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Sensibility in the Era of Global Communication. A Semioethic Perspective

Abstract:

This paper proposes a phenomenological and semiotic analysis of sensibility, or feeling, in the era of globalization which is the era of global communication: how are such things as time, space, self, others, life, death, health, illness, work, employment, unemployment, free-time, development, underdevelopment, etc., perceived in today's world? As vast as this excursion may seem, these different issues are relative to dominant sensibility today and can all be conducted to the problem of the relation between identity and alterity. The hypothesis is that the common denominator in science and sensibility today is the ideology, or ideo-logic, of identity. However, with reference to Europe, for example, the ideo-logic of identity is also a menace to the difficult process of forming the European Union. In Europe, indeed in world history at large, the logic of identity and of alterity can both be traced in all the most important phases that have determined the destiny of the people in history. In the current phase of development in the social reproduction system, that of advanced capitalism, the contrast between identity and alterity is at an extreme, at the point of exasperation. In this paper we also intend to explore the possibility of opening sensibility to alterity not only in Europe, but in the anthroposociosemiotic sphere at large.

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1. Global semiotics and global communication

Global communication today has modified space, distance, time, and the affections. We must now decipher the signs of the transformation processes involved and identify the new circuits where commodities are circulating in this new situation of global communication. We must learn to read the new messages produced by these processes, search for a measure of their planetary extension, of the velocity with which they are transmitted, and inscribe the criteria involved in a new system of values. In other words, it is now time to reflect from a semiotic perspective on the new conditions of sensibility, and to construct *a critique of globalization and global communication today*.

The framework we propose for critical reflection is that of *global semiotics* (Thomas A. Sebeok). And the reason for this is that the expression “globalized communication” not only indicates the quantitative fact that the communication network has extended throughout the entire human semiosphere, but also the qualitative fact that all life-forms have been englobed into that same network. Late capitalist society in its present phase of development may be characterized in terms of *world* communication and globalization. Given that communication has extended over the whole planet and is realistically accommodated to the world as it is, the expression “world communication” would seem especially appropriate. And given that communication pervades the whole production cycle not only interfering with human life but with life in general, this is unquestionably the era of globalization.

Consequently, an adequate analysis of capitalism today calls for a perspective that is just as extensive, just as inclusive and truly global. While the special sciences taken separately are not in a position to provide such a perspective, the general science of signs or semiotics has adequate instruments at its disposal to do so. This does not imply that semiotics as it is practiced today is ready for the task. If anything, the opposite is true. And what we must emphasize is that it is no longer possible to practice semiotics adequately, especially when a question of communication theory or the communication sciences, without keeping account of today’s situation of worldwide and global communication.

Moreover, a communication model that fails to keep account of the *global* nature of world communication, a phenomenon which is altogether new in history, is inadequate for semiotic analysis, and at the very least will prove to be shortsighted and anachronistic. *General semiotics* formally re-envisioned as *global semiotics* must carry out a *detotalizing function*: global semiotics must be designed to formulate a critique of all alleged totalities, in the first place the totalities “world,” “globalization,” and “global communication.” If general semiotics or global semiotics fails to perform such a detotalizing function, it’s work will prove useless or, even worse, the mere syncretic result of the special semiotics, a transversal language of the encyclopaedia of unified sciences, or a philosophical prevarication suffering from omniscience with respect to the different disciplines and specialized fields of knowledge.

A full understanding of global communication implies a full understanding of the risks that communication today involves, including the *risk of the end of communication*, the risk that communication may come to an end. Here, the risk we are alluding to is not simply the risk of the rather trivial phenomenon known as “incommunicability” theorized and represented in film and literature, a subjective-individualistic disease which emerged during the transition to communication as it has developed today in terms of communication inseparable from production, what we have denominated “communication-production.” Far more radically, the risk of the end of communication refers to nothing less than the risk of the end of life on the planet Earth, considering the enormous potential for destruction that society has at its disposal in the present day and age contrast with earlier phases in the development of the social system. With such a statement it should be obvious that communication is equated with life itself. As especially Thomas A. Sebeok’s approach to biosemiotics has made clear, semiosis and life, communication and life converge. And from this perspective, the end of communication would mean the end of life.

For an adequate understanding of communication today which means to keep account of the historical-social specificity of communication as a worldwide phenomenon and of its interconnectedness to life over the whole planet (remembering that life and communication, life and semiosis converge), semiotics

must adopt a “planetary,” therefore *global* perspective in both spatial and temporal terms. Such an approach will grant the critical distancing necessary for an interpretation of contemporaneity that is not imprisoned within the limits of contemporaneity itself.

