

SUSAN PETRILLI

CHALLENGES TO LIVING TOGETHER

TRANSCULTURALISM, MIGRATION, EXPLOITATION
FOR A SEMIOETHICS OF HUMAN RELATIONS

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Extending the gaze to all signs of life, semiotics as global semiotics evidences the condition of inter-relatedness and interdependency not only among the sign systems forming the anthroposphere, but also between the latter and those forming the biosphere, ultimately between nature and culture. As “the art of listening”, “of caring”, semiotics as semioethics shows how the relation with the other, whether the other of self or the other from self, is inevitable and cannot be escaped. The vocation of the sign, of life, of communication, verbal and nonverbal, is the other. The other is a constitutive part of the world inhabited by all living beings. Challenges to human and nonhuman life in today’s world are numerous and appear unsurmountable. In reality, these are challenges to living together, but living together is possible. Semiotics as global semiotics and semioethics tells us as much. This book designs a common vision from different perspectives all essentially oriented by the belief that living together can only be fully achieved when the business of living espouses diversity and care for the other as the principle of unity, when the unifying principle is difference.

CHALLENGES TO LIVING TOGETHER

*Transculturalism, Migration,
Exploitation*

For a Semioethics of Human Relations

by

Susan Petrilli

with

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For my husband Franco Auditore and our special charges
Assetou Madeleine and Kalif Louis

SUSAN PETRILLI

Introduction

THE WORLD IS NOBODY'S IF IT'S NOT EVERYBODY'S

Why another book on topics like those presented here, another book on humanity and its disasters, in one sense or another? *Challenges to Living Together. Transculturalism, Migration, Exploitation*: the challenges to living together in today's world often appear unsurmountable, but living together is possible as the title also indicates. In fact, the expression *For a Semioethics of Human Relations* following on from the title wants to tell us as much. On outlining perspectives and pathways, this book is intended to open the heart to hope, love and desire (Petrilli 2013: 200; Seif 2016). In popular language the expression "semioethics" (Petrilli and Ponzio 2003a, 2010) can also be said with such expressions as "the art of listening" (Petrilli, ed., 2007; Petrilli and Ponzio 2016), "the art of caring". For what? For human relations, and for the other *tout court*. Given that humanity is but a piece in the larger picture made of a countless number of other pieces, interdependent and interrelated, to care for the human is to care for all of life over the planet which flourishes, in turn, interdependently with the larger system called Gaia, and so forth, according to a progression whose boundaries, if boundaries there are, ultimately we do not know. We propose to listen to and care for human relations, or better "interrelations" given the inexorable condition of intercorporeality, "dialogic intercorporeality", interconnecting all life-forms on earth. And in terms that are not uncertain this condition of intercorporeality, of biological dialogism, wherewith the other cannot be avoided, warns us that in the long term we all either flourish together or perish together, whether literally or metaphorically.

As inhabitants of the same "biosphere" we live in the same "semiosphere". This expression is taken from Jurij M. Lotman (1990) but is understood by Thomas A. Sebeok (2001) in a far more extended sense than Lotman's. The latter limited the sphere of reference of the "semiosphere" to human culture with the initial claim that communication does not take place outside the semiosphere thus connoted. The different forms of semiosis, sign processes, sign activity forming the semiosphere are studied by semiotics. And from the perspective of so-called "global semiotics" where

semiosis is described as converging with *life* (in this sense global semiotics is “semiotics of life”), the *semiosphere* identifies with the *biosphere* (term coined in Russian by Vladimir Vernadskij in 1926) to emerge, therefore, as the *semiobiosphere*. The semiosphere thus extended is articulated into different subspheres which overlap and converge with the different spheres of life: the zoosphere whose material is zoosemiosis, object of study of zoosemiotics; the phytosphere made of phytosemiosis processes studied by phytosemiotics; and the mycosphere whose mycosemiosis activities are the object of study of mycosemiotics. Semiosis in the human world, anthroposemiosis and its various articulations, enters the more general and inclusive sphere of zoosemiosis. It forms the anthroposphere and is studied by anthroposemiotics.

