BAKHTINIAN DIALOGICS AND SIGN INTERPRETATION
Mikhail Bakhtin and Charles Peirce

Susan PETRILLI[1]

susan.petrilli@gmail.com

ABSTRACT: this article aims at presenting central concepts in the sign sciences reading Bakhtin's philosophy of language with Peirce's semiotics. Insofar as the sign models proposed are dialectic and dialogic, they account for the live processes of semiosis in contrast to glottocentric and anthropocentric orientations. From different perspectives both philosophers evidence the open and dynamic nature of signs and sign activity, their processual nature as material in becoming in open-ended fluxes of infinite semiosis, the connection between signs and values, the centrality of dialogic otherness in interpretive/translative processes, the implications for verbal and nonverbal semiosis, specifically for our conceptions of language, communication, body, and self. This essay develops around the following topics: sign, text, utterance; the dialogic nature of the sign "self"; reading together Bakhtin and Peirce; dialogue and argumentation; dialogism and the voice; dialogism and otherness in the "great experience"; dialogism and critique of identity; the grotesque body and its signs.

KEYWORDS: Dialogue; Intercorporeity; Otherness; Utterance; Voice

RESUMO: este artigo tem como objetivo apresentar conceitos centrais nas ciências dos signos lendo a filosofia da linguagem de Bakhtin juntamente com a semiótica de Peirce. Na medida em que os modelos de signos propostos são dialéticos e dialógicos, eles representam os processos vivos de semiose, em contraste com as orientações glotocêntrica e antropocêntrica. A partir de diferentes perspectivas, os dois filósofos evidenciam a natureza aberta e dinâmica dos signos e da atividade sígnica, sua natureza processual como material em constante transformação e em indeterminados fluxos de semiose infinita, a conexão entre signos e valores, a centralidade da alteridade dialógica em processos interpretativos/translativos, as implicações para a semiose verbal e não verbal, especificamente para as nossas concepções de linguagem, comunicação, corpo e "eu". Este ensaio se desenvolve em torno dos seguintes temas: signo, texto, enunciado, a natureza dialógica do signo "eu"; leitura conjunta de Bakhtin e Peirce; diálogo e argumentação; dialogismo e a voz; dialogismo e alteridade na "grande experiência"; dialogismo e crítica da identidade; o corpo grotesco e seus signos.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Diálogo; Intercorporeidade; Alteridade; Enunciado; Voz

1 For a critique of "decodification semiotics"

As Valentin N. Voloshinov had already demonstrated in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929, Eng. trans. 1973), the instruments provided by so-called "decodification semiotics", or "equal exchange semiotics" are inadequate for a convincing analysis of the essential characteristics of human communication. My reference here is to such characteristics as dialogism, otherness, plurivocality, ambiguity, polysemy, plurilingualism – internally to a single so-called "national language" as much as externally in the relation among different languages.

In the framework of so-called "equal exchange semiotics" or "decodification semiotics" the sign is divided into two parts: the *signifier* and the *signified* (respectively, the sign vehicle and its content). These are related on the basis of the principle of *equal exchange* and of *equivalence* – that is, of perfect correspondence between communicative intention, on the one hand (which involves codification of a message), and interpretation (understood as decodification of communicative intention), on the other.

In Italy, the Italian philosopher and semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi had already systematically critiqued this approach in his monograph of 1961, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (Meaning, communication and common speech). And his criticism came at a time, that is, the 1950s and 1960s, when decodification semiotics and the equal exchange sign model were very much in fashion and on the rise on the scene of sign and language studies worldwide. We know that Bakhtin and his Circle had already formulated and given voice to their own critique in publications of the 1920s, but we also know that their work was not to come to the attention of the wide public before the 1970s when the English translation of Voloshinov's *Marxism and the Philosphy of Language* appeared, followed by its translation into Italian, in 1977, promoted by Augusto Ponzio whose monograph on Bakhtin soon followed, the first internationally, in 1980.

Rossi-Landi ironically tagged the equal exchange sign model associated with decodification semiotics as the "postal package theory". He pointed out that to describe communication in terms of the exchange of messages was reductive, for such an approach could not account for the complexity of the processes of communication, expression and interpretation in real life. Analysis of communication in terms of messages (the postal package) complete in themselves that pass from a sender to a receiver (from one post office to another) was an oversimplification: according to this model, all the receiver must do is decipher the content of the message which is preestablished with respect to the exchange relation, that is, simply decode it.

Important to underline is that this sign model was inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure's theory of the sign (1916) and as such is based on value theory as conceived by marginalistic economics from the School of Lausanne (L. Walras and V. Pareto). However, as Rossi-Landi pointed out in a series of important studies subsequent to 1961 including his 1968 monograph, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (Eng. trans. *Language as Work and Trade*, 1983), followed by *Linguistics and Economics* in 1975, assimilation of the study of language to the study of the marketplace in an ideal state of equilibrium as per marginalist economics gives rise to a conception of the sign that is static and consequently incapable of accounting for live communication. In other words, according to this approach the sign is viewed in a synchronic framework and is

dominated by the equal exhange paradigm, that is to say, by the paradigm of perfect correspondence between communicative intention and restitution of that intention, between that which is given and that which is received. This paradigm is based on equal exchange logic as it regulates social relations today in the dominant social reproduction system, that is, the capitalist, now the post-capitalist.

Decodification semiotics is developed with reference to the Saussurean sign model and is rooted in a series of dichotomic pairs: *langue* and *parole*, *signifiant* and *signifié*, *diachrony* and *synchrony*, and the *syntagmatic* and *paradigmatic* axes of language. In the sphere of communication studies these notions were associated to the mathematical theory of communication as elaborated by Shannon and Warren Weaver (1949), which soon favored translation into such binary pairs as *code* and *message*, *transmitter* and *receiver*. These concepts were thought to provide an adequate description of all types of sign processes – not just simple sign processes of the *signal* type relative to information transmission, but also complex sign processes at high degrees of *semioticity* as characterizes real life human communication globally and in its different aspects (for the distinction between sign and signal, see Voloshinov 1929; and infra). This explains why the semiotics of Saussurean derivation has been described with such expressions as "decodification semiotics" (Rossi-Landi 1968), semiotics of "code and message exchange" (Bonfantini 1981), or "equal exchange semiotics" (Ponzio 1973).

But human communication with special reference to verbal language cannot be contained within the two poles of *langue* and *parole* as described by Ferdinand de Saussure (1916), nor is it contained by any of the oppositional pairs described above: *signifié* and *signifiant*, code and message, transmitter and receiver, etc. And, as pointed out above, Mikhail Bakhtin with various members from the Bakhtin Circle, notoriously such figures as Valentin N. Volosinov and Pavel N. Medvedev, had already demonstrated all this very clearly in their early writings of the 1920s.

2 Signs, signals and meaning

Now, before proceeding some considerations are in order on the distinction between "signs" and "signals"; therefore between "semioticity", "signness" or "signhood", on the one hand, and "signality", on the other. The signal is a *sui generis* sign. Signals occur in the sign network, but unlike other signs the interpretants of a signal occur on a single "interpretive route". The "interpretive route" converges with meaning as developed in the deferral from one sign to the next as described by Augusto Ponzio in his 1990 monograph *Man as a Sign*. This means to say that signals are univocal, monological. As such the signal is characterized by a low degree of dialogism and otherness by comparison to the sign. Or, rather, the signal is a sign at a low degree of semioticity. Signals are mostly conventional in the sense that the relation between the interpreted sign (that is, the sign object of interpretation) and the interpretant sign (that is, the sign that interprets the former sign and confers meaning upon it) is to a large extent determined arbitrarily, with reference to a law. Therefore signals presuppose a code, that is to say a system of rules. Consequently, the interpretant of the signal is preestablished on the basis of the code in question.