2. Sensibility in global communication-production: a semiotic and semioethic perspective

As anticipated, communication in capitalist society today pervades the whole reproduction cycle, and not just the intermediate phase, that of exchange, circulation, and the market, and because of this may be characterized as *communication-production*. Globalized communication-production is not only a question of extension of the communication network and of the market at a planetary level, but also involves englobement of human life in all its manifestations into the communication-production cycle. Reference is to development, wealth and consumerism as much as to underdevelopment, poverty and the impossibility to survive; health and disease; normality and deviance; integration and emargination; employment and unemployment; emigration/immigration functional to the labour-force and migration, which involves the denied request for hospitality; traffic of both legal and illegal commodities – from drugs, uteruses to nonconventional weapons. The fact is that all life over the planet is involved (even compromised and put at risk) in the current communication-production system.

Reflection from a semiotic perspective on the *fundamental conditions* of *sensibility* in global communication society is lacking; here semiotics is also understood in terms of transcendental aesthetics (that is, as relating to the a priori, the foundations) relatively to the self, the body, in global communication; a critique of global communication that keeps account of global communication as the context itself of communication, is lacking. In other words, we need to work towards critical reflection capable of proceeding beyond the partial and sectorial manifestations of global communication, therefore beyond analyses based on internal perspectives functional to the system.

Critical reflection with a claim to any degree of adequacy must not remain connected empirically to psychological subjects, reduced to the parameters of the social sciences, and measured in terms of statistics. The category of 'identity' and that of 'subjectivity' which is closely interconnected with the former, both perform a decisive role in worldwide and global communication, whether a question of the identity of the individual subject or of the collective (Western world, European Union, nation, ethnic group, social class, etc.). The concepts of individual identity and of community identity alike need to be analyzed in a semiotic key. And identity in either form may prove to be governed either by logic oriented in the sense of monologism, what we could call a "mono-logic," or by logic oriented in the sense of dialogism, therefore a "dia-logic." The difference is profound and pervasive. To repeat, then, we need to reflect on global communication from a perspective that is as global as the phenomenon under analysis. This also means from a perspective that is capable of understanding the logic of global communication and of proceeding to an adequate critique of dominant logic, better *ideo-logic* today, and of the subject and human sensibility in this globalized and monologic context. We believe that global semiotics developed in the direction of *semioethics* can provide such a perspective.

As a unique *semiotic animal*, that is to say, the only animal capable of reflection upon signs and communication, the human being has a singular responsibility towards life (which is made of signs and communication), including the quality of life, of all forms of life generally, and therefore from a more strictly sociosemiotic perspective towards the subject and human sensibility, the immediate object of the present paper. More than *limited responsibility*, the type of responsibility involved is *unlimited responsibility, responsibility without alibis, absolute responsibility*. Our responsibilities towards life in the global communication-production phase of development in late capitalist society are enormous, indeed unbounded, also in the sense that when we speak of life, as just anticipated, the implication is not only human life, but all of life throughout the whole planetary ecosystem, from which human life most obviously cannot be separated. As the study of signs semiotics cannot evade this issue. Originally, semiotics was understood as "semeiotics" (a branch of the medical sciences)

and was focused on symptoms. Nowadays the ancient vocation of semiotics as it was originally practiced for the “care of life” must be recovered and reorganized in what we propose to call “semioethical” terms. This issue is particularly urgent in the present day and age in the face of growing interference in communication between the historical-social sphere and the biological sphere, between the cultural sphere and the natural sphere, between the semiosphere and the biosphere. *Semioethics* is the result of two thrusts: one is *biosemiotics*, the other *bioethics*. With an attitude or propensity we propose to call semioethical, semiotics understood as semioethics recovers its ancient vocation as “semeiotics” (or symptomatology) with its focus on symptoms, and focuses on “care for life” in a global perspective which knows that life and semiosis, life and communication converge.

3. Hyperaesthesia and synaesthesia

We may limit our gaze to perceiving global communication as global communication wants us to perceive it; or we may *perceive the perception*, that is, listen, understand, respond, as indicated by “transcendental aesthetics” understood in terms of critique unindifferent to alterity, to otherness. To work in this “second” sense (in truth the *only sense* in which *sensibility* may be effectively understood) means to take a critical stance against the processes of anaesthesia characteristic of unreflecting sensibility today ensuing from a situation of extensive hyperaesthesia in globalized communication.