But all this only concerns a partial sector of global semiotics, that involving the world of “eukariots”, leaving aside the enormous quantity of “prokariots” with which life arises on earth and continues to proliferate and evolve to this very day, thanks to an incredibly refined communication system which interconnects them all in a network that covers the entire planet. Prokariots are the object of study of that branch of general semiotics known as microsemiotics and specified as endosemiotics which, as the expression itself explains, has a focus on semiosis, that is, communication, as it occurs inside the organisms populating the superkingdoms. In addition to the prokariots, endosemiotics studies intercellular communication in larger organisms together with the genetic code, the immunitary system, and the neuronal system, all being communication systems that allow for the reproduction, maintenance and overall behaviour appropriate to a specific *Umwelt*.

The sign network that is life is a communication network, a global communication network far before the rise of global communication as we know it today, that is, as an expression of globalisation and its technological supports. From a semiotic or better biosemiotic perspective, communication is no less than a property characteristic of living beings, a condition for existing, a condition for life.

To repeat then, global semiotics is in a position to evidence the extension and consistency of the sign network which includes the *semiosphere* in Lotman’s sense, as constructed by human beings, therefore human culture, signs, symbols and artifacts, etc. But global semiotics evidences the fact that the human cultural semiosphere is part of a *far broader semiosphere*, the *semiobiosphere*, a sign network human beings have never left and as *living beings* never will.

To the axiom that the biosphere and the semiosphere converge, we

will add a gloss concerning the possibility that the semiosphere, the “sign network” may in fact supercede the “life network”. Looking at life both retrospectively as much as raising the gaze towards the future, the hypothesis is that signs may well overflow with respect to life itself, but certainly where there is life there are signs and where there are signs there is life. The life sciences and the sign sciences just like their respective objects of study, life and signs, proceed together, with the difference, as regards the past, that consciousness of the association is now much higher. A sign in this sense is the birth in the twentieth century, at the interface between the life sciences and the sign sciences, of “biosemiotics”, whose object of study is the great multiplicity of semioses forming the biosphere, a new branch of general semiotics and at once overarching vision of life and the sciences that study it. As posited by Sebeok, one of the most representative pioneers in the field, the criterial feature of life is the sign.

The name of the “general science of signs”, “general theory of signs”, or “doctrine of signs”¹ is “semiotics” and semiotics, that is, general semiotics goes a step further with Sebeok to become “global semiotics”, an expression which indicates the extraordinary range of the “semiotic field”². Here the term “global” indicates an orientation, a project, a trend. Semiotics practiced as global semiotics fosters an interdisciplinary approach to the life of signs that includes all the special fields of semiosis from medicine, physics, chemistry, biology, anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics, mathematics, logic, grammar, stylistics, poetics, musicology, architecture, aesthetics, literature, to philosophy, and so forth. Consequently, global semiotics is unbounded semiotics.

By virtue of this “global” or “holistic” approach to semiotics, research into the “life of signs” is immediately associated with concern for the “signs of life”. Signs, communication, interpretation are prerogatives characteristic of living beings. Semiosis originates with the first stirrings of life. In fact, the sign science today is all but limited to the “science qui étudie la vie des signes au sein de la vie sociale” (Ferdinand de Saussure) with its anthropocentric, glottocentric, phonocentric, alphabetocentric and, ultimately, ethnocentric bias. Therefore, as sectorial and specific a given interest in semiotic studies may be (Umberto Eco distinguishes between

-
- 1 The “doctrine of signs” is an expression Sebeok recovered from John Locke to indicate an approach still in formation in terms of methodology, conceptual instruments and objects.
 - 2 “The semiotic field” (“Il campo semiotico”) is the expression that Umberto Eco chose for the book series he directed during a lifetime with Bompiani publishers in Milan.

“general semiotics” and “special semiotics”), that special interest has its place in the larger context of semiotics understood as global semiotics, precisely.

Global semiotics includes any sign relation, any interpretant or interpreter whatsoever, so that the model of sign used by semiotics, however restrictively, however specialistically, must necessarily be construed in such a way as to be applicable to all sign processes (or semioses), as is in the nature of a model with claims to generality, whatever the special use in any given instance. Semiotics must base itself on a *general theory of signs*. And this general theory with its related notion of the sign in general must avoid the limit often presented by semiotics, especially when it takes the form of *sémiologie* of Saussurean derivation: in other words, a general theory of sign must avoid *glottocentrism*. Glottocentrism means to refer to the verbal sign as the general sign model and, therefore, to linguistics as the model science of semiotics. From this point of view, Roland Barthes was right when he said that *sémiologie* is affected by glottocentrism. Consequently, semiology is englobed by linguistics, despite Saussure’s intention to the contrary of it englobing linguistics.

