i.e. a philosophy-derived semiotics, with Peirce and Morris as the founding fathers; a linguistically inspired semiotics (departing from Saussure; as a rule, structuralisms in any sense); but then there are also two clearly "deviating" wings, actually becoming more and more important as times go by, i.e. biosemiotics (initiated by Jakob von Uexkull), and socio-semiotics (founding father Mikhail M. Bakhtin in his Voloshinovian guise).

These are four qualitatively different currents in so far as their immanent logic is different: 1) Peirce departs from the "logic of thought" (inference; for Peirce, logic and semiotics were, as he emphasized, one and the same); 2) the structuralisms from Saussure's "logic of language" as the most advanced sign system, privileging "langue", that is, language as a system, as the major field of study (and consequently, favorizing more often than not reductively the "systemic" aspects within semiotic research and cogitation); 3) bio-genetic (or bio-evolutionary) biosemiotics departing from a "bio-logic", that is, from the general science of life and the inherent laws of organic nature; and 4) socio-genetic (or socio-evolutionary) socio-semiotics resting on a "dia-logic" (to use Petrilli's and Ponzio's quite accurate term) and in the last instance on a "socio-logic" (hence, this type of comprehensive socio-semiotics should not to be confused, for instance, with Greimas' "sociosemiotique", actually a substitute for pragmatics yet remaining within the structuralist paradigm, and similar attempts to make up for the unrenouncable sociality as well as historicity of sign systems as used by humans).

Ad 1) The pragmatic-pragmaticist current plus related philosophical side-streams, actually starting already, in a way, with John Locke, who coined the notion of semiotics as we understand it today, brought forth the greatest figure in the history of semiotics till now, the true founder of semiotics indeed, Charles Sanders Peirce, who at the same time must be acknowledged as the most important philosopher not

only in the history of the Americas, but as such standing in one line with Aristotle, Plato, Hegel, Kant... In Europe, the history of pragmatist semiotics started with Victoria Welby, Peirce's companion, philosophically speaking, and unfortunately still one of the less known pioneer figures in the history of modern semiotics (despite the fact that an early "school", i.e. signification, built on her insights). Charles W. Morris, the other major force in early US-American semiotics, followed Peirce to a certain extent, but he drew also fruitfully from Mead's social behaviorism (while Mead himself must be mentioned too in semiotic connections, since he studied particularly the genesis and making of simple forms of signs and gestures). Later on, Max Bense and Elisabeth Walther (the Stuttgart School) were mainly inspired by Peirce, and so were Klaus Oehler, Gerard Deledalle, Lucia Santaella and many others forming and broadening this current, which nowadays has gained influence on a world-wide scale (while the diverse structuralisms including post-structuralism, though wide-spread and quantitatively dominant through decades, had to face some significant aporia and became less influential in more recent times).

Ad 2) The founding father of structuralism resp. structuralist semiotics, Ferdinand de Saussure, is now rated in most semiotic handbooks and encyclopedias as the initiator of structuralist linguistics and thus as a very important reformer of a central discipline of the humanities. However, concerning semiotics, in whose history he doubtlessly still deserves an outstanding place, he must be taken rather as a visionary who himself did not yet fulfill the program of his "semiology" which, he claimed, should study the life of signs within the life of society. It was in fact Louis Hjelmslev who, by means of his "glossematics", built the first great semiological "system", still strongly a linguo-scientific rather than philosophical endeavor, but doubtlessly influential (together with some early other currents, like Prague structuralism) for several schools appearing later on, which indeed expanded the subject matter of semiology/semiotics (still) on the basis of the linguo-centric paradigm: classical structuralism in France (Barthes, Lévi-Strauss, Lacan...), the Ecole de Paris (Greimas and his followers), the Moscow-Tartu School (Lotman, Ivanov, Toporov...), and finally the poststructuralists (in their attempt to criticize, and by this, to dynamize, structuralism immanently).