However, signals do not only form a special class of signs. Signality is a dimension of semiosis that is also present in signs at high levels of semioticity. In fact, from this point of view it is appropriate to speak of "signality" rather than of "signals" given that the latter suggests a separate category among signs. The expression "signality" indicates that dimension of signness which is characterized by low degrees of otherness and dialogism. Even verbal signs which are characterized by their potential for multivoicedness and polylogism, contain a margin of signality. However, verbal signs are not determined in their specificity by signality, just as they are not determined in their specificity by physical materiality. All the same, signality is constitutive to verbal signs. Signality comes into play when interpretation is limited to mere identification or decodification. For example, as when a speaker is called to recognize a given sound, a phonia by contrast to another (pig/big), a syntactical structure and semantic content, and so forth.

In the case of signality, the interpretant is an "interpretant of identification" at low degrees of dialogism and otherness. Instead, in the case of signness or semioticity, the interpretant is an "interpretant of anwering

comprehension" or "interpretant of responsive understanding" characterized by ever higher degrees of dialogism and otherness (see Petrilli 2010: 49–56).

By contrast to the signal, the interpretive potential of the sign at higher degrees of otherness is not exhausted in a single interpretive route, in a single meaning. In other words, the the interpreted sign, or signifier, and the interpretant sign, or signified, do not relate to each other on a one-to-one basis. We have anticipated that meaning is not simply an intentional message formulated by an emitter and sent off to the receiver according to a precise communicative will. Consequently, the work of the interpretant sign cannot be limited to the basic operations of identification, mechanical substitution, or mere recognition of the interpreted sign. By contrast to signals, signs at high levels of semioticity are not interpreted simply on the basis of fixed and pre-established codes, through decodification processes and on the basis of identity logic. As Volosinov obersves in *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*:

> In the speaker's native language, in other words, for the linguistic consciousness of a member of a particular language community, signal recognition is certainly dialectically effaced. In the process of mastering a foreign language, signality and recognition still make themselves felt, so to speak, and still remain to be surmounted, the language not yet fully having become language. The ideal of mastering a language is absorption of signality by pure semioticity and of recognition by pure understanding. (Voloshinov 1929; Eng. trans.: 69)

In real life communication processes the sign is a dialogic unity of self-identity and otherness, signality and signness. What Voloshinov describes as the "actual sense" of a sign, it's "theme" is oriented by otherness logic and consists of something more with respect to the elements that permit its recognition or identification. Actual sense is formed of those semantic-ideological aspects of a sign that in a certain sense are unique to it, that specify it in its singularity. Actual sense is inextricably interconnected with the situational context of the semiosis in course.

Voloshinov evidences the dialogic relation between these two aspects of the sign, indicating them as "meaning" – all that which is reproducible and stable in the sign and is subject to a process of identification; and "theme" – the more innovative and creative signifying aspects of the sign which require active comprehension, a response, a standpoint, and are connected to the specific

situation in which semiosis occurs. With reference to the verbal sign and considering the dialectic relation between "theme" and "meaning", Voloshinov observes the following:

> [...] it is even impossible to convey the meaning of a particular word (say, in the course of teaching another person a foreign language) without having made it an element of theme, i.e. without having constructed an example – utterance. On the other hand, a theme must base itself on some kind of fixity of meaning; otherwise it loses its connection with what came before and what comes after – i.e. it altogether loses its significance. (Ibid.: 100)

In *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, Rossi-Landi grafts the tradition in sign and language studies that leads from the two twentieth century masters of the sign in the USA, Charles S. Peirce and Charles Morris, combined with elements from Oxonian analytical philosophy, Ludwig Wittgenstein's philosophy of language, and Hugo Dingler's operationism onto the trunk of Continental, non idealistic historicism. In this monograph Rossi-Landi introduces the concept of "common speech"; subsequently, in his 1968 monograph, he translates "common speech" into the concept of "linguistic work" (see his essays collected posthumously in the volume *Between Signs and Non-signs*, 1992). Rossi-Landi also proposes another very important distinction, that between "initial meaning" which is explicit meaning and "additional meaning" which is implicit meaning.

The distinction between so-called "initial meaning" and "additional meaning" is part of a general conception that views meaning as part of the real life processes of communication and interpretation, as part of the historico-social, intersubjective and dialogic dimensions of signifying processes. "Initial meaning" involves experience, practice, value, familiarity with a given environment, and possible speakers that range from the restricted family group to the extended community. "Additional meaning" is determined in the intersubjective and dialogic character of signifying practices and presupposes orientation towards the other.

The distinction between "initial meaning" and "additional meaning" cuts across the distinction between meaning fixed by use and meaning dependent on context. Implicit meaning, indirect, latent, hidden, absent, remote, secondary, unconscious meaning is present in meaning dependent on context as much as

in meaning that is autonomous with respect to a given communicative situation. Implicit meaning is also present in meaning that is fixed by tradition. In any case, both "initial meaning" (explicit meaning) and "additional meaning" (implicit meaning) are active in Saussure's *langue* and *parole*, in Bachtin-Voloshinov's "meaning" and "theme", as much as in Peirce's "interpretant" which he classifies as "immediate interpretant", "dynamical interpretant" and "final interpretant" (see Peirce in Hardwick 1977: 108-112).

Understanding is possible thanks to the understood, that is, thanks to implicit meaning, the "enthymeme" in the terminology of Bakhtin and Voloshinov. Vagueness itself is structural to the very possibility of understanding. The English philosopher and linguist Victoria Lady Welby even maintains that the more we attempt to be precise, the less we are capable of understanding each other (Petrilli 2009). To make implicit meaning or indeterminate meaning explicit, to render the invisible visible means to inaugurate new interpretive routes, new signifying paths and, therefore, to introduce new enthymemes, new implications, new additional meanings, new variables, new accentuations, intonations, ever greater degrees in signifying otherness in situations of dialogized extralocalization. In such a framework, verbal communication involves dialogic investigation and approximation by interlocutors, that is, interpretants, in relation to the referent of discourse – whether a general referent, ultimate truth, or the restricted, immediate referent. Saying, explicitation, specification, therefore, in the last analysis, signifying and understanding all presuppose the understood, the unspoken, implied meaning, indeterminacy and vagueness. And as the authors so far mentioned in this essay teach us, all these aspects both presuppose and augment semioticity thereby enhancing signifying potential and contributing to the generation of new possible worlds.

3 Sign, text, and utterance

The sign model proposed by Bakhtin and his Circle can be characterized as *dialectic* and *dialogic*. The sign is neither described as an isolated entity which has been defined once and for all, nor as a "piece" in a sign system, endowed with specific value developed on the basis of relations of "mechanical

opposition" with other pieces forming that system. Nor does the sign converge with the message alone. This would involve another oversimplification, for the message too is just another component in the act of communication. In reality, the sign is an open system of relations in becoming where the terms forming these relations are forever changing roles. As such the sign is open and dynamic and is more appropriately designated in terms of process. In addition to such aspects as the sender, receiver, and message, other elements forming sign or semiosic processes include the interpretant, referent, situational context, implied meaning, value, and so forth. The sign converges with a sign situation, a sign event taken globally where the parts interact dialectically and dialogically in open-ended and unfinalized semiosic processes.