It ensues that a general sign model as proposed by a general sign theory cannot be construed on the sole basis of the verbal sign. This glottocentric approach to the life of signs is based on the fallacy that any type of sign can only be dealt with by speaking about it, through verbal signs, in other words, that all signs can only be fully understood if they are transposable, translatable into verbal signs. On the contrary, a sign model intending to be general must represent the sign under the aspect that is most refractory to verbal translation, most resistant, most irreducible, in this sense most other with respect to verbal signs, for example, as in the case of musical signs. Music requires a capacity for listening.

À *propos* the general science of signs, this of course is not the whole story, but this is not the place to tell it. Here our concern is simply to outline a context for the studies presented in this collective volume which features contributions from different authors working in different disciplinary areas and from a variety of different points of view, and thus evidence the overarching sense of our common enterprise. We have drawn our map so that we might now more easily see how we human beings, the actors of anthroposemiosis (specified as anthropobiosesemiosis and anthropobiosociosemiosis), are placed in the bigger picture, as a part in the global system interrelated and interdependent with all others.

Concerning the human world, semiotics must reflect upon the conditions of possibility of what Edmund Husserl calls the already given, already

done, already constituted, already determined world. Critical analysis of the world, with a focus on *alternative planning*, on the construction of *new possible worlds*, requires this type of reflection. Our claim is that semiotics today is in a position to carry out the general task of “constitutive phenomenology”. As Husserl clearly demonstrates in *Erfahrung und Urteil* [*Experience and Judgement*], 1948, the aim of *constitutive phenomenology* is to describe the entire complex of operations that leads to the constitution of a *possible world* (Petrilli 2010: 159-236; Petrilli and Ponzio 2007).

To investigate how the world is constituted means to deal with the essential form of the world in general and not our real actual existent world, the world-as-it-is. This means to investigate the modelling structures and processes of the human world not simply in terms of factuality, reality and history but also in terms of potential and possibility. Such an investigation is also specific in the sense that it deals with a species-specific modality of constructing the world (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005; Petrilli 2012, 2014a, 2016).

As compared with sign activity, with the semioses of life-forms inhabiting the other spheres that together constitute the biosphere, anthroposemiosis has a special characteristic: it doubles into two levels at least, that of “semiosis” and of “metasemiosis” (see *infra*, II.3.2). In other words, human beings do not only behave, think and communicate directly like all other life-forms, but they are endowed with a capacity to take a step back and reflect, speculate, and deliberate. This brings us to the point we wish to make about human beings and how they are different from other life-forms in a way that is species-specific. In fact, unlike other animals, the human animal is capable of constructing innumerable possible new worlds. Sebeok baptises the human *modelling device* of the world as “language”. This capacity is specific to the human species. Thanks to language, unlike all other species humans are in a position to construct innumerable real or imaginary, concrete or fantastic worlds, and not just a single world always the same (Petrilli and Ponzio 2015; Sebeok 1991).

As a science semiotics is founded on a special capacity, that is, on semiotics understood as a species-specific modality of using signs by the “semiotic animal” (Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio 2005; Mladenov and Iankova 2016), or human being. This is the capacity for *metasemiosis* just mentioned. It distinguishes the human being from all other living beings that are only capable of semiosis. Semiotics as a science is aware of metasemiosis as its very own condition of possibility. Unlike “semiotics” understood as metasemiosis specific to human beings, “semiotics” as a science presents itself as meta-semiotics. If the human being is a

metasemiosical animal, then the semiotician, the person who practices the semiotic science, is a metasemiotical animal.

Metasemiosis understood as the capacity to reflect upon signs is connected with responsibility: the human being, the only semiotic animal existing, is the only animal capable of accounting for signs and for sign behaviour, of accounting for the self. Therefore, the human being is subject to and subject of responsibility. And to the extent that the semiotician practices metasemiotics, he or she is doubly responsible: the semiotician must account for him- or herself and for others, and as a global semiotician he or she must account for life over the entire globe.