Ad 3) Biosemiotics, however, rests first of all on the work of biologist Jakob von Uexkuell, at the same time the creator of "Umweltlehre" and co-creator of (animal) behavioral research. His (in a way, cybernetic) concept of "function circle" (or cycle)

contains in nuce a semiotics of its very own, later on expressed in the language of modern science by his son Thure von Uexkuell. Other scientists who contributed to early biosemiotics were the psychologists Buehler and Piaget (rather on the ontogenic level), while the major figure in the second half of the 20th century, indebted to the older Uexkuell as well as to Peirce, is doubtlessly Thomas A. Sebeok, who made "zoosemiotics" a well-known notion as well as field of research, and in the long run developed an all-embracing biosemiotics of outstanding conceptual innovativeness and quality and of impressive breadth of applicability which opened paths to further biosemiotic endeavors partly still in the making: meanwhile not only zoosemiotics came into being but even phytosemiotics (Martin Krampen), and a steadily increasing number of scientists has decided to carry out biosemiotic research in different fields (Hoffmeyer, Emmeche, Brier, Chebanov...).

Ad 4) Socio-semiotics, in our understanding finally came into being (after some precursors in the 19th century, such as Ludwig Noiré) in the early 20th century mainly through the efforts of Mikhail M. Bakhtin (and his Circle, as already mentioned before) to clarify the relationship between the signs, the world, and ideology, as well as through introduction and elaboration of the "dialogic principle", and later on, his culture-theoretic works. Important were also some contributions by the Russian appropriation psychologists (Lurija and others), first of all the seminal work of Lev Vygotskij. Of major interest were the chapters about "sign complexes" in Lukacs' work, later on the writings of Adam Schaff (especially his "Introduction to Semantics"), Georg Klaus and Lazar O. Resnikov, all of whom stressed the role of Man as a sign creator/producer. One should also mention, among others, the further impact of social behaviorism on so-called Symbolic Interactionism, e.g. in the work of Erving Goffman, the interesting contribution to semiotics by Alfred Schuetz in his hermeneutic sociology, or the so-called "social semiotics" of M.A.K. Halliday who indeed succeeded in dynamizing his structuralistically grounded approach toward the sociality of signs. The theoretically most elaborated and thus in fact exemplary socio-semiotics, however, came from Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, who in his impressive life-work developed an outstanding theory of signs resting on the notion of work in general, sign work in particular, and embedding the sign systems and processes in the whole of social reproduction.

*Semiotics, a Genuine Transdiscipline*

Beside these four currents that are obviously different in qualitative terms, one should also mention the fact that semiotics as a genuine transdiscipline (and not only interdisciplinary, see also below) for many decades now has had exchanges with other fields of study. In other words, exchange was never restricted to philosophy and linguistics (in the most comprehensive sense, i.e. including literary studies) understood as the "root" disciplines. On the contrary, there was and still is a continuous coming and going with other systemic-structurally oriented fields and approaches, such as information theory, communication theory, cybernetics, synergetics, on the one hand, and with many other disciplines within the humanities, like psychology, sociology, anthropology, cultural studies, media studies, etc., on the other. And exchange is not limited to the humanities: considering biosemiotics, for instance, the heritage stems not only from biology and behavior research but also from medicine (and that since Antiquity, as Thomas A. Sebeok never tired of proving and emphasizing). Recently, some attempts have even been made to include the study of unorganic nature in the field of interest of semiotics. That is, all kinds of human knowledge have contributed to the shaping of contemporary semiotics, and still do so, the natural sciences as well as the human, social, and cultural, while semiotics, vice versa, can and does serve as a platform for further exchange. In fact, the two constant interrelated subject matters of semiotics are at once signification and communication which are pertinent to all fields of study. Therefore, the transdisciplinarity provided by semiotics rests on a common denominator, that is, the dynamic-relational concept of sign.