We propose a new *critique from the perspective of aesthetics*, capable of dealing with the self’s sensibility in global communication, characterized as it is by a situation of egosthesia. Such critique is founded on the relation of *unindifferent differences* (Emmanuel Levinas) and presents itself in terms of *restitution*: restitution of identity to alterity, restitution of *separate sensibility, that is, sensibility that has been separated and isolated from other sensibilities* in global communication, restitution to the body and to other bodies in their *irreducible intercorporeity*. The aim of a critique of aesthetics is to recover and restore the condition of *unindifferent difference* among people in today’s global communication society.

New communication media (e.g. multimedia) allow for *synaesthesia* – (“give a colour to sound”) – but in terms of market logic and not as a manifestation of the poet’s exceptional capacity for “alchemy” (Rimbaud). Synaesthesia on the market takes the form of *syncretism among separate senses*, among “divided Is,” “separate Is,” a form of syncretism that is as “artificial” as the false “paradises” offered by drugs. *On line* interconnection on a planetary level allows for connections among identities relating to roles, the identity of professions, etc., or among monadic solitudes outside roles, or in “free-time.”

With respect to this type of syncretism and synaesthesia, *transcendental synaesthesia among unindifferent differences* (which, to repeat, the critique of aesthetics aims to recover) is interconnection among senses and sensibilities. As such transcendental synaesthesia transcends the individual body just as it does all other divisions functional to communication-production (which in the last analysis does no more than communicate and reproduce itself). *Synaesthesia of the transcendental critique of sensibility is intercorporeal synaesthesia, synaesthesia of perceiving the pleasure of the pleasure of others, of feeling the fear of the fear of others, the suffering of the suffering of others*: this is the synaesthesia of feeling the other under one’s own skin (Levinas).

4. Feeling exposed

Today more than ever before human beings live in spaces that cannot be isolated, around which barriers cannot be constructed. All environments are part of a larger environment. No piece of architecture can subsist outside the play of concentric circles formed with other architectures. This holds true on a natural level, the level of the *semiobiosphere* as well as on a historical-social level, that of the *anthroposemiosphere*. These two levels, in turn, cannot be separated (as problems relating to ecology now evidence so strongly). Indeed, there is no such thing as a natural environment that is not involved in historical-social processes.

We could speak of a situation of *exposition*, that is, of *being necessarily exposed to, subject to the outside*. To live and operate in the illusion of isolation is no longer

possible. All totalities are part of larger totalities. And the possibility of understanding the internal characteristics of a totality, its logic, requirements, balance and stability, and the consequent possibility of planning a new totality do not simply depend on a capacity for analysis internal to the totality. Rather than breaking it down into its parts, to read the totality means to study its interconnections with larger totalities, its insertion into larger totalities. On this basis, in the first place, what seemed a totality proves instead only to be a part or a result or a factor or a piece in a larger totality. This perspective means to apply what we propose to call a *detotalizing method* rather than an analytical method.

There is no refuge, no shelter: this is the situation mankind is subject to in global communication, a situation of total exposure. The *interpermeability* that characterizes global communication is caused by two factors: technological development and extension of the market to the point of becoming a worldwide market.

The first factor has now reached such an advanced level of development, progress in technology, that the effect of human action can have repercussions over the whole planet (think of the possible consequences of nuclear energy). The second factor, worldwide extension of the market, involves dependency of any one product on a totality that is far greater than the market where those same products circulate, or even the national market. Instead, what we are dealing with are the general structures of exchange at a world level.

But these two factors (technology and market) are the surface phenomena of a deeper structure: the social relations of production. Global architectonics must be taken into account when dealing with problems relating to micro-architectonics, whether a question of housing, the general habitat of a community, the natural environment, or reconstruction of the bio-psychical health of the human body. All architectures are interconnected insofar as they belong to and are expressions of the same level of technological production and of the same market. A “natural” habitat (“natural” in inverted commas) as much as a piece of software are what they are relatively to the level of development of these two factors – technology and market.

Therefore the relation between such surface phenomena is far deeper than the surface itself and may be traced to the level of the social relations of production and social reproduction, with respect to which technology and the market are only the effects.

5. From analogies to homologies. The architectonics of sensibility in globalization

To shift our attention to this level means to pass from metaphors and analogies to homologies. That is from surface similarities and transpositions to profound similarities of the logical-structural and historical-genetic order among totalities that seem autonomous and separate, but are not. The detotalizing method is a *homological* method. Detotalization is possible by tracing homological relations, that is, relations of the genetical-structural order among objects that seem autonomous and separate from each other, but in reality are closely interconnected.

This also means to shift our gaze from the restricted programs of pseudo-totalities to the larger scale programs of the totalities to which they belong. This approach affords a global view of control exerted by communication-production programs on each other in concentric circles, and in processes that are not only unidirectional but also retroactive. *This global picture is the general communication system, the semiosphere of global communication* – a network now in a position to hold and control most cultures, languages, and productions over the entire planet.