The interpretant of a sign is another sign which the first creates in the interpreter, being “an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign”, as the American scientist, father of modern semiotics and ideator of “pragmatism”, Charles S. Peirce says (*CP* 2.228). Therefore, the interpretant sign cannot be identical to the interpreted sign; it cannot be a totalising repetition, precisely because it is *mediated*, interpretive and therefore always new. With respect to the first sign, the interpretant is a *response*. As such, it inaugurates a new sign process, a new semiosis. In this sense, it is a more developed sign. As a sign the interpretant determines another sign which acts, in turn, as an interpretant: therefore, the interpretant opens to new semioses, it develops the sign process, it is a new sign occurrence. The meaning of a sign is a response, an interpretant that calls for another response, another interpretant. This implies *the dialogic nature of sign and semiosis* (Ponzio 2006). A sign has its meaning in another sign which responds to it and which in turn is a sign if there is another sign to respond to it and interpret it, and so forth *ad infinitum*. In our terminology, the “First Sign” in the triadic relation of semiosis, the object that receives meaning mediated by the sign, is the *interpreted*, and what confers meaning is the interpretant which may be of two main types (Petrilli and Ponzio 2002, 2007).

The interpretant that allows for mere recognition of the sign is an *identifying interpretant*. As such, it is connected with the signal, code and sign system. Whereas the specific interpretant of a sign, that which interprets its actual sense, is indicated with the expression *answering comprehension interpretant* or *responsive understanding interpretant*. This second type of interpretant does not limit itself to identifying the interpreted, but rather expresses its properly pragmatic meaning, installing with it a relation of involvement and participation: the interpretant sign responds to the interpreted sign and takes a stand towards it (Petrilli 2010; Ponzio 1990).

Dialogism characterises the life of signs and is strictly related to a biosemiotic conception of semiosis. In fact, the dialogic relation is not only present in the human world, but in the biological world at large. The “Copernican revolution” operated by another Russian scholar, Mikhail Bakhtin, on a philosophical level, and by Fedor Dostoevsky, on an artistic level, concerns the human being involved with all one’s life, needs, thoughts, and behaviour in the life of others, human and nonhuman (Bakhtin 1981). This is the body *in its vital and indissoluble relation to the world and to the body of others*. The shift in focus from identity (whether individual, as in the case of self-consciousness, or collective, that is, a community, historical language, or cultural system at large) to alterity, otherness, is a sort of Copernican revolution in itself. With such a shift, the Bakhtinian critique of dialogic reason not only interrogates the general orientation of Western philosophy, but also the dominant cultural tendencies that engender it (Ponzio 1993). On the basis of his own dialogic and biosemiotic conception of the sign, Bakhtin in fact criticises both subjective individualism and objective abstraction.

But let us return to the problematic of language. Another characteristic specific to the human species is language understood as “verbal language” (speech). In his description of language, speech and communicative functions in the human world, Sebeok maintains that verbal language, speech, is based on the primary modelling system he also calls “language”, precisely: *language for modelling is one thing, language for communication is another*. On Sebeok’s account, at a certain point in the evolution of the human species, verbal language arises with a communicative function as part of an adaptation process regulated by language understood as modelling. This position is behind his critical stand against theories and training practices, popular at the time in the USA, exploring and promoting the idea that animals can “speak”.

According to Sebeok’s modelling theory, in the course of the evolutionary development of human beings, the primary modelling system called “language”, specific to *Homo*, the hominid, arose as an adaptive mechanism much earlier than did “verbal language”, “speech”. It ensues that language was not originally a communicative mechanism, but rather a modelling device. On Noam Chomsky’s account as well, language is not essentially communicative. But when Chomsky says “language” he is referring to “verbal language”, “speech”, and not to language as modelling as described by Sebeok. The first hominid was endowed with language understood as a modelling device. And however rudimentary at the time, the belief is that this modelling device is at the basis of the human species’ development through to *Homo sapiens*.