Revisiting the concrete history of modern semiotics, however, one should not conceal certain problems concerning the functioning of this exchange. On the one hand, the fact that semiotics derived from different traditions in the history of thought, has led for a while to some controversies in the semiotic community itself, sometimes causing an outer image of conceptual unclearness and even competition, as well as some general criticism concerning the "scientificity" of semiotics (or some of its currents). In more recent times, however, the internal struggles were increasingly replaced by efforts towards elaborating an "intersemiotics", as I want to call it, or comparative semiotics on a meta-level, to unveil the common grounds. As one of the major results, one could state that none of the traditions deliver automatically the "whole truth" but rather complement each other. On the other hand, considering the

"fuzzy" borderlines of semiotics with regard to the (fields of study of) other disciplines as well as the internal discussion whether it is a science, a method, an approach, a field, a discipline, a doctrine or whatever, has made the status of semiotics in academia rather ambivalent. As to that, one can observe, however, that it is becoming more and more clear now that it is precisely the transdisciplinary quality of semiotics which is its main offer to all other disciplines, in a time in which interdisciplinarity is often conjured up as a remedy against extreme specializations, but cannot be achieved by simple addition, accumulation, or merging of disciplinary points of view.

To summarize referring to Petrilli's and Ponzio's *Semiotics Unbounded* in light of this overview, my point now is, that: firstly the authors of this not only voluminous but indeed weighty work are fully aware of the breadth as well as differentiation of semiotic cogitation as sketched by my above effort to classify the main currents and developments in the field (although their terms may be different), and; second, the book under examination is a very serious endeavor to go some important steps further in the elaboration of intersemiotics and in the improvement and development of its transdisciplinary qualities.

Let me specify by following Petrilli and Ponzio now more closely.

#### *An Excursion into Semiotics with Petrilli and Ponzio*

In the Introduction, the authors give in 12 sections the outlines of what semiotics is about, explaining and discussing some of the most central terms as well as facts necessary to speak about signs and about semiotics today, that is, after 2500 years of implicit and, in the sense of modern semiotics, about 150 years of explicit (trans)disciplinary development of this type of cogitation and research. The Introduction aims at, and succeeds in, offering, in just some 20 pages, the basis of accurate knowledge needed to understand what a sign (or rather, sign process) is, which constitutive parts have to be distinguished to talk analytically about signification (and related terms), in evidencing how far semiotics necessarily transcends a linguo-centric point of view, and what instruments are needed to thus proceed on a meta-level.

They make their point clear from the start, indeed, that, after many decades of parallel development of different currents in semiotics, preference must be given for

provable reasons to "interpretive" semiotics (vs. "decodification" semiotics). In the sections on "Subject and alterity" as well as "Dialogue and inference", it becomes quite obvious why: namely because the authors did not intend to restrict themselves to a "neutral" reader's digest glossary of semiotics in this Introduction but wanted to pursue their project, setting their course from the very start, for "semioethics" necessarily based, as to the general idea, on the signs' comprehensive dialogism - therefore, they had to deliver the terms and conceptual approach for its particular understanding from the very beginning.

The volume is divided into three parts, the first of which, "Semiotics and Semioticians", revisits and discusses the most essential milestones, in the authors' view, in the history of modern semiotics, in seven chapters dedicated to Charles S. Peirce, Victoria Lady Welby, Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Charles W. Morris, Thomas A. Sebeok, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, and Umberto Eco. As to this selection, which seems to me is in line with the assessment given above, the authors argue that the foundations laid by these classics provide the indispensable basis for the understanding of their theoretical approach developed in the other two parts of the volume.

I will comment now a bit more extensively on the seven chapters forming Part I, because they build the multi-polar core not only of the authors' approach, but of modern semiotics per se; then I'll turn to Part II and III in a more cursory way, which is possible because they take up, specify, and apply many topics already introduced before in one, or very often more than one, of the preceding chapters.