In his *Critique of Pure Reason*, in a chapter entitled, “The Architectonics of Pure Reason,” Kant specifies that by “architectonics” he intends the *art of the system*. Systematic unity is what transforms common knowledge into science, a system. Therefore, architectonics is the doctrine of the scientificness of knowledge in general and necessarily belongs to the doctrine of method. Governed by reason, knowledge in general cannot form a rhapsody, but must constitute a system in which alone can knowledge sustain and promote the essential ends of reason.

Architectonics understood as the art of the system must today necessarily be a critique of the social system as it emerges in global communication. Thus described, architectonics, that is, detotalizing architectonics is not limited to the sphere of

cognitive and practical-functional activities, but must also include *aesthetics*, *aesthetics of general sensibility* in the capitalist production system as it is reorganizing itself today.

6. Sensibility in general

Global communication puts us in a position to speak of “*sensibility*” *in general*, and sensibility in Europe as in the world at large has changed and continues changing. Sensibility is related to the sense of messages (merchandise-messages and messages-merchandise) rather than to their meaning. It belongs to the body. The transformation of sensibility inevitably involves an anthropological mutation.

It is a question of rethinking aesthetics and recasting it as the study of the *aesthesia of the human*: we need to analyze and understand structural changes in human beings, changes that are irreversible. Without this new picture of the aesthetics of the human animal, the semiotic animal, in the era of global communication, humanisms and antihumanisms do not have a referent; indeed, they refer to a referent that, if it ever did exist, is no longer there, or at least not in the form originally conceived.

The difficulty with this new aesthetics is that aesthesia today is rendered opaque by the characteristic *anaesthetizing* effect of globalized communication. No doubt, this may be largely attributed to the processes of homologation operating throughout, but anaesthesia is also caused by a condition of *hyperaesthesia* which obstacles attention itself, which blunts and obstacles the possibility of reflection and even more so, of critique.

Our sensibility generally occurs immediately in the signs forming the surrounding social environment to which we belong, and mediately in the signs forming the extended social environment – extended to varying degrees on the level of contemporaneity as well as of succession in history. Therefore, sensibility is always connoted *semiotically and socially*. Obviously, presentday global communication with its signs, machines, merchandise and messages, with its extension and velocity, its values and criteria for evaluation, has consequences for sensibility on a planetary level.

Aesthetics, as we envisage it, proposes a direct and systematic analysis, a *critique* (in the Kantian sense) of *presentday sensibility*. This critique is conducted from a semiotic perspective and cuts across the specialisms forming the various psychologies, sociologies and other human sciences.

An *aesthetic analysis*. Therefore critique. A critique not in terms of empirical description conducted from a sociological, psychological or anthropologico-cultural perspective. Rather, a *phenomenological analysis from the perspective of a new transcendental aesthetics*. "Transcendental" because aesthetics is also the a priori of subjectivity, the I in global communication, indeed constitutes the fundamental condition.

7. The alterity of sensibility

The I we are theorizing is not a universal and ahistorical I, but the *alterity* (or otherness) of the I, alterity inherent in the I with respect to the I that feels according to the *forms of sensibility specific to global communication*, time, space, work, illness, body, etc. *Alterity* is there, on the horizon of the I, but like a breach, like the in-finite that it cannot contain; *alterity of unindifferent difference* that the indifferent difference of identity presupposes as the *restlessness* from which it must defend itself on the level itself of sensibility. Consciousness needs this defence mechanism as a top priority in order to preserve the sensibility of its *good conscience*; and monologic reason also prioritizes this defence mechanism in order to prevail over the reason of the other without feeling ill at ease.

A semiotic reflection on sensibility in global communication, oriented in terms of *transcendental aesthetics*, presents itself as a *critique of the reason of global communication*. This approach evidences the limitations and aporias, contradictions and amphibologies that question global communication and put it into crisis in spite of the tendency to reproduce itself insistently, the obstinacy in reasserting and reestablishing itself.

With co-author Augusto Ponzio we have presented a project, now published as a monograph entitled *Il sentire della comunicazione globale* (2000), for a new form of

aesthetics. The point of reference is sensibility in global communication analyzed with the instruments of the critique of dialogic reason. The aim is to analyze the way we perceive in the present day and age, for example the way we perceive *space, distance, time, relations, difference, communication, need, desire, the imaginary, wealth, affections, fear, pain, pleasure, health, illness, sex, famine, death, reality, truth, war, work, free-time, beauty, amusement, self, body, others, community, politics, language, the word of the other*.