Whether language for modelling or language for communication, the distinctive feature of language is “syntactics”. The syntactical capacity is what distinguishes the human animal, the semiotic animal, from other animals, nonhuman animals that too are endowed with a capacity for consciousness, problem solving, resourcefulness, and initiative, but at far lower degrees. Thanks to the primary modelling device, in addition to mere “consciousness” the human animal, the “semiotic animal” has a capacity for inventiveness, innovation, creativity, originality, for the “play of musement”, to evoke Peirce once again (see also Sebeok 1981, who adopts the expression as the title of a book). We have claimed that the human animal is endowed with a “semiotic” capacity for semiosis – which is precisely a “metasemiotic” capacity, the capacity to use signs to reflect upon signs –, for consciousness and self-awareness, and for a conscience, which is accompanied by the consequent condition and capacity for responsibility, inexorable, mandatory responsibility. Again, as stated by Bakhtin:

The witness and the judge. When consciousness appeared in the world (in existence) and, perhaps, when biological life appeared (perhaps not only animals, but trees and grass also witness and judge), the world (existence) changed radically. A stone is still stony and the sun is still sunny, but the event or existence as a whole (unfinalised) becomes completely different because a new and major character in this event appears for the first time on the scene of earthly existence – the witness and the judge. And the sun, while remaining physically the same, has changed because it has begun to be cognized by the witness and by the judge. It has stopped simply being and has started being in itself and for itself [...] as well as for the other, because it has been reflected in the consciousness of the other (witness and judge): this has caused it to change radically, to be enriched and transformed (“Notes Made in 1970-1971”, in Bakhtin 1986: 132-158).

As predisposed by our primary modelling device, or language, humankind has continuously invented new languages, what considering the syntactical component we may also call new forms of “writing”. Thanks to new technologies, on the one hand, and encounter and exchange among different cultures, on the other (the global situation of interculturalism), writing today, in its various forms, is proliferating more than ever before. We could even maintain that this is the civilisation of writing. And “writing” as we understand it here is not to be confused with the “written sign”. Writing manifests itself in numerous forms, which thanks to language as modelling are on the rise – literary writing, novels, poetry, painting, design, photography, cinema, theatre, television, multimedia, social media,

technology and artificial intelligence in its various manifestations, and so forth. These are all expressions of the human potential for writing and as such they all enhance in turn the human capacity for the “play of musement”.

A section in this volume is titled “Art Matters”. In it are discussed different forms of artworks, from the pictorial expressions of Aboriginal Australia to the poetry and painting of those who came after, the visual arts as represented by James Gleeson, for instance, the literary word as represented by Jack Lindsay. All are witnesses to the liberating power of artistic discourse, as enabled by the different forms of “writing”.

In the communication world today, the global communication world, it is important to thematise and value the different forms of writing and not juxtapose “writing” to the “image”, as though the latter in its various manifestations were not an expression of writing. Instead, what needs to be recognised is the objective contradiction between the expansion of writing, the increase in languages, of the free play of musement, on the one hand, and increasing control of the economic-political order over the communication network, concentrated ever more in the hands of a few, and consequently the rise of another “Newspeak” order, on the other.

The proliferation of different forms of “writing”, especially when a question of art forms, represents the possibility of escape from social programming and dominant ideology, from control by those who program the so-called “communication-production”³ world in the present day and age (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005). In his novel *Fahrenheit 451*, Ray Bradbury projects writing as the last stronghold for critique, revolt, and radical social change in the face of power and control as legitimated and exerted by the status quo. In the words of Beatty, a character in this novel, addressed to Montag, the protagonist:

It didn't come from the Government down. There was no dictum, no declaration, no censorship, to start with, no! Technology, mass exploitation, and minority pressure carried the trick, thank God. Today thanks to them, you can stay happy all the time, you are allowed to read comics, the good old confessions, or trade journals. [...] We must all be alike. Not everyone born free and equal, as the Constitution says, but everyone made equal. Each man the image of every other; then all are happy, for there are no mountains to make them cower, to judge themselves against (Beatty in dialogue with Montag, in Ray Bradbury, *Fahrenheit 451*).

3 In the current phase of development of the capitalist system, communication is production. Today's capitalist system is a global communication-production system (see Ponzio 1999 and 2009: II, 1, 63-65; in English see Petrilli and Ponzio 2005: 491-494, 520-527).

Global communication in today's world is dominated by the ideology of production and efficiency. The "interesting", "desire" are now determined in the capacity for homogenisation with respect to such values. In dominant ideology which in today's world converges with equal exchange logic, capitalist, or if we prefer post-capitalist exchange logic, the "interesting" is crudely substituted ever more by egotistical and vulgar "self-interest". This is in complete contrast with the "carnival" worldview, as thematised by the same Bakhtin.