With specific reference to verbal signs, Bakhtin thematizes the utterance which is contextualized in relation to a given language, discourse genre, social context and ideological orientation. The utterance may be viewed as a rejoinder in a dialogue, as a text shared by interlocutors, as part of an interpersonal relation in a given historical-social context. The text thematized by Bakhtin is a *live* text and not a *reified* text, where the latter alludes to the text understood as a monological expression separated from the live context of communication, analyzed in terms of the relation among linguistic units that constitute it with reference to language understood as a *langue*, that is, as a linguistic code. On the contrary, on Bakhtin's description the text takes shape and flourishes in the relation with other texts, or utterances, and other con-texts where the relation among elements is dialogic and call for interpretation that is responsive, critical and creative, that is for what Bakhtin calls the "interpretant of answering comprehension" or "interpretant of responsive understanding" which is analogous to Charles S. Peirce's notion of the "dynamic interpretant".

Sign interpretation in fact cannot be limited to identification. Interpretation requires "active comprehension", that is, "responsive understanding". The sense of a sign, its significance consists in something more, an excess with respect to the elements that allow its recognition: sense is formed of those semantic ideological aspects which are indissolubly connected to the situational context of semiosis, and which under certain aspects are unique. Comprehension of the sign is "active comprehension" because it calls

for a response, a standpoint. It arises from a dialogic relation and in turn engenders a dialogic relation: the sign flourishes as a rejoinder in a dialogue (cf. Bakhtin 1970–71).

Referred to the verbal, the sign is a complete utterance, it is not isolated from the social context, the field of the ideological or from the discourse genre to which it in fact belongs ("the unending variety of discourse genres", says Bakhtin in 'From Notes Made in 1970-71': his unfinished texts published posthumously include the title 'The Problem of Speech Genres', Eng. trans Bakhtin 1986). The utterance is understood as a constitutive part of a socially and historically specified relation, as a living text and not as an inanimate entity; not as an isolated monologic expression to be interpreted on the basis of the relation between linguistic units and abstract language.

Dialogic relations structural to the sign cannot be reduced to binary relations of mechanical opposition internal to the text. Binary relations may account for identification processes as described above, but certainly not for interpretive processes at the level of "sense" and "significance". Important to underline, as does Bakhtin in "Toward a Methodology of the Human Sciences" (1974), is that the relation among signs, text, utterances and their parts presuppose relations among unique single individuals, that is, among unique bodies and voices:

> The text lives only by coming into contact with another text (with context). Only at the point of this contact between texts does a light flash, illuminating both the posterior and anterior, joining a given text to a dialogue. We emphasize that this contact is a dialogic contact between texts (utterances) and not a mechanical contact of "oppositions", which is possible only within a single text (and not between a text and a context) among abstract elements (signs within a text), and is necessary only in the first stage of understanding (understanding formal definition, but not contextual meaning). Behind this contact is a contact of personalities and not of things (at the extreme). If we translate dialogue into one continuous text, that is, erase the divisions between voices (changes of speaking subjects), which is possible at the extreme (Hegel's monological dialectic), then the deep-seated (infinite) contextual meaning disappears (we hit the bottom, reach a standstill). (Bakhtin 1986: 162)

Bakhtin's notion of the text is far broader than the notion of the sign considered as an isolated unit; like the live sign, like the sign that flourishes in

the relation with other signs, the text too can only flourish and signify in the light of a still broader context: the intertextual context of dialectic/dialogic relationships among texts. The sense of a text develops interrelatedly with other texts, along the boundaries and margins of another text. As Bakhtin had already annotated in "The Problem of the Text": "The dialogic relationships among texts and within the text. The special (not linguistic) nature. Dialogue and dialectics" (Bakhtin 1959-61, in 1986: 105).

This approach gives full play to the centrifugal forces of linguistic-cultural life, thematizing otherness, polysemy, and dialogism as constitutive factors of the sign's very identity. The categories developed by decodification semiotics are most often oversimplifying, especially in their application to discourse analysis, writing, and ideology.

On the other hand, so-called "interpretation semiotics" with its theory of sense, significance, and interpretability ("*interpretanza*", in Umberto Eco's terminology, cf. 1984: 43), with its broad, flexible and critical conception of the sign accounts for signification as much as for communication, thereby providing a far more exhaustive description of human communicative interaction.

The sign model developed by interpretation semiotics is a dynamic model that does not at all refer to the notion of equivalence between one sign and another, between the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, to the logic of equal exchange and equivalence between the language system, on one side, and the utterance, on the other (*langue/parole*). Instead, interpretation semiotics thematizes deferral from one sign to the next in the open chain of semiosic fluxes, the situation of *renvoi* from the interpreted sign to the interpretant sign. These two sign factors (the interpreted sign and the interpretant sign) which can only effectively emerge in semiosic processes are connected according to the logic of non-correspondence and excess, the logic of otherness.

According to such logic the interpretant sign never corresponds exactly to the previous sign, the interpreted sign, but says something more (Peirce, *CP* 2.228), developing and enriching the preceding sign with new meanings. The interpreter/interpretant responds to something, and in so doing becomes a sign which in turn gives rise to another interpretive response, in turn the object of interpretation by another interpretive response, and so forth. In such a

perspective, the function of the interpretant sign is not limited to the mere identification of the previous sign, but rather is taken to various levels of "responsive understanding", which implies the existence of a concrete dialogic relationship among signs regulated by the principle of reciprocal otherness. As Bakhtin says, once again in "The Problem of the Text": "Being heard as such is already a dialogic relation. The word wants to be heard, understood, responded to, and again to respond to the response, and so forth *ad infinitum*" (1986: 127). Semiosis ensues from this live relation and certainly not from any abstract relationship among the signs forming a sign system.

4 The dialogic nature of the sign "self"

Sign models are also intimately related to our conceptions of the self given that the self converges with sign material, verbal and nonverbal. In fact, both Bakhtin and Peirce thematize the human being in terms of sign relations. As Voloshinov clearly maintains in *Frejdizm* (1927), the conscious and the unconscious are made of dialogically structured verbal and nonverbal sign material.

Like Bakhtin and his Circle Peirce also evidences the role of dialogism and otherness in the life of signs, with which he too contributes toward a more profound understanding of dialogic structures and practices. His thought-sign theory evidences the dialogic structure of the self insofar as it consists of sign material and develops in terms of dialogue between a thought acting as a sign and another sign acting as an interpretant.

The Peircean sign model is today gaining wide consensus in both semiotics and the philosophy of language and is now gradually supplanting the Saussurean sign model. This is of no small account given that the Saussurean sign model is associated with structuralism which has spread from linguistics (and semiology) to the human sciences generally, influencing and modelling them even.

Decodification or equal exchange semiotics thematizes a subject grounded in the logic of identity, therefore at a low margin of otherness or dialogism. According to this approach, the subject coincides perfectly with its

own consciousness, it fully manages its own sign processes, subjecting what it communicates to its own will as a sender and coder.

On the contrary, those trends in semiotics which refer to the Peircean model of sign and generally come together under the banner of "semiotics of interpretation" thematize the production of sense and meaning in terms of open-ended semiosic processes in becoming without the guarantees offered by a code regulating exchange relations between interpreted signs and interpretant signs (Peirce, *CP* 5.284).

The description of signifying processes in terms of unending semiosis, of interpretive processes characterized by dialogic responsiveness, in terms of deferral or *renvoi* from an interpreted sign to an interpretant sign has consequences for the theory of identity and of the subject. In fact, contrary to their description in the perspective of decodification semiotics, in the framework of interpretation semiotics identity and subjectivity are no longer described in terms of coherent and unitary entities. Instead, otherness is placed at the very heart of identity, is described as constitutive of identity which develops in the dialectic and dialogic dynamic between the sign and its interpretant in thought processes forming a single conscious as much as in the relationship among different selves. Identity, the self, the conscious develop in open-ended semiosic processes, that is to say in the relation between the thought-sign and the interpretant, according to the dynamics of responsive understanding, dialogism, and otherness.