### *Semiotician Milestones*

The authors leave no doubt that Peirce is the titanic figure within semiotics on whose shoulders all semioticians after him who aspire to do "essential" work on signs must stand. They discuss Peirce's central notions like sign, semiosis, representation, interpretation, and especially interpretant, on the background of his (sometimes difficult to grasp) philosophical system, particularly his doctrine of categories, and they stress the general character of his concept of sign (against the linguo-centric orientation of other approaches). Of special interest is, however, the authors' commitment to show how far Peirce had also already dealt substantially with such questions as identity vs otherness, the immanent dialogism of the sign, the sign-

bound, or sign-imbued interrelationship between thought, world, and body, and other topics so far not focused in Peirce-derived semiotics till now except fragmentarily by some specialists. This is so in particular for the very basic evolutionism to be found in Peirce's thought as well as for his commitment to the problems of values, and of ethics in general, which cannot be separated from his seminal findings about signs and logic ("thought signs"). - It is exactly these points which connect Peirce perhaps more with England's Victoria Welby than their better-known exchanges about the internal structure of the sign.

Therefore, the chapter on Victoria Lady Welby makes it quite clear that this one and only "founding mother" of semiotics (or signification, which is how she preferred for good reasons to call her theory of meaning) is by far the most underrated figure among all the great names connected with the shaping of this transdiscipline, but a genuine classic, nonetheless. Considering the fact that many sources are not easily available, it is indeed meritorious how this chapter unfolds the whole of Welby's development, that is, of her steadily increasing commitment to and permeation of the intricate questions of (the constitution of) "meaning" in a plain and in an advanced sense, of questions of use and particularly misuse of language, of the interrelationships between religion, science, and philosophy, and of the biological-organ(ism)ic, and that is, evolutionary, basis of sign use, language, meaning, thought, and culture, which is at the same time one of the reasons for the strong impact of ethics in her work. (It is not by chance that - in the wake of Welby's thought - some leading representatives of the signification movement, which then gained some importance on the continent, were asked by the interwar League of Nations to carry out a research project on the fundamentals of peace-keeping...).

Mikhail M. Bakhtin, in the next chapter, is presented as another true pioneer, indeed hero of modern semiotics, despite the fact that it is philologically difficult to separate his doubtlessly decisive share in some early works written together with other members of the so-called Bakhtin Circle. Although well-known later on by his works in literary science and his cultural resp. culture-historical studies, he is sketched here first of all as a philosopher of language, a fact which gives the occasion to discuss the intricate relationship between semiotics, metasemiotics, and the philosophy of language. Bakhtin's sign conception, formulated in contrast to Saussure's structuralist model of the sign resting on "langue", is based on "parole", heteroglossia, dialogisms, interpretation, concrete interaction, fullness of life, and as

such has much more in common with Peirce's thought. Another important point in Bakhtin is the relationship (and interdependence) between signs and ideology, including questions of the unconscious and of values. Bakhtin's theory contains, it is pointed out, in nuce a critique of that kind of dialogic reasoning based only on a code-theoretically informed understanding of communication, or on related reductionist approaches. Long passages are also devoted to the comprehensiveness of Bakhtin's method, that is, to his interdisciplinary merits (which I would prefer to call transdisciplinary).

Charles W. Morris is presented and discussed on the basis of the interplay of classical behaviorism and pragmatism so characteristic of his work. It is indeed true that through the Peirce-revival in the second half of the 20th century, Morris lost his role as the major focus of non-structuralist semiotics and was even criticized for having offered a seemingly shallower version of Peircean semiotics. The reconstruction and revaluation of his merits, however, shows that, first, his point of departure was deliberately quite different, namely by examining the conditions of the existence and possibility of signs, not only in the human but first of all in the animal world, assessing so very consequently a biological as well as evolutionary viewpoint, while secondly, by drawing from Mead's classical social behaviorism, he added to the Peircean view an important empiricist concretization (in the true sense of the - Saussurean - claim of studying the life of signs in the life of society), elaborating so one of his lasting contribution to semiotics, the three so-called sign dimensions and at the same time subdisciplines of semiotics. And one should not forget the immanent ethics in Morris who dealt extensively with values and stressed the emancipatory qualities of semiotics.