But the world of global or better globalised communication celebrates individualism to an exasperated degree and with it the logic of competition. Productivity, efficiency, individualism, competitiveness and velocity represent dominant values in contemporary society over the "properly human". All the same, the structural presence of the grotesque body, the condition of intercorporeity and involvement of the body with the body of others, cannot be ignored. In this sense, the human being's vocation for the "carnavalesque", for excess with respect to the dominant order still resists, as testified by literary writing. In this sense, literary writing, indeed artistic discourse in general, is and always will be carnivalised (Petrill and Ponzio 2003b, 2006).

Artistic discourse, literary writing, in particular the novel articulates language (here understood as verbal language, speech) into primary and secondary discourse genres, the direct and the indirect word, thereby enacting and enhancing language (as modelling) as it characterises the semiotic animal in its capacity not only for semiosis, but also for metasemiosis, for reflection, critique, creativity and responsibility. In literary writing, secondary discourse genres depict and portray the primary discourse genres of everyday life. And thanks to such mediational capacity the novel in particular is capable of reflecting on life and perspecting new possible worlds. Again to evoke Bakhtin, author of an early programmatic text of 1919, "Art and Answerability": "For what I have experienced and understood in art, I must answer with all my life, so that all that has been experienced and understood does not remain inactive (in Bakhtin e il suo Circolo 2014: 29, Eng. translated directly from the Russian original).

Listening is decisive for global semiotics, for the capacity to tune into and synchronise with the semiotic universe. The capacity for listening is connected to music. Listening is necessary for a critical discussion of separatism and different trends that tend to exchange the part for the whole, whether by mistake or in bad faith, as in the case of exasperated individualism in social and cultural life, and the current "crisis of overspecialisation" in scientific research. The capacity for listening is a condition for connecting semiotics to its early vocation as medical

semeiotics and the interpretation of symptoms, as observed by Sebeok (1986; see also Petrilli and Ponzio 2001a, b).

If semiotics is concerned with life over the whole planet given that life and semiosis converge, and if one of the original motivations for studying signs, symptoms precisely, is “health”, the health of semiosis, the health of life, then a task that semiotics should not neglect in the era of globalisation is to interpret the symptoms of social and linguistic alienation and emphasise the need to care for life in its globality. Social symptoms of *malaise* are on the rise globally and tell us as much: from growing violence, including at school among the children, to the various forms of social alienation, depression, eating disorders, to an increase even in the suicide rate, and all this in a so-called “developed” country like Australia.

Listening evokes auscultation, a medical attitude. In Ancient Greece music was thought to have a therapeutic character, as it is still thought to today. And as hinted above, semiotics originates from semeiotics (or symptomatology), classified by Galen as one of the principal branches of medicine, whose task we know is to interpret the symptoms of illness.

But medicine as practiced today is functional to “bio-power”, to promoting techniques of subordination of the body to the knowledge-power of biopolitics (denounced by Michel Foucault). Medicine contributes to the controlled insertion of bodies into the production system. With their specialisms and treatment of the body as a self-sufficient entity, the medical sciences today strengthen the dominant conception of the individual as a separate sphere, efficient and self-contained, indifferent to the other.

In such a context, listening becomes “direct, univocal listening”, listening as it is imposed by the Law, by the “order of discourse” (Foucault 1971), “applied listening”, “wanting to hear”, imposition to speak and, therefore, to say univocally (Barthes and Havas 1977). *Listening* is one thing, *to want to hear* is another. Listening is responsive understanding, answering comprehension: “listening speaks”, as Barthes says, similarly to Bakhtin; listening focuses on signs in their constitutive dialogism. On the contrary, to hear, that is, wanting to hear, or “applied listening”, excludes the capacity for responsiveness, for responsive and dialogical listening. As such it belongs to a “closed discourse universe” (Marcuse) which fixes questioning and social roles and separates listening from responsive understanding. “Applied” listening freezes signifiers and interpretants in a fixed and rigid network of speech roles: it maintains the “ancient places of the believer, the disciple, the patient” (see Barthes and Havas 1977: 989-990). Instead, listening understood in terms of dialogism and responsive understanding (or answering comprehension) produces new signifiers and interpretants without ever fixing sense.