These issues must be treated one by one like the entries in a dictionary thereby offering a picture (that is more or less complete) of the ideo-logic of sensibility in global communication. Some of these entries are more necessary than others to delineate the project itself. And others are just as important, for example, the concept of *community*, to introduce the problem of sociality as experienced in this particular social system. From the perspective of transcendental aesthetics, another way of feeling the social may be juxtaposed to community, what we can provisionally call the *open community*.

8. Aesthetics and ideology in globalization

In the first part of *Critique of Pure Reason*, "Transcendental Aesthetics," which opens the section titled "The Transcendental Doctrine of the Elements," Kant defines *transcendental aesthetics* as the science of all the *a priori principles of sensibility*. Such a science is necessary and must form the first part of a transcendental doctrine of the elements, in opposition to the science that contains the principles of pure thought and is denominated transcendental logic.

Analogously, semiotic reflection on the fundamental conditions of globalization and global communication, as anticipated, must not limit its analysis to partial and sectorial aspects, nor remain connected to psychological subjects. On the contrary, semiotic reflection must understand the overall logic of global communication and therefore be capable of *critiquing* it. Semiotic reflection must begin from transcendental aesthetics, from a reflection on the unreflecting sensibility of global communication and search for the *a priori* principles of sensibility in globalization.

Similarly to Kant, transcendental aesthetics of globalization as we conceive it must begin from two fundamental forms of sensible intuition – space and time. However, differently from Kantian critique, in our case where aesthetics concerns the *system* of global communication-production, the *elements of sensibility* cannot be separated from the principles that constitute the *logic* of that *system*. In other words, spatio-temporal sensibility cannot be understood if not in relation to the internal *ideo-logic* regulating this system and, therefore, we must return to its *logic*. Aesthetics and logic must not be separated.

9. Time

By contrast with Kant and his *Critique*, we shall begin from the concept of time rather than space. Considering the fundamental character of time in the logic of the capitalist system, sensibility in relation to space also depends on the way we perceive time. In globalization, time is the time of communication-production as it characterizes the capitalist production system in today's phase of development.

Communication in the capitalist social system is characterized by the tendency towards totalization in terms of extension and circulation relatively to people, goods (services) and messages. In the capitalist production system, communication and market coincide, exchange is essentially the exchange of merchandise. The tendency to total communication is the tendency to the total market, which implies extension of the market at a worldwide level and the possibility of transforming anything into merchandise. Consequently, messages become commodities just as commodities could not be commodities if they were not messages as well. People circulating in the same circuits also become commodities, commodities-messages. According to this logic, understood as the circulation of messages-commodities, and as the circulation of people through means of circulation, which too are merchandise, communication in its entirety is convertible into market.

However, communication does not only invest the intermediate exchange phase in the three phases forming the production cycle – production, exchange (circulation or market) and consumption. Production itself tends to become

communication (automation, labour-force operating at a distance, tele-work), and consumption understood as the consumption of commodities-messages and messages-commodities is also a communication process.

Therefore, communication is a social structure, communication structures society. And all individual and collective behaviour is part of the programs, projects or planning of communication in the capitalist system of production; in other words, human behaviour, whether individual or collective, obeys the ideo-logic of capitalist production.

Given that production and communication identify with each other, the aim of the entire production-communication cycle, production-circulation-consumption, is production, and ultimately therefore communication: *production for the sake of production, communication for the sake of communication*. Production no doubt aims at profit, but profit is a function of production, that is, of extended reproduction of the production-communication cycle and of the general communicative network to which the production-communication cycle belongs and wholly depends on.

Consequently, the *dominant class in today's capitalist social system* is the class that *controls communication in that system*.

Time in the capitalist social system, time in production-communication is time that must be reduced. But never before as in the present phase of development in the capitalist social system has time reduction been demanded to such a high degree. Never before has this demand been felt so acutely, never before has time presented itself so urgently as something that must be eliminated. The tendency to zero time, which is a characteristic of the capitalist production system, has reached a paroxysmic degree because of the connection between labour and profit.

The need to reduce time concerns all three phases in the productive cycle. Given that production, exchange and consumption cannot be separated, reduction in the time of production must go together with reduction in the time of circulation and consumption in order to avoid overproduction. Consequently, communication is accelerated in the other two phases, therefore in the overall reproductive cycle.

Acceleration is achieved by functionalizing scientific research and technological progress to the needs of capitalist production. The aim is to reduce the overall time of communication, that is, the time of production, circulation and consumption.