Revisiting Sebeok, Rossi-Landi, and Eco, the authors then enter the second half of the last century, demonstrating exemplarily by these in fact most outstanding scholars that even in a broadening scientific community, as in semiotics today, there is still place for true pioneers. Thomas A. Sebeok was the pivot figure of this scene, its spiritus rector, as a polymath as well as institutional promotor, multi-editor, and a historian of semiotics, and in a decisive way, moreover, as a visionary of an all-embracing science yet to come (a "global semiotics"). The authors reconstruct Sebeok's roots mainly in Peirce and to a certain extent also in Morris and in a refined acceptance of some structuralist conceptions (e.g. the later Jakobson who was himself a partly "Peirceanized" structuralist, or the notion of modeling systems, which Sebeok

adapted creatively from the Moscow-Tartu School), while perhaps the most important influence (leading to "global semiotics") came from Jakob von Uexkuell - the founder of biosemiotics (then not yet thus identified) in the first half of the 20th century -, and from biology in general.

All this caused Sebeok to develop first his zoosemiotics (with derivations like endo- and exosemiotics), then a biosemiotics of his very own, including the determination of anthroposemiotics within its framework, thus evidencing the incredible manifoldness of signs and semioses we actually have to face - an endeavor standing only at its beginnings -, while LANGUAGE in a comprehensive sense turns out to be the primary modeling system, and SEMIOTICS as a genuinely anthroposemiotic endeavor. Semiosis and symbiosis finally become synonymous. Resting on the unifying function of semiotics within the natural as well as human sciences, the authors further point out, Sebeok was also seriously occupied with several indeed future-oriented fields as differing, for instance, as machine semiosis, one the one hand, or educational semiosis, on the other, which both bring many ethical aspects into play. There is no doubt, the authors conclude, that a global semiotics as envisioned by Sebeok is an essential tool for reassessing a global responsibility for life as such on our endangered planet.

The most extensive of the seven chapters dedicated to the seminal figures of modern semiotics is not by chance that on Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, since the authors, as I understand, wish to demonstrate the utmost importance of his conceptions in modern semiotics for the understanding of the functioning and structure of the societies of today. Rossi-Landi's philosophy of language as well as semiotics, in general, and socio-semiotics, in particular, namely, rests on an unrenouncable anthropological principle. The transformation of the whole of nature into culture, i.e. of self-evolutive sociality, is based on "work" which needs: materials, instruments, workers, operations, aims, products. The transformation of materials via operations into products take place in an endless concatenation of work cycles. In it, the "realm of freedom" emerges, despite all material dependencies. The sign, then, can be described in terms of materials (signans and signatum), united to a product (signum) by a sign-work operation. Sign work causes the transformation of an already socially given (signatum), mediated by a material antithesis (signans), to a social result, i.e. the sign itself. This goes for sign production per se as well as for sign reproduction (sign use). Part of sign (re)production occurs inside individuals, another one outside.

Cogitation ("ideology") and communication are just two sides of the medal. The social, however, rests upon a vast array of artefacts, trivially material ones as well as signs, verbal and non-verbal. One of Rossi-Landi's central achievements, as to that, is the so-called homology model, a dialectically conceived 10- resp. 11-level model of material as well as sign production. Signs (sign systems and processes) play an absolutely central role in social reproduction, which comprises, or is made of, the triadic movement(s) of production, exchange, and consumption. Exchange appears as trivially material and as sign exchange, i.e. communication. The sum of all movements makes society develop itself: social practice renders, via its tools, history.

Against this background, the authors reconstruct the itinerary followed by Rossi-Landi from his early reception of Morris (extending the latter's Meadian social behaviorism to social practice) to the elaboration of the (anti-Saussurean as well as anti-Oxonian) concept of "common speech", its foundation in (sign) work, its systematization in the mentioned homology model, and its final embedding in social reproduction. As a result, "common speech" in the last analysis translates into "common semiosis". The authors stress the importance of such an approach for a critique of ideology and (false) consciousness and for the analysis of modern (mass media) communication, social programming, (new forms of) alienation, the increasing as well as rapidly changing role of signs in contemporary society in general, and related issues - that is, at once all the challenges deriving thereof.