For both Peirce and Bakhtin, the self is constructed dialogically in translative/interpretive processes which connect thought-signs to interpretants in chains of deferrals that are potentially infinite: in such a framework the self is always other which means to say that it is never wholly present to itself and only in such a context can the self effectively subsist as self. Therefore, the self-other relationship subsists not only in the more obvious case of the relationship between different selves, but also between the multiple "selves" forming a single, "individual" consciousness. The self does not contain interpretive processes within itself, it does not preexist with respect to interpretive processes, nor does the self have perfect control of such processes. Far more significantly the self converges with the chain of sign-interpretant relations in which it recognizes itself, to the point that experience of the self of

another person is not a more complicated problem than that relative to recognizing certain sign-interpretant relations as "mine", those through which "I" become aware of myself. Consequently, as Peirce says, just as we say that a body is in motion and not that motion is in the body, thoughts are not trapped inside us but develop in the relation with other thought-signs in the dialogic dynamics between inside and outside. In Peirce's own words from a note to "Some Consequences of Four Incapacities": "[...] just as we say that a body is in motion, and not that motion is in a body we ought to say that we are in thought and not that thoughts are in us" (*CP* 5.289, n. 1) (Petrilli 2013).

5 Reading together Bakhtin and Peirce

It is possible to construct a powerful semiotic model by associating the Bakhtinian notion of sign with the Peircean. This model can explain the complexity of signs or semiosis far better than any other model tending to reduce the sign to two perfectly correlated parts, the *signifiant* and the *signifié* Reference here is to semiology of Saussurean matrix (Saussure of the *Cours* rather than of the anagrams) which not only conceives the sign in terms of equal exchange between *signifant* and *signifié*, but also only theorizes two poles in linguistic life between which all linguistic and (taking linguistics as the model) all semiological phenomena take place: these two poles are the unitary system (*langue*) and individual use of this system by the single speaker (*parole)*. Reading together Peirce and Bakhtin (see Ponzio 1990, 2006a). helps demonstrate how the sign model proposed by decodification or equal exchange semiotics is oversimplifying and naive, given that in such a framework the sign: 1) is put at the service of meaning that is already given and pre-established outside the communication and interpretation process itself; 2) is thematized as a passive instrument in the hands of a subject that in turn is given, pre-established, and in full control over the sign processes it produces; and 3) can be decodified on the basis of a pre-existent code common to both partners in the communicative process.

Instead, the sign model proposed by interpretation semiotics refers particularly to categories introduced by Peirce such as his analysis of interpretants into "immediate interpretant", "dynamic interpretant", and "final

interpretant"; his subdivision of the object into "immediate object" and "dynamic object"; his most renowned sign triad – "symbol", "index", and "icon", etc. Peirce places the sign in the dynamic context of semiosis and works on the concept of "unlimited semiosis" which presupposes the relationship between the sign and its interpretant viewed as a dialectic and dialogic relationship (see Peirce's *Collected Papers*, vol. 2).

Both Peirce and Bakhtin place the sign in the context of dialogism in which alone can it flourish as a sign. In fact, though these scholars work independently of each other and in different directions (Peirce focused primarily on questions of a cognitive order, Bakhtin on literary language, they both recognize dialogism as an essential characteristic of the sign. As anticipated above, in addition to "dialogism" central notions in Bakhtin's studies on the sign include "otherness", "answering comprehension", "text", "intertextuality", and so forth.

What ensues from reading Bakhtin and Peirce together is a sign model that is dialectic or "dialogic" (understood as dialectic founded on dialogue) where signs and semiosic processes converge. Once the dialogic nature of the sign is recognized, it no longer appears as an autonomous unit endowed with meaning preestablished outside the communicative event, with a value of its own determined in the relationship of mechanical opposition with the other units forming the sign system. In Ponzio's words: "Once signs are no longer reduced to a single element, or broken down into their component parts, it is difficult to say where they begin and where they end. Signs are not things, but processes, the interlacing of relations which are social relations (1990: 260).

In the situation of impasse characterizing decodification semiotics, like Bakhtin Peirce's approach represents a means of escape and development. His *Collected Papers* include studies on signs that go back to the second half of the nineteenth century, but these volumes (8 in all) only began appearing in 1931. Today major anthologies collecting his works include *Writings of Charles Sanders Peirce. A Chronological Edition* and *The Essential Peirce*.

In his studies on the sign Peirce recovers the forgotten connection with sign studies from the Middle Ages, a major reference point being Peter of Spain and his *Tractatus. Summule logicales.* In his renown essay of 1867, "On a new list of categories", Peirce describes the concepts he believed most suitably

account for the polyhedric nature of the sign. An even more articulate version of this description is available in his letter of 12th October 1904 to Victoria Lady Welby, which focuses on the relationship between signs and knowledge:

> a sign is something by knowing which we know something more. With the exception of knowledge, in the present instant, of the contents of consciousness in that instant (the existence of which knowledge is open to doubt) all our thought & knowledge is by signs. A sign therefore is an object which is in relation to its object on the one hand and to an interpretant on the other in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object corresponding to its own relation to the object. I might say "similar to its own" for a correspondence consists in a similarity; but perhaps correspondence is narrower. (Peirce in Hardwick 1977: 31–32)

A *sign* or *representamen* stands to someone for something in some respect or capacity. The sign stands to someone in the sense that it creates "an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign", in the *interpreter;* that is, it creates an *interpretant* sign (*CP* 2.228). Moreover, the sign stands for something in some respect or capacity in the sense that it does not refer to the *object* in its entirety (*dynamic object*), but only to some part of it (*immediate object*). Therefore, a sign subsists for Peirce according to the category of *Thirdness*; it presupposes a triadic relation between itself, its object, and the interpretant thought, itself a sign. A sign always plays the role of *third party* precisely because it mediates between the interpretant sign and its object.

The meaning of a sign is an (open) class that includes that sign and all its possible interpretants. The mediating function between the meaning and object of a sign is in turn achieved through the mediation of other signs. According to Peirce, a sign exists according to the category of 'thirdness', in other words, it presupposes a triadic relation among itself, its object and the interpreting thought, it too a sign. A sign always plays the role of third party given that it mediates between the interpretant sign and its object.

A sign grows as a consequence of its excursions to the outside with respect to itself, and of its relations with other signs. Nor are the relations we are alluding to relations of equal exchange. On the contrary, equal exchange characterizes the signal where, by contrast to the sign, a one-to-one correspondence is established between signifier and signified (on this aspect Voloshinov's analyses are enlightening).

Peirce's semiotics focuses on the concept of interpretation and associates meaning (which Saussurean semiology leaves unexplained) to the interpretant – that is to say, to another sign which takes the place of the preceding sign. Insofar as it is a sign, the interpretant subsists by virtue of another interpretant in an open-ended chain of *renvois* rooted in the potential creativity of interpretive processes. According to this perspective, semiosis is not guaranteed *a priori* thanks to the possibility of appealing to a code that is fixed previously with respect to semiosis, for the code itself does not subsist outside interpretive processes. Indeed the code as well is established and supported by semiosic processes.

The concept of "mediation" is closely interrelated with that of "interpretation" and "infinite semiosis" and is another fundamental concept in Peirce's theory. The sign is mediated by the interpretant without which it cannot express its meaning and in turn mediates the relationship with the object in any interpretive act whatsoever, from the simplest levels of perception to the most complex levels of knowledge.