The logic of reducing labour-time is extended to the whole communication system, and provokes the tendency to zero time in everyday life as well, that is, outside the work-place and outside work-time (as much as the orientation in production-communication is to eliminate the work-place properly understood, that is, to eliminate barriers between labour and non-labour). Both inside and outside the work-place time is perceived as something to eliminate.

10. Non-labour time

The reduction of labour-time, achieved through progress in technology, is converted into surplus value (with respect to “equal exchange” between labour and capital), therefore into profit. This determines the concrete configuration of nonlabour-time: free-time, waiting-time for a job, time for education, time of redundancy (in Italian *esuberi*), of the process of losing a job, time of unemployment, prepension-time, pension-time, etc.

Nonlabour-time is time subject to labour-time, and even the time of unemployment (*dis-occupazione* in Italian) is pre-occupied with and by labour-time. Nonlabour-time is subordinate to labour-time, nonlabour-time in the form of time to rest (to establish work hours, festivities, holidays) is time functional to the recovery of energy necessary for work; nonlabour-time in the form of unemployment, the time of waiting for a job is also time subordinate to labour-time; and, again, the end of active life, of active working life (whether in the form of pensioning, or exceeding “age limits” in the course of permanent education while waiting for a job), is also functional to labour-time.

Understood as free-time, nonlabour-time is empty time, “lost time,” time to “fill-in,” time to “pass,” “time to kill,” or to convert into profit (think of the free-time industry); and, as unemployment, it is time to eliminate as quickly as possible. Even

when free-time is considered as “time waste” (with respect to the time of production), it must be economized, it too must obey the productive logic of not wasting time.

To accelerate communication of free-time is to accelerate circulation and consumption. The possibility of drawing benefits from all this is relative to employment, labour-time, and to its other face, the implication of nonlabour-time, the time of rest, unemployment; but it is also relative to the degree to which nonlabour-time can be converted into surplus labour, that is, surplus value and profit, therefore, it is also relative to the cost of labour.

Nonlabour-time is “essential” to the capitalist production social system and manifests itself in the form of increased *liberation from labour* (free labour, that is, commodified labour). As a result of automation in production and in the tertiary sectors of society, liberation from labour takes the form of unemployment, eventual unemployment benefits, reduction in work hours, and anticipated pensioning. It also presents itself in terms of the new possibility for “*otium*” and for “immaterial work,” involuntarily fuelled by capital with its demand for knowledge relative to scientific and technological research. Therefore, nonlabour-time is also the time of education, study, and specialization as a consequence of the need manifested by capital in the communication-production phase to exploit so-called “immaterial” work, that is, “intellectual” work which must be constantly responsive, adequate and functional to scientific and technological development.

In capitalist society, increased nonlabour-time is essential, structural to the system, considering also that capitalist development destroys traditional forms of employment in so-called “underdeveloped” countries, or developing countries. “Nonlabour-time of the many” produced by capitalist development today (by contrast with the few in earlier phases) also involves unemployment (or loss of conditions for employment) in non-capitalist social systems. This situation is provoked by capitalist development, which is reducing a growing part of the world population to life conditions below the subsistence level, and is the motor for the presentday phenomenon of mass migration. Differently from traditional emigration/immigration patterns, migration cannot be absorbed by capital, neither in the form of employment,

nor as a reserve of unemployed people (which leads to closing the frontiers of the community to the so-called “extra-communitarians”).

11. Space and circulation

Space cannot be separated from time in the capitalist social reproduction system, the globalized communication-production system, and must be considered from that perspective. In globalization, time is the time of communication-production.

Space in global communication is characterized in terms of “places that can be reached,” “connections,” “spaces that can be covered,” “accessibility.” These are the characteristics of space according to the “ideo-logic of worldwide and global communication.” Global communication responds to the world as it is, it corresponds to the reality of the world as it is, but precisely because of this it also expresses its contradictions. The consequence is that the characteristics just listed (“places that can be reached,” “connections,” “spaces that can be covered,” “accessibility”), translate into their opposites. One’s perception of reachability, connectedness, accessibility to spaces, spaces that can be covered, is associated with the opposite perception of unreachability, unconnectedness, inaccessibility to spaces, spaces that cannot be covered. This type of perception is felt ever more deeply, is perceived ever more as unjust, frustrating, painful, the more the bond to this type of sensibility is perceived as inevitable.