Finally, the authors dwell upon Umberto Eco, today's most famous semiotician, no matter whether his fame stems from his best-selling novels rather than from his many books on semiotics - which, to a certain extent thanks to the first, are comparably well-distributed and have made Eco, by a wide margin, certainly the most-read and thus probably most influential author in the field today. However, his many books on semiotics are doubtlessly of high quality and originality, and show his comprehensive acquaintance with all intricate problems in the history of sign theory and with the scholars working through them, making him one of the most central figures in this scientific community. In fact, Eco is a brilliant literary as well as scientific author, and his great merits for semiotics in general and the semiotic scene in particular must therefore be fully recognized.

Nonetheless, Petrilli and Ponzio, though acknowledging these achievements, take Eco's work and development foremost as an (outstanding!) example of the necessity to change or at least broaden one's perspectives if dealing seriously with the

"essential" problems of semiotics. That is, they pursue and analyze in detail Eco's path from "decodification" semiotics (structuralist semiotics as well as information-communication-theoretically nourished semiotics), to which he contributed significantly, e.g. by his theory of codes and subcodes, towards "interpretive" semiotics, in the end (Peirce, Morris, Bakhtin et al.), where he arrived later on - not by chance, I would argue in concord with the authors, since the more he tried to develop a full-fledged semiotics of culture, one of his major aims, the more the need increased to reach a holistic perspective and at the same time a dynamical sign conception as provided from the start by "interpretive" semiotics. Although he aimed at extending the boundaries of semiotics, and although his work rests on his impressive knowledge about signs and culture, the authors seem to insinuate, that he remained to a certain extent a syncretist, who could not fully avoid some reductionism, and did not (want to) succeed, moreover, in transgressing the "lower threshold" (Eco's own formulation) towards biosemiotics, hindering him at the same time from arriving at a global semiotics like Sebeok's.

### *Modelling, Writing, and Otherness*

Part II, entitled "Modeling, Writing and Otherness", takes some key concepts as well as key problems of semiotics as its points of departure.

First it concentrates on modeling and otherness, discusses the notions of model and modeling in connection with the basis given by von Uexkuell the elder (Jakob) and the younger (Thure), extensively stresses once again the importance of the "interpretant" and arrives at the a priori dialogical nature of the sign, showing how it already relates with biosemiotic fundamentals, on the one hand, and with the advanced understanding of dialogism of the socio-semiotician Bakhtin, on the other. The specification of "dialogism" as well as "modeling" is then deepened by correlating both with conceptions such as "primal sense" (Welby) and particularly "otherness" (Levinas), the latter indeed ruffling the limited occidental understanding of "identity".

In conclusion follow deliberations about writing as a syntactics and not just transcription, about creative writing in particular, and about the creativity of language, in general, leading to the next chapter in which these terms resp. conceptions are synthesized, and even "intercorporeity" comes into play via Bakhtin,

whose seminal work on the carnivalesque is also extended here to writing in the above sense. Dialogue and polyphony (another central Bakhtinian topic) are then examined with a focus on novel and drama, and then narrativity as such comes into play, exemplified unconventionally with reference to the challenging contemporary phenomena of African oral literature ("oraliture").

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

Part III, then, deals first with fundamental questions of understanding vs misunderstanding, focussing on the ("semiogenealogy" of) predicative judgment, mainly on a Peircean basis, and arriving at a very active-interactive understanding of predication. Then the focus switches to the difference between objective misunderstanding and linguistic mystification. The authors discuss and criticize, among other "maladies of language", its vaguenesses, the restricted power of definitions, the fallacies of metaphor, of trivial common-sensism, of a misunderstood universality of language, holding against all that - resting on Rossi-Landi's notion of "common speech" - a critical common-sensism and (Peircean) pragmaticism. The second chapter - based mainly on Rossi-Landian as well as Bakhtinian prerequisites once again - starts by assessing nothing less than the state of the world (of late capitalism), especially as to the steadily increasing role communication plays in it: media communication, in particular, and globalized technological communication, in general.