Meaning does not reside in the sign, but in the relationship among signs. More precisely, the meaning of a signal is the class which contains that signal and its interpretants according to relations of mere substitution (a red traffic light has a single meaning and is a signal, in other words, its meaning is the class of meanings that substitute the color red: 'Stop' in the graphic or phonic form, a policeman with outstretched arms, etc.).

The sign no doubt also contains a factor of signality and its correlate, self-identity, but this does not characterize it insofar as it is a sign. Comprehension of a sign is not merely a question of recognizing fixed and repeatable elements. Human signs are characterized by their semantic and ideological flexibility, which makes them available to ever new and different signifying contexts. Where there are signs, the factors of signality and self-identity are transcended by the traits that are specific to signs: changeability, ambivalence and multi-voicedness.

In the framework of Peirce's cognitive semiotics logic and semiotics are related on the basis of the assumption that knowledge is mediated by signs, indeed is impossible without them. Interpretation semiotics substitutes the dichotomy between "signifier" and "signified" with the triadic relationship

between "object", "sign", and "interpretant" which is characterized in terms of symbolicity, indexicality, or iconicity depending on the type of interaction among the parts. In any case, whichever aspect prevails the role of the interpretant remains fundamental. Meanings evolve dynamically in open-ended interpretive processes. The greater the degree of otherness in the relationship between the interpretant sign and the interpreted sign, therefore of dialogism, the more interpretation evolves in terms of active dialogic response, creative reformulation, inventiveness, rather than as mere repetition, literal translation, synonymic substitution, identification.

6 Symbol, index, and icon

A sign subsists and develops in the dialectic among *symbolicity*, *indexicality*, and *iconicity*. This accounts for the different degrees of dialogism in the relationship between signs and interpretants, and between the premises and the conclusion of an argument. A sign is never a pure symbol, but also contains traces of indexicality and iconicity; similarly, as much as a sign is prevalently indexical or iconic, it will always maintain a certain margin of symbolicity. In other words, like symbols in the case of indices and icons as well mediation by an interpretant and recourse to a convention are necessary. It follows that all signs share in the character of symbolicity, indexicality, and iconicity and to varying degrees: for example, verbal signs, though fundamentally conventional, also contain a certain degree of indexicality and iconicity.

Symbolicity is an expression of the conventional character of the sign – that is, of the relation of *constriction by convention* between a sign and its object as established on the basis of a code, of a law. The symbol is not immediately related to its object if not through the interpretant, without which it could not subsist as a symbol. However, even if the symbol is founded on a code, a convention, a law, the latter in turn is also founded in turn on an open process of unending deferral and *renvois* from one sign to the next: consequently, even in the case of symbols, the sign's relationship with the object is never completely univocal. Symbolicity is present in all signs to varying degrees and not just in the symbol (in which of course it is a

characterizing element). In the above-mentioned letter to Welby date 12th October 1904, Peirce gives the following definition: "I define a Symbol as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object only in the sense that it will be so interpreted. It thus depends either upon a convention a habit, or a natural disposition of its interpretant, or of the field of its interpretant (that of which the interpretant is a determination) (in Harwick 1977: 33).

According to Peirce, in signs of the conventional type where the relationship with the object is established by an external law and necessarily depends on the interpretant, the category of Thirdness dominates. Thirdness is ultimately concerned with the sign in its relation to the interpretant.

Indexicality refers to the compulsory nature of signs, to the relationship of cause and effect, of *necessary contiguity*, of spatio-temporal contiguity between a sign and its object. As Peirce puts it: "I define an Index as a sign determined by its dynamic object by virtue of being in a real relation to it" (*Ibid.*). Unlike symbols in the case of indices it is not the interpretant that decides the object. Rather, the relationship between the sign and the object preexists with respect to interpretation as an objective relationship, and in fact conditions interpretation. The sign and what it is a sign of are given together, independent of the interpretant. However this does not exclude the inevitability of resorting to a convention for the relationship between a sign and its object to become a sign relationship.

The indexical character of signs prevails in traces, symptoms, and clues, in the relationship between fire and smoke, between the spots on the skin and a liver disease, between a knock at the door and the fact that someone is behind the door and wants to enter. Given that the relation here between the sign and the object is of cause and effect, of necessary contiguity (natural contiguity, inferential contiguity, etc.), and as such subsists independently of the interpretant, indexical signs are characterized by the category of Secondness.

The icon is characterized by a relation of *similarity* between the sign and its object, and similarity (or resemblance or likeness) takes on different forms as in the case of images, metaphors, and graphs: "I define an Icon," as Peirce explains in his correspondence with Welby, "as a sign which is determined by its dynamic object by virtue of its own internal nature" (*Ibid.*). The dominating factor in iconic signs is not at all a system of conventions, natural causality, or

any other form of contiguity. The iconic sign signifies without depending on a code, a convention, on conferral of sense by a preestablished interpretant. The iconic sign is self-signifying, has meaning in itself, imposes itself on its own account: its virtue of signifying is an expression of its sign quality.

The iconic sign reaches a maximum degree of independence with respect to its object, and the interpretant can occur in a system of sign relations that is distant from the icon, and in extreme cases is even invented *ex novo* – neither through a relation of necessary contiguity (index), nor of conventionality (symbol), but of hypothetical similarity. Though containing traces of symbolicity and indexicality, the iconic relation is distinguished by the character of affinity, attraction, innovation, creativity, dialogism, and otherness. Given its relative signifying independence with respect to the object and the interpretant, the icon expresses the reality of Firstness.

Iconicity and dialogism are intimately connected; indeed, the highest degrees of dialogism are reached in iconic signs (Bonfantini and Ponzio 1986; Ponzio 1993). Not being the expression of a convention, the mechanical effect of a cause, etc., iconicity is connected with the concepts of responsive understanding, active participation, dialogic evaluation, point of view, semiotic materiality, resistance in terms of signifying processes and interpretation; iconicity cannot be contained within the boundaries of identity logic, but, quite on the contrary, is oriented by the logic of otherness, of opening to the other (Petrilli 2010). On considering icons and dialogism together, a useful expedient is to imagine them as rejoinders in a dialogue – that is, in terms of a creative response to the verbal or nonverbal standpoint of another interlocutor, whether a provocation, prayer, threat, question, etc.

Necessity characterizes signs of both conventional and indexical type with the difference that in the first case the relation of necessity ensues from accepting a convention, while in the second it is passively endured as the result of an external effect. Consequently, in both symbols and indices dialogism is relatively reduced. However, we also know that signs generally depend on their relationship with interpretants, but while such dependency is a determining factor in the symbol owing to the dominance of conventionality, it carries less weight in indices and icons. Peirce classifies the index and the icon as

degenerate signs (a term taken from the language of mathematics) by contrast to symbols which he describes as relatively *genuine* signs.

7 Dialogue and argumentation

A fundamental characteristic of interpretation semiotics by contrast to decodification semiotics is the light it sheds upon inferential processes. Inferences are developed in the passage from a sign to its interpretant which as we have said are related *dialogically*. Inferences (or as Peirce also calls them, arguments) may be divided into three types: deduction, induction, and abduction, that is inferential processes characterized by the predominance of indexicality, symbolicity, or iconicity. In deduction the relationship between the sign and the interpretant is dominated by indexicality, in induction by symbolicity, in abduction by iconicity.