The methodics of semiotics (Rossi-Landi 1985) is a *methodics of listening* (Petrilli and Ponzio 2016). Listening is the interpretant of responsive understanding, it is the disposition for hospitality, for welcoming the signs of the other, the signs of the other person, for welcoming signs that are other into the house of semiotics, into the building of semiotics: signs that are other to such a high degree that generally we can only denominate them in the negative, that is, as “nonverbal signs”. Listening is the condition for a general theory of signs.

Semiotics is a critical science, but not only in Kant’s sense, that is, in the sense that it investigates its own conditions of possibility. Semiotics is a critical science in the sense that it interrogates the human world today on the assumption that it is not the only possible world, not the only world possible, it is not the definitive and finalised world as established by some self-interested, individualistic, profit-oriented ideology. Critical semiotics looks at the world as a possible world, which means to say a world that is subject to confutation, therefore as one among many possible worlds.

As global semiotics, as metasemiotics, as critical semiotics (in the double sense mentioned), as semiotics subject to responsibility in a dual sense, that is, of “responding to” (rather than of indifference) and of “taking the blame for” (rather than of fleeing and cleansing, as in ethnic cleansing for example), semiotics must concern itself with life over the planet – not only in a cognitive sense, but also in the pragmatic and in the ethical. In other words, semiotics must care for life. From this point of view, semiotics recovers its relation with medical semeiotics. Nor is this just a question of history, of remembering the origins. Far more radically, what we are signaling is a question of the ideologic-programmatic order.

Again, semiotics is listening, listening in the medical sense, and not just in the sense of general sign theory subtending semiotics; semiotics is listening in the sense of medical semeiotics or symptomatology. Semiotics must listen to the symptoms of today’s globalised world and identify the different expressions of unease and illness – in social relations, in international relations, in the life of single individuals, in the environment, in life generally over the planet. According to the orientation in semiotics baptised as “semioethics”, we need to diagnose, prognose and indicate possible remedies for the future of globalisation, for the health of semiosis globally, therefore of life, by contrast to a globalised world tending towards its very own destruction.

Semiotics shows how the other is inevitable and cannot be escaped. We can even go so far as to state that the vocation of the sign – the stuff of life and of the business of living, of communication (whether verbal or nonverbal),

of human relationships – is the other. The other is the indistinct background from whence we, each and every one of us, are born into this world; the other testifies to my entry and to my exit from this world; the other is no less than the condition of possibility for life and communication to flourish. Extending the gaze beyond subsystems and microsystems, global semiotics evidences the condition of total interrelatedness and interdependency not only among the subsystems forming the anthroposphere and their porous boundaries, but between the latter and all other subsystems forming the great biosphere, ultimately between nature and culture as we know them, certainly as far as Gaia, and possibly beyond.

The quality of life and destiny of each and every one of us is determined by the relation with the other, irrevocably, and by our conscious awareness of this state of affairs. For as long as we are alive and connected to the sign network which accomodates us all, the other cannot be escaped and must be dealt with, in one way or another. The upshot is that in the bigger picture we do not choose the other, but if anything the other chooses us.

The world is nobody's if it's not everybody's. Indifference towards the other is not a reasonable option. In nature the tremors of the earth tell us so, in culture the tremors of humanity, the symptoms of social disease also do, whether a question of wars, terrorism or alienation in its various forms, social and linguistic. And such a state of affairs implies the responsibility of each and everyone of us towards every other, whether a question of conquering lands and preexisting human and nonhuman societies, of creating new socio-political systems, of building nations and international relations, or simply caring for the most vulnerable, for the world's children, our own.

The contemporary world, the world-as-it-is, is overwhelmed by dominant ideology whose reach today is unbounded, global, thanks to a communication network that is just as unbounded, just as global, thereby acting as the perfect support for the overriding system. Semioethics underlines the need for conscious awareness of the role of values in our sign systems, our life systems. In the human world, signs and values come together, in the same packet: where there are values there a signs, the material of values are signs, values are construed and are communicated through signs, whether verbal or nonverbal, and signs, properly human signs are perfused with values. This is another axiom we cannot escape. Our language, our behaviour, whether verbal or nonverbal, is intonated, accentuated, orientated in one direction or another, and is so before and beyond what are easily recognisable as the great ideological systems.