A refined "interpretive" semiotics aware of true dialogism, the authors succeed in demonstrating, is a useful instrument for the critical analysis of these developments and phenomena, on the one hand, and for the demystification of reductionist understandings of communication as such, on the other. This is well exemplified also by an excursus on the specificities and especially shortcomings of political language as documented in the Helsinki Final Acts, drawing from an extensive semiotic research program carried out already in the second half of the 1980s (with Adam Schaff as one of the major protagonists). Particularly, the concept(s) of "nation" in their ambiguity deserve special attention, and need semiotic clarification, the authors argue.

The next subchapter then turns to the semiotically most remarkable fact of (post)modernity, namely that now machines have come extensively to do sign work, i.e. to process semioses on a large scale, and possibly also to develop their own

semiotics. This poses hitherto unknown questions of man-machine communication, and of the (uneven) relationship between human and artificial intelligence. So technological development, the authors assess, renders useful tools for the liberation of mankind, on the one hand, but does so under the hegemonic conditions of a globalized market, on the other, thus bringing forth a globalized network of a communication of nonetheless a restricted type. The latter's challenges rather than chances are exactly the contents of the next subchapter, in which the "global communication-production system" is discussed and criticized.

"Communication-production" means that communication in the Rossi-Landian sense (i.e. sign exchange) as a crucial part of the general social (re)production system, is now transformed and generalized to an all-embracing machinery, in and by which technological progress does not keep pace with the true capacities of dialogical communication, since this machinery rests on a narrow concept of communication easily to be subsumed under the interests of capitalist accumulation and hegemony. One has to hold against this, the authors argue, an ontologically based concept of communication which is much broader and transcends all utilitarian views, due to its immanent dialogism and its acknowledgment of (Levinassian) otherness, and thus helps to regain the true sociality of communication: communication to be enforced by, and sublated in, communitariness.

Such problematics, and this is the third and final chapter of Part III, are to be analyzed from the viewpoint of a global, in fact planetary semiotics, truly acknowledging the sociality as well as historicity of anthroposemiosis, in the Rossi-Landian sense, on the one hand, but equally based on a comprehensive understanding of semiosis in the wake of Th. A. Sebeok's biosemiotics, on the other, which must lead to the development of a "semioethics", as first drafted by Lady Welby, but now on a "globalized" level. This ethics, the core and final destination of Petrilli's and Ponzio's concern and conclusions, as I see it, rests on a bioethics and ecological ethics, and translates at the same time into a semioethics - if one accepts Sebeok's axiom that semiosis and symbiosis are one and the same. From this perspective such new responsibility transcends mere "communication-production" and makes the Other, however distant or alien, our neighbor, on a world-wide scale, and at once appeases our present disastrous struggle between ecology and economy. Semiotics, thus understood, that is, as an all-embracing reflection, which only humans can perform, upon an all-pervasive phenomenon in nature and culture, namely semiosis,

may become a central tool for developing our responsibility towards LIFE on a global scale.

*By way of conclusion: an invigorating stroll*

The thesis of "Semiotics Unbounded" says, as I understand it according to my introductory remarks on the state of the art and considering the way the authors develop their specific transdisciplinary intersemiotics, that modern semiotics viewed in its entirety up to now brings forth its quality as an open as well as totalizing field reconciliating the seemingly quite different realms of nature and culture, or biology and society. Both realms have something basic in common, since they both rest upon, bring forth, and belong to, manifoldedly interconnected sign networks. The authors' decision to appraise and adapt not all currents in modern semiotics equivocally (see particularly their very carefully argued criticism on some weak points in the diverse structuralisms), but to favor the tradition of "interpretive semiotics", enables them to develop the very interesting and creative concept of "interpretive routes" through these sign networks. In the last analysis, that is, resting on Man's ability to reflect semiotically on semiosis, this makes them also capable of drafting a promising field unfortunately not yet explicitly existing in semiotics till now, namely that of "semioethics" (previously "ethosemiotics", "telosemiotics", "teleosemiotics") showing thus that a genuine intersemiotics of the suggested type can, in principle, even deliver a kind of life-support beyond the possibilities of mainstream science (or rather, of reductionist scientificity), whether in the natural sciences or in the humanities - a very important aspect considering the global (ecological, economical, social, cultural...) challenges of our time, and the "new responsibility" we all are asked to develop for survival. To sum up, this work, based in fact on very sound and up-to-date scholarship, is a significant contribution to the field, or even more, a guide for its future development.