To consider sign processes in terms of an unending chain of deferrals from one interpretant sign to the next leads sooner or later to the need to consider the terms and sense of this opening; or, rather, as Eco says, it leads to the need to examine the question of "the limits of interpretation", as recites the title of one of his monographs (1990). Eco singles out two conceptions of interpretation: on the one hand to interpret means to highlight the objective nature of a text, its essence independent of interpretation; on the other, the text is described as being subject to infinite interpretation. Eco criticizes the latter conception which he classifies in terms of "hermetic semiosis", maintaining that the Peircean theory of unlimited semiosis is something altogether different, contrary to appearances and to the opinion of certain scholars. The main object of Eco's criticism is Jacques Derrida's notion of "infinite deferral" as elaborated in the framework of "deconstructionism" (Derrida 1967). Eco argues that the deconstructionist notion of "infinite drift" differs from Peirce's concept of "infinite semiosis", and does so on the basis of Peirce's notion of *habit.* The latter is connected to the intersubjective character of interpretation. It is always fixed by community convention. As Eco says, from the moment when the community agrees with a given interpretation, there is, if not an objective, at least an *intersubjective* meaning which acquires

a privilege over any other possible interpretation spelled out without the agreement of the community (Eco 1990: 40).

Eco's specifications concerning the Peircean notion of "infinite semiosis" points to the dialogic character of interpretation. The relationship between interpretants is dialogic.

Dialogism helps evidence still other aspects of the relationship between signs in different signifying practices. For example, on the basis of the relation he establishes between the sign theories of Bakhtin and Peirce and in his commitment to theoretical and terminological systematization, Ponzio authors an essay entitled "Signs to talk about signs" (1985) in which he describes meaning and signifying processes in verbal and nonverbal signs in terms of *interpretive routes.* Motivated by the ambitious aim of developing adequate verbal instruments to talk about signs, he recalls Morris's own project as proposed in *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* (1938): to understand meaning as an "interpretive route" means to place it in the context of dialogic relationships which whilst responding to both the Peircean and Bakhtinian notion of the sign, represents an original aspect of Ponzio's research.

Meaning is described as a possible interpretive route in a dense sign network, a route interweaving with other routes, with other meanings branching out from the same sign. On taking off from the sign intersection, one may choose and shift among a multiplicity of alternative itineraries. Meaning emerges as a signifying itinerary in a sign network, as an interpretive route simultaneously well defined and yet subject to continual amplification and variation by virtue of continual dialogic contacts with other and alternate interpretive routes.

This explains the indeterminacy, openness, and semantic availability of the sign which finds its place in the context of dialogic relationships. These emerge: (1) in the relationship between the sign and its interpretant, which in argumentation is (2) the relationship between the premises and the conclusion, characterized by a minor or major degree of dialogism in deduction, induction, and abduction (Peirce); (3) in the relationship among the multiple interpretants, verbal and nonverbal, forming the open trajectory of the interpretive route; and (4) in the relationship among the interpretants of different interpretive routes.

Such a description contributes towards a better understanding of the distinguishing features that characterize human communication (Petrilli 1990a, 1990b). As mentioned at the beginning of this essay such features include ambiguity, polysemy, plurivocality, heteroglossia, dialogism, the "semiotic materiality" of signs, – that is, the otherness, resistance, and semiotic autonomy of signs and their meanings with respect to other signs as well as with respect to the self that produces, uses, and interprets them.

8 Dialogism and the voice

Bakhtin focuses on the relationship between dialogue and the body as early as the 1929 edition of his book on Dostoevsky. Dialogism cannot be obtained among disembodied minds. Dialogue takes place among *voices* – not monologic and integral voices, but internally dialogic and divided voices. And the *voice* is described as representing an ideological position *embodied* in the word. Bakhtin highlights the problematic of the embodiment of the voice.

However, his statement that Dostoevsky's hero is *voice* and that the author does not show it to us as though it were an object, but has us listen to it is misunderstood by René Wellek (1991) as the expression of idealism. Such a misunderstanding is perfectly in line with critique carried out against Bakhtin by the representatives of "socialist realism" and their unjust accusation of "polyphonic idealism". Such critique reproposes the opposition established by Merezkovsky between Dostoevsky "prophet of the spirit" and Tolstoy "prophet of the flesh" (see A. Ponzio's introduction in Bakhtin 2008).

In Dostoevsky dialogue is determined in the hero's claim above all to complete independence from recognition from the other, that is, in the hers's claim to autonomy from the other's gaze, from the other's word. Here dialogue arises from ostentation of absolute indifference to the opinion of others, to their value judgements. This is particularly obvious in the monologue of the man from the underworld. His obsession with autonomy leads the hero to anticipate the possibility of denial by the other, through the word of the other. But, as Bakhtin claims the hero's anticipation of the other's reply and his response to this reply actually reveals his dependence on the other (himself included). The hero *fears* that the other may think that he *fears* his opinion. But such fear reveals his dependence upon the consciousness of the other, his inability of being satisfied with his own self-determination.

Dostoevsky is not interested in showing the human being engaged in a dialogue that is fully respectful of the other. On the contrary, dialogue is

achieved *in spite of* oneself, of one's own intentions. Dostoevsky the novelist reveals how the word is dialogic in the sense that it is passively involved in the word of the other, always and inspite of itself. Dialogue does not only occur in the composition of viewpoints and identities; on the contrary, it is structured in refractoriness to synthesis, including the illusory synthesis of one's own identity. In fact, identity is fragmented dialogically insofar as it is inevitably implicated with alterity, just as the "grotesque body" is implicated with the body of others (Bakhtin 1965).

As Bakhtin claims, dialogue in Dostoevsky is neither dialectical nor synthetic due to the fact that contradiction does not arise from *disembodied ideas*: the ultimate givenness for Dostoevsky is not the idea conceived in terms of a monologic conclusion, but the event of interacting voices. *Ideas are embodied in different voices that are unindifferent to each other*, in spite of or even because of the delusory effort to ignore each other, in spite of or even because of the delusory attempt at evading the polyphony of the many voices in which each voice flourishes in relation to the other, each in its singularity. Ideas are incarnate ideas and precisely because of this the logic of Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel presents itself in dialogic terms.

Dialogism constitutes the real life of the word and of thought processes. And with respect to such a condition, monologic dialogue is an abstract representation relieved of all responsibility without alibis. On the contrary, unlimited responsibility is the condition of being in the world, where the body of each single individual occupies a position that cannot be exchanged with another. Embodiment is expressed through the voice. And when in "From Notes made in 1970-71" Bakhtin in fact describes the process that leads from concrete dia-logics without synthesis to abstract monologic dialectics, he indicates the voice as a fundamental element in the distinction between dia-logics and dialectics:

> Take a dialogue and remove the voices (the partitioning of voices), remove the intonations (emotional and individualizing ones), carve out abstract concepts and judgments from living words and responses, cram everything into one abstract consciousness — and that's how you get dialectics. (Bakhtin 1986: 147)

In Bakhtin's view, the voice, its incarnation, the body all distinguish Dostoevsky's dialogue from Plato's in which (as much as dialogue is not completely monologized, pedagogical), the multiplicity of voices are cancelled in the idea. Plato is interested in the disincarnated ideal, the idea as being and not

as a dialogic event, the event itself of dialogue. In Plato, participation in the idea is not participation in dialogue, but in the being of the idea. Because of this, different and unindifferent voices are annulled in the unity of belonging to a common entity. Moreover, in Bakhtin's view, another element that distinguishes between the two different types of dialogue is given by the fact that in Dostoevsky, by contrast to Plato, dialogue is neither cognitive nor philosophical. Bakhtin prefers to relate dialogue in Dostoevsky to biblical and evangelical dialogue, for example, dialogue in Job, because of its internally infinite structure that has no possibility of synthesis and is external to the sphere of knowledge. However, Bakhtin also warns us that not even biblical dialogue furnishes the more substantial characteristics of dialogue in Dostoevsky's writings.