The most macroscopic example of contradictions produced by presentday ideology is *migration*. While the general tendency is to open frontiers without reserve to the circulation of merchandise, including labour-force, when a question of migration, of the circulation of people, in fact they are closed. At the most, a minimal margin of migrants can be accepted if they can be assimilated to emigration/immigration processes, that is, to labour-force on the national and international market. Migration obliges the capitalist system to close circulation and communication circuits, interrupting “free market” labour-force circuits; migration is a symptom of the fact that the category of labour-in-general cannot be extended indefinitely, that people cannot be converted into labour-force unlimitedly. Migration obstacles the processes

of homologation that are structural to “equal exchange” and that subtend abstraction, equivalence, commensurability, exchange, communication. The present-day phenomenon of migration is at once new and old, and by no means identifiable with emigration/immigration which differently from migration can be englobed into the production system. On the contrary, the specificity of migration is that it presents an excess with respect to the system, an alterity that cannot be assimilated.

The tendency to economize time (a characteristic that has been exasperated by the capitalist system today in the communication-production phase), to eliminate time on the basis of the equation time = slowness, finds a counterpart in the widespread imperative, now a common place, to reduce or even eliminate space altogether. Intermediary space between the starting point and the end point of a communicative trajectory is considered an impediment. Similarly to intermediate time perceived as time loss, intermediate space is also perceived as waste.

12. Urban space

Urban space today is an eloquent expression of this new way of perceiving space. Being part of the communicative universe, urban space is subject to its dominant ideologic. Urban space with all its internal “peripheral” zones must not remain isolated from other spaces, but must enter the general production-circulation-consumption circuit forming the communication network.

To be “well-connected,” small distances, distances that are rapidly covered and even eliminated, minimal distances from nodal points in the network (represented by the work-place, commercial centres, shops and shopping centres, supermarkets, administrative offices, amusement areas, areas for free-time) are the criteria used to establish (exchange) value in the global evaluation of urban space and its parts. To be well connected concerns the level of development in technology and is a criterion that must apply to all urban spaces and their parts. Vicinity, proximity is not perceived in physical or “natural” terms, but rather in the technological – to be well connected means to be well-served technologically (reference is to transport systems, road networks, train networks, metropolitans, television channels, telematics, telephone

and e-mail connections, etc.). Urban space must be completely open to communication, and must not include areas that are inaccessible – it must be possible to quickly travel through all spaces and reach all points in the urban network.

The need to reach all points in urban space and all built-up areas as fast as possible means that space – perceived as an obstacle, distance, separation – must be eliminated. This means to expropriate urban space, which must be functional to the communication-production cycle. Consequently, urban space is amorphous, anonymous, indistinct, homologated. Its identity, difference, is sacrificed to indifference, for urban space must be levelled and made functional to communicative exchange. This is in conformity with capitalist society understood as the passive result of separate and isolated interests: the result of a common interest in exchange among subjects that are mutually indifferent to each other, united on the basis of the relation among things, among objects that have been equalized, rendered equivalent, and which as such function as commodities.

Urban space as the space that joins one to the rest of the communicative universe is the obliged negation of difference, of identity. Negation of difference is the result of mutual indifference among differences, of separation among individual or collective identities. Identities are passively united by the interest – suffered as a common interest – of a communication system *that communicates nothing* insofar as it involves homologation, levelling, elimination of differences: communication limited to reproducing itself, communication for the sake of communication.

The result is a sense of boredom that cannot be eliminated by any form of interest, amusement, pass-time, excitement offered by the communication void (emptied space and accelerated time). Boredom is largely at the basis of the relation between present-day urban space, with its suburb-dormitories (though well integrated into the communicative circuit), and drug addiction in youth (think of the connection between addiction to consented communication and the prohibited communication of drugs).

Another result of communication for the sake of communication is a sense of frustration in perceived by identity and difference. In a situation where urban space

and communicative exchange deny separation for the sake of efficiency and velocity, the reality is that identity and difference are felt ever more insistently. Present-day mutual indifference among differences is easily transformed into conflict and hostility towards the stranger, towards anyone who is different.

Differences can only be traced in the past; the present cancels them. A common past can unite and differentiate and therefore identify, referring to religion, language, territorial distribution, origin, descendency, roots, blood, skin colour, etc. The only possibility of identity among different populated centres and inside the same urban space is reference to religious, ethnic, linguistic differences, differences relating to past cultural traditions, etc. On the basis of this logic, the logic of identity and identification, difference can be eliminated from one's own territory (national, urban, suburban, or neighbouring territory, etc.), however permeable it may be, according to varying degrees of abjection (from hatred to so-called tolerance).

13. Space between indifference and “museumified” difference

Indifference in space-time today contrasts with difference in space-time in the past. However, in accordance with our social system based on the alternative between difference and the negation of difference, claims to difference end up separating opposite interests, justifying barriers, ghettos, exclusions, extromissions to the very point of massacre and genocide, as testified by the atrocities of world history.