The authors have invested great efforts in presenting sometimes very complicated matters in a readable way, considering especially the fact that semiotics, philosophy in general, philosophy of language in particular, and related agenda are fields of knowledge which do not open themselves easily as such, and ask for certain intellectual presuppositions. In this sense, the Introduction and the more historical and referential Part I can be more easily consumed by non-insiders although its contents

are and remain of fundamental importance by definition. When the authors, however, start to develop their own ideas extensively on the backbone of the approaches of the classics, then this kind of argumentation necessarily requires serious work and concentration from the readers, the more so since the innovative interconnections offered by the authors not only call for technically (here I am referring above all to the multi-terminology - in this case truly unavoidable), but also conceptually a priori open minds on the part of receivers. These circumstances must be accepted as a matter of fact, however, since *Semiotics Unbounded* is a demanding endeavor resting on research and profound cogitation which certainly cannot be delivered in the form of "popular science". On the other hand, this volume is systematical, formally speaking, but also in a more inherent way, since by principle it rests on a continuous revisitation of the classical sources, while at once working step by step toward a final synthesis on the basis of cogent argumentation and exemplification. To be underlined that the authors' compositorial principle of revisitation and development is not merely a kind of literary style but is grounded directly in the subject matter, in the very character of semiosis as well as semiotics, that is, in the complexity of the world to be described in terms of signs, meaning, and interpretation, striving towards a refined, innovative world vision, critical of course of some "ruling" scientific and philosophical standard stances, which consequently calls for such a method of careful examination and re-examination of those intellectual tools promising final success.

Though belonging to a demanding kind of scientific and philosophical literature, this book can, even for beginners in semiotics, but more fruitfully perhaps for already slightly advanced students, certainly play the role of a comprehensive guide to the world of signs as well as of semiotics itself, and to the problems connected with and insights delivered by this field of thought and research: Peirce, Welby, Morris, Bakhtin, Sebeok, Rossi-Landi, and Eco, the authors' main witnesses, belong doubtlessly to the absolutely great figures whose work and thought has shaped the face of modern semiotics, particularly of "interpretive semiotics" - but one should add, as to this, that structuralisms are also discussed broadly: partly in the chapter on Eco who maintains a floating kind of in-between position, partly through the reported criticism of Bakhtin and Rossi-Landi on Saussure and his followers, partly interim in many places (see e.g. the brilliant considerations on Chomsky).

Furthermore, all the major books on the subject, that is, particularly, the heritage of modern semiotics of the late 19th and the entire 20th century, are quoted (with very

few exceptions) in the comprehensive and in fact impressive bibliography, and it is more than obvious that the authors have referred to them appropriately. That is, the book rests doubtlessly on a fundamental and actually admirable knowledge of semiotic literature including, of course, complexly related fields such as philosophy, in general, and philosophy of language, in particular. The work under examination deals with these sources, however, not just in a learned way, but is in full command of the whole corpus, connects the different currents of semiotic heritage innovatively, and develops the contents further, I dare to say, in superior style, to form an outstanding theoretical stance in its very own right.

So use as a kind of encyclopedia is not excluded, and students may benefit from it extensively, as well as readers outside this type of discourses, and general readers as such. For the experts, however, I would like to assume that this book, as based, on the one hand, on the most distinguished classics, should provide, on the other hand, thanks to the authors's decisive efforts towards synthesis, a fresh and novel (and partly also constructively controversial) approach to semiotics, which, as standard literature in the field from the start, will make the book a widely discussed one for decades. Actually, I believe, this work is a candidate for the Olympus of semiotics, to be counted, that is, among let's say the thirty most important works ever written in the field.