Bakhtin made a point of emphasizing the body's direct involvement in the *circumspect word* objectivated by Dostoevsky. He evidences the implications, the effects registered in the hero's relationship with his body ensuing from a word that is aware and cautious of the other, in spite of itself, a word that reveals its unindifference to the other precisely when flaunting maximum indifferente towards the other, rejection of the other, antagonism towards the other. As the example of the man from the underworld makes very clear, the body is overwhelmed by an interference of voices which denies it self-sufficiency and univocality; the body does not belong to the hero, it is not its own, for it is exposed to the gaze and to the word of the other.

The body puts the individual's presumed autonomy into crisis, rendering the idea of autonomy and self-sufficiency illusory and even ridiculous. Instead, the body is constitutively intercorporeal in both a diachronic and synchronic perspective. Despite separation, identification, membership, distinction, homologation functional to individuality, the body of each one of us *remembers* its constitutive intercorporeity in spite of memory as determined in the "small experience", and does so in terms of the "great experience".

9 Dialogism and otherness in the "great experience"

Bakhtin distinguishes between "small experience" and "great experience" in his annotations of the 1950s: "small experience" is experience that is

reduced and partial, that is functional to the concrete and effective world, that is appropriate to contemporaneity, that is reduced to interest, utility, and knowledge functional to practical action, to the economy of memory which excludes all that which distracts and is dispersive with respect to logicality, unilinearity, uniformity in terms of social planning, univocality in terms of sense. Whereas in the "great experience", the world does not coincide with itself (it is not what it is), it is not closed and finalized. In the great experience memory flows and fades away into the human depths of matter and of boundless life, the experience of worlds and atoms. And, as Bakhtin emphasizes throughout his writings, for such memory the history of the single individual begins long before its cognitive acts (its cognizable "Self") (see, for example, "The Problem of Speech Genres" and "The Problem of the Text", in Bakhtin 1986).

The carnivalesque participates in "great experience" understood as offering a global view of the complex and intricate life of bodies and signs. This conception emphasizes vital bodily contact and reveals how the life of each and every one of us is implicated in the life of every other, underlining the bond that unites all living beings to each other. This is a "religious" (from Latin *religo*) view of the existent. It highlights bodily excess with respect to specific functions as well as sign excess with respect to a specific meaning: signs and bodies – bodies as signs of life – are ends in themselves. On the contrary, the minor and more recent ideological tradition is vitiated by reductive binarism: this sets the individual against the social, the biological against the cultural, the spirit against the body, physical-chemical forces against life forces, the comic against the serious, death against life, high against low, the official against the non-official, public against private, work against art, work against non official festivity. Through Rabelais Bakhtin recovers the major tradition and criticizes the minor and recent conception of individual body and life, which is inherent in capitalism as well as in real socialism and its metamorphoses. Dostoevsky's polyphonic novel is in line with this major tradition in *Weltanschauung*, as Bakhtin demonstrates in the 1963 secondo edition of his original (1929) monograph on Dostoevsky.

The body is refractory to the "technologies of self" and to the "political technology of the individual" (Foucault). The body is *other* with respect to the

subject, with respect to consciousness, to domesticated, graded, filtered, adapted memory; it is other with respect to the narration that the individual or collective subject constructs for itself and through which it delineates its identity. The body is other with respect to the image presented by the subject as its identity card, with respect to the image one wishes to exhibit and wants to interest others in, one's physiognomy offered for recognition, the role recited. This body that is other is viewed in terms of singularity, unrepeatability, nonfunctionality. It finds the expression of its excess in relation to a given project, story, "authentic" choice in death, considered as an unconclusive end: the living body that knows before being known, that feels before being felt, that lives before being lived, that experiences before being experienced. This body is connected to other bodies without interruption in continuity, it is implicated, involved with life over the entire planet Earth, it is part of the general ecosystem, an interrelated complex from which no technology of self can ever free us.

The signs of bodily and dialogic interconnection have not been studied sufficiently, and what studies have been carried out are limited to the sectorial interests of specific scientific fields. That the self is inevitably an incarnate self, intercorporeal being, that is to say, a body connected to other bodies from the very outset, an expression of the condition of intercorporeity on both a synchronic and diachronic level, that the self is not incarnated in a body isolatedly from other bodies is not indifferent to our conception of the single individual. The self is an incarnate entity from the point of view of biological evolution, of the species, as well as from the point of view of sociality and of cultural history. The body plays a fundamental role in the development of awareness or consciousness. Consciousness is incarnate consciousness. The body is a condition for the full development of consciousness, of the human being as a *semiotic animal* (Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio 2005). The self develops interrelatedly with other bodies through which it extends its boundaries which are the boundaries of the world it experiences. The word is an extension of the body. Indeed, echoing Voloshinov (1929), the word is a bridge joining my own body to the body of others over territory that is shared by interlocutors – speaker and listener, utterer and interpreter.

10 Dialogism and the critique of identity

Dialogism plays a central role in argumentative reasoning, that is, in reasoning that has not stiffened into the defense and reproduction of identity, but, on the contrary, is open and available to otherness. As Bakhtin evidences in "From Notes Made in 1970–71", discursive unilaterality, the ossification of logical procedure, rectilinear and unilateral dialectics all derive from sclerotized dialogue. Monologic, unilinear and totalizing dialectics is necessarily oriented toward a synthesis and a conclusion and as such calls for a "Critique of Dialogic Reason" (Ponzio 1993; Ponzio and Petrilli 2005).

The whole course of his research, including his final essa of 1974, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences", concentrates on the same problem faced by Jean Paul Sartre in his *Critique de la raison dialectique,* that is, whether knowledge and understanding in man by man not only implies specific methods but also a new form of reason. However, this problem cannot be adequately understood simply by postulating a new relationship between *thought* and its *object* as Sartre believed (1960). In fact, Sartre's dialectics remains wholly inside the limits of monologic 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 assert one's own objectifying view over the other.

The critique of dialogic reason is the critique of the logic of Identity, dominant in Western thought and praxis today. In the perspective of identità, sense coincides with partial and limited interests and engenders mystification, whether reference is to the identity of smaller groups such as the single individual, nation, language, cultural system, or to larger groups, to macro-communities such as the European Union, the United Nations, the Western world, etc.

The category of Identity dominates today's world because of the *concrete abstractions* which are constructed upon it and form the *reality* we experience: these concrete abstractions are "internal" to today's dominant social reproduction system. They include individual, society, state, nation, truth, knowledge, equality, justice, freedom, limited responsibility, need, equal exchange, etc. However, it is not only a question of the concrete abstractions produced by the system. Even more importantly, the system itself is grounded in the category of identity. The logic of identity is asserted structurally and constitutively, as universal in the worldwide and global processes of production, equal exchange and consumption. The dominant logic that orients

concrete abstractions in today's processes of social reproduction is the logic of identity. And such notions as the individual with its rights, obligations, and responsibilities; society and its interests; the state and its politics functional to the world as it is, to reality; equal exchange and its demands – all such notions obey the logic of identity.

The places of argumentation internal to the order of discourse are the places of the logic of identity. Reason includes the reason of war even if in the form of *extrema ratio*, which presents war as legitimate, just and legal. Reason includes the reason of the elimination of the other — from emargination and segregation to extermination. Reason is the reason of identity. Its logic is asserted by barricading, isolating, expelling or exterminating the other thus laying the conditions for the construction of the concrete abstractions mentioned above. As anticipated, these concrete abstractions include the category of the individual which, in the first place, must sacrifice its own otherness to itself in order to assert itself as identity.