With reference to the citizens of the world, all this should not translate into a justification for passivity, a sense of fatality, of indifference towards

the other simply because we enter an already given world, an already intonated world, a set social program. We have claimed that the vocation of the sign is otherness. The allusion here is above all to the other that each and every one of us is, to the singularity, uniqueness of each one of us, therefore to absolute otherness and to the capacity it represents for creativity, critique and excess with respect to any one given system, for overflow, and for escape with respect to the order of discourse. Involvement, participation in the life of the other, whether the other from us, or the other of us, is inevitable. How we process such inevitability will depend upon the values that drive our actions beyond immediate circumstances. Directly proportional to the global spread today is the need for critique, listening and love, love for one's neighbour, as close or as distant as that neighbour might be. And how we process that neighbour is a choice left to each and every one of us to make, a responsibility for each one of us to take, each and everyone of us.

This volume assembles texts by different authors, all working either from Italy or Australia, to the exception of Noam Chomsky (USA), mostly colleagues from various universities, each focussed on a special problem, but all somehow responding, like parts in a common project, to an overarching vision as articulated by the title, *Challenges to Living Together. Transculturalism, Migration, Exploitation*. Contributions have been distributed across five parts: I. Identity Matters. Ethnicity, Difference, Nation; II. Culture Matters. Global Communication and Its Mystifications; III. Whiteness Matters. Social Justice, Human Rights, and the Other; IV. Subject Matters. Intercultural Dialogue, Education, Alienation; V. Art Matters. Between Ethics and Aesthetics. The first two parts are intended to provide a framework – theoretical, historico-pragmatic, ethical –, and possible interpretive key, semiotic or, better, semioethical, for a better understanding of the problems raised in the parts that follow and that resound throughout the whole volume.

Part II also contains three dialogues, the first with Noam Chomsky, a world renown linguist and socio-political analyst, the second with philosopher semiotician Augusto Ponzio, and the third with Mike Rann, at the time a colleague at Flinders University and Premier of South Australia.

Brian Medlin (1927-2005) was Emeritus Professor at the Flinders University of South Australia where he taught Philosophy, from 1967, as the founding Professor of that discipline. His name resounded among the most important at the university when I was there as a Bachelor of Arts student, in the early 1970s. In spite of my interest in his research and activities on campus, circumstances were such that I was not able to meet

him personally at the time, though my interest never left me. In response to the capitalist privatisation of academia, he chose to publish only the minimum necessary, and mainly essays.

The present book was already in proofs when, during my sabbatical in 2016, granted by the University of Bari “Aldo Moro” and spent at the University of Adelaide (where I am Visiting Research Fellow), I was at last able to access Medlin’s writings. These are contained both in the Medlin Archives, Flinders University Library, and in his private collection, made available to me by Gillian Dooley in the first case, and by Wallace McKittrick (Medlin’s literary agent) in the second, both of whom I take the opportunity here to thank.

It seemed appropriate to me to add a few pages by Medlin to the present book, choosing from those writings that were close to the topic addressed herein (though not an easy choice, not only because of the relevance of his writings generally, but also, if not above all, because of their surprising topicality). To conclude this brief presentation, let me signal the recent book, *Never Mind About the Bourgeoisie* (Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), which collects the correspondence between Medlin and the British author Iris Murdoch (edited by the same Gillian Dooley with Graham Nerlich).

Subject Matters was the title of a journal inaugurated in London, UK, by a friend and colleague, Paul Cobley. From there the title of the collective volume of 2007, edited by myself, *White Matters*, and now of each of the five parts articulating the present volume: identity, culture, whiteness, subjectivity and art are all matters that matter and do so ever more in a global, transnational and transcultural world.

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SUSAN PETRILLI: – It would seem that you have dedicated your life to testifying to the importance of hope deriving from socio-political and ethical engagement. As much as it seems unreasonable if not impossible, is hope for a better world justified? From this point of view, how significant do you think are such expressions as “anti-global movements”, “peace movements”, the “World Social Forum”? –.

NOAM CHOMSKY: – They are extremely important. In fact, they are the hope for the future. I would not use the term “anti-globalisation”, however. The World Social Forum, for example, illustrates globalisation in a far richer and more extensive way than the World Economic Forum, which meets at the same time. The WSF brings together people from all over the world, from all walks of life, committed to further international integration, but for the interests of people, not concentrated economic and state power. Therefore, the expression “anti-globalisation” in the doctrinal system refers to that which is shaped by concentrated power, in this respect as in others –.

(From the interview with Noam Chomsky)