The critique of reason and argumentation thus understood requires a *point of view that is other*. This approach calls for preliminary *recognition of the other*, or, better, recognition of the fact that recognition of the other is an *inevitable imposition* (see Ponzio 1996). 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 (the allusion is to Hobbes's fallacy!) such concrete abstractions as state, politics, law.

Globalization related to capitalist production and the expansion of bio-power (Foucault) have led to the controlled insertion of bodies into the production system and to reinforcement of the idea of the individual as a separate and self-sufficient entity. The body is understood and experienced as an isolated biological entity, as belonging to the individual, as part of the individual's sphere of belonging. This has led to the progressive and almost total disappearance of cultural practices and worldviews grounded in intercorporeity, interdependency, exposition to the other, opening to the other. The technologies of separation applied to human bodies, to interests, to the life of individual and collective subjects are functional to global communication-production and to the identification of production with consumption characteristic of today's reproductive system.

With respect to all this and thanks to its ontological perspective, "global semiotics" (Seboek 2001; Petrilli and Ponzio 2003), if nothing else can oppose a whole series of signs showing how each instant of individual life is wholly

interrelated, even compromised with all other forms of life over the entire planet. In fact, to acknowledge the condition of intercorporeal and dialogic interrelatedness means to recognize a form of responsibility that far exceeds all positive rights and all limited responsibilities, restricted responsibilities with alibis. Such acknowledgement is ever more urgent the more the reasons of production and of global communication functional to it impose ecological conditions which impede and distort communication among bodies and between the body and the environment of which it is part.

11 The grotesque body and its signs

The different forms of perceiving the body by popular culture, discussed by Bakhtin in *Dostoevsky* (1963) and *Rabelais* (1965), the forms of "grotesque realism", are almost extinct. In fact, the body and corporeal life as perceived by popular culture do not respond to today's conception of body or corporeal physiology, for the body is neither wholly individualized nor wholly detached from other life forms over the planet, from the rest of the world. Rather than view the body as an isolated biological entity, as a sphere belonging to the individual, grotesque realism presents the body as undefined, unconfined to itself, in a relation of symbiosis with other bodies, of transformation and renewal through which the limits of individual life are continually transcended. On the contrary, in today's world of global communication-production verbal and nonverbal signs connected to the practices and conceptions of the grotesque body have almost completely disappeared as the individualistic, private, static conception of the body is asserted. What remains are mummified residues studied by folklore analysts, archeological residues preserved in ethnological museums and in the histories of national literatures (the expression of a situation of generalized museumification. Signs of the grotesque body of which only very weak traces have survived in the present day include ritual masks, masks used during popular festivities, carnival masks.

The signs and language of the grotesque body privilege and exalt those parts of the body, excrescences and orifices, that most favour communication with other bodies as well as between the body and the world, with recourse to blends and contaminations which do not know interruptions between the human and the nonhuman:

> The grotesque body [...] is a body in the act of becoming. It is never finished, never completed; it is continually built, created, and builds and creates another body [...]. the grotesque ignores the impenetrable surface that closes and limits the body as a separate and completed phenomenon.

> The grotesque mode of representing the body and bodily life prevailed in art and creative forms of speech over thousands of years [...].
>
> This boundless ocean of grotesque bodily imagery within time and space extends to all languages, all literatures, and the entire system of gesticulation; in the midst of it the bodily canon of art, belles lettres, and polite conversation of modern times is a tiny island. This limited canon never prevailed in antique literature. In the official literature of Eureopean peoples it has existed only for the last four hundred years [...].
>
> The new bodily canon, in all its historic variations and different genres, presents an entirely finished, completed, strictly limited body, which is shown from the outside as something individual. (Bakhtin 1965, Eng. trans.: 317–320)

Once official ideology functional to maintaining the established order and power of the dominant class is separated from unofficial ideology, the grotesque body is interdicted by official culture. The language of the grotesque body is rich in terms and expressions referring to body parts that most establish relations of interdependency and compromise with the world and the body of others. Such language can be traced among all peoples and all epochs. It always refers to a body that is not strictly delineated, stable, fulfilled in itself, but to a body connected to other bodies, in a relationship that is at least bicorporeal:

> The body of the new canon is merely one body; no signs of duality have been left. It is self-sufficient and speaks in its name alone. All that happens within it concerns it alone, that is, only the individual, closed sphere. Therefore, all the events taking place within it acquire one single meaning: death is only death, it never coincides with birth; old age is torn away from youth. (*Ibid.*: 321–322)

As Michel Foucault (1988) in particular has revealed (but let us also remember Ferruccio Rossi-Landi's acute analyses as articulated in his books of the 1970s), division and separatism among the sciences are functional to the ideologico-social necessities of the "new cannon of the individualized body" (Bakhtin), which, in turn, is functional to the controlled insertion of bodies into the reproduction cycle of today's production system.

An ontological reformulation of bioethics in a global semiotic perspective that keeps account of today's socio-economic context of global communication evidences two fundamental principles, what we may call *exposition* and *dislocation.* These principles allude to the human single individual as a living body interconnected with all other forms of life over the whole planet thanks to its condition of diachronic and synchronic intercorporeity. The human body is *exposed* with respect to techniques that encourage and favor subordination to

the knowledge-power of *biopolitics* (Foucault); and *dislocated* with respect to chronotopic coordinates, projects, structures and roles that are functional to reproduction of the same in the socio-economic system of global communication.

12 For an open science of signs

A global and detotalizing approach in semiotics demands availability in relation to the other, to an extreme degree, a disposition to respond, to listen to others in their otherness, a capacity for opening to the other, where such opening is not only measured in quantitative terms (the omnicomprehensive character of global semiotics), but also in qualitative terms. All semiotic interpretations by the student of signs, especially at a metasemiotic level, cannot ingore the dialogic relationship with the other. Dialogism is a fundamental condition for a semiotic approach in semiotics which, though oriented globally, privileges the tendency to open to the particular and the local rather than to englobe and enclose. Accordingly, we are describing an approach that privileges the tendency toward detotalization rather than totalization.

As another great philosopher of our times, Emmanuel Levinas, has revealed, otherness obliges the totality to reorganize itself always anew in a process related to what he calls "infinity" (Levinas 1961). This concept can be related to the Peircean concept of "infinite semiosis". This relation to infinity is far more than cognitive: beyond the established order, beyond the symbolic order, beyond our conventions and habits, it tells of a relationship of involvement and responsibility with the other. This relation to infinity is the relation with what is most refractory to the totality; consequently, it implies a relation to the otherness of others, to the otherness of the other person, not in the sense of another self like ourselves, another *alter ego*, an I belonging to the *same community*, but of an other in its extraneousness, strangeness, diversity, difference toward which we cannot be indifferent in spite of all the efforts and guarantees offered by the logic of identity, by the identity of the I.

Such considerations orient semiotics according to a plan that does not belong to any given ideology. Out interest is in human signs and behavior as they ensues from awareness of the human being's radical responsibility as a "semiotic animal" toward life. Properly understood, the "semiotic animal" is a responsible actor capable of *signs of signs*, of mediation, reflection, and awareness in relation to semiosis over the whole planet. In this sense global semiotics involves cognitive semiotics, but it is also open to a third dimension beyond the quantitative and the theoretical, that is to day, the ethical. Given its

focus on the ends and goals we strive to reach, for this particular dimension in sign studies we have proposed the term "semioethics" (Petrilli and Ponzio 2003, 2005, 2010).

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