Identity relative to a common past is ever more strengthened in terms of self-defence and ever more extended in terms of space when a question of the nation, state, or confederation of nations and states such as the European Union. Identity logic contradicts world-wide circulation and communication of commodities in spite of differences and borders. Identity relative to a common past can exclude the so-called “extracommunitarian” from its space of identification, the migrant forced as a result of disasters provoked by development to ask developed countries for hospitality.

With respect to free circulation and velocity thanks to technology, urban space is a nuisance, an inconvenience: speed limits, pedestrian areas, slow traffic. Historical areas in urban spaces may be closed to traffic if this doesn't obstacle private interests

in freely covering urban space. However, to close spaces exasperates the anachronism and the processes of museumification characteristic of these spaces with respect to the need of presentday communication for total opening and exposition. On the other hand, in the face of indifference, homologation, opacity of time-space required by communication today, identity looks for the chance to reassert itself in what can make the difference, whether in terms of some “natural” characterization or of history: tradition, custom, monuments, witnesses to the cultural past, language and dialect, religion, ethnic group, etc. Therefore, the historical parts of a city – churches, museums, ruins – continue to be the characterizing elements (to the point of becoming tourist attractions exploited in the communication-production circuit), the element of identification in an urban space which is otherwise anonymous and the same as any other.

14. Travel through space and availability of personal means of circulation

The communication network and its programs for circulation and consumption interfere with private life and deny any possibility of separation. This is compensated by the illusion of increase in the sense of individual freedom thanks to technological progress in communication, available to everyone, in urban space and in the communicative network at large. This is the illusion of the free market, of the freedom to buy and sell labour, freedom to choose work, a job, freedom of equal exchange between salary and labour-force, which is reflected in the availability of free communication on the market, accessible to the individual in the interests of reproducing the same communication-production cycle.

However, freedom of communication turns against the individual who must always be available, immediately, and who can always be reached (think of mobiles). The communication network penetrates even further into “private” life. Freedom of communication is effectively the obligation to be part of the communication network, enabling the productive cycle to persist and develop – obligation to respect its rhythms, to adapt to its velocity, etc.

The idea that our bodies are separate from each other, that our home is closed, that our surrounding space is autonomous and self-sufficient, is necessary to personal identity and the need to circumscribe “one’s own interests” with respect to the “interests of others.” At the same time, however, this illusion obstructs awareness of one’s inevitable involvement, even compromise, in the communicative-productive cycle, and of the negative consequences for us all. For example, the illusion of being separate and autonomous obstructs awareness of the cost of “freely” using private transport in terms of the individual’s health (pollution, urban space clogged up by the automobile industry which makes living conditions unbearable, traffic jams, car accidents, etc.). The contradiction which has emerged between productivity and health in the factory, internally and in surrounding space (which continues to expand if we consider that the radius of noxiousness provoked by technological development is increasing) has now been reposed in relation to urban space.

The freedom to use private and individual means of circulation (indeed individualized, given that we are free to choose model, colour, power, accessories etc.) justifies production, and increases risks for health in urban space. Paradoxically the cause of pollution and degradation is transformed into the solution (a mask) offered to the individual – who commutes, for example, to the work-place, because housing costs are too high in areas whose (exchange-) value has increased given their optimal position in the communication network, or simply to escape every now and again from the polluted city (free-time, weekends, holidays, etc.).

15. Migration and alterity irreducible to the labour community

In relation to its status as an “uncomfortable witness,” the “drug” phenomenon can be associated with *migration*, another large scale phenomenon of our time. Both are an embarrassment to the system. As anticipated, differently to traditional *emigration/immigration* patterns functional to the system, *migration* cannot be controlled if not in the form of repression and expulsion.

By comparison to the world of “normal” commodities, “domesticated” commodities, and to purchase and sale of labour considered as merchandise, drugs

and migration reveal the shame of generalized commodification, from this point of view the impotence of the capitalist system, its brutality. The fact that the State is forced to take strong measures against both drugs and migration, provoking intolerance in the behaviour of civil society, is symptomatic: the drug addict and the migrant (an extracommunitarian) have a common denominator in the reaction against them in terms of defence mechanisms, exclusion and elimination, provoked by the fact that they denounce insoluble contradictions in the system, simply because they exist.

Migration is the expression of a reality that is other within the totality of social reproduction today, the globalized capitalist system. This system has spread at a planetary level and includes internal areas of absolute alterity, whether they be called "underdevelopment," "developing countries," "third world," "south of the world," etc.

The absolute other is difficult to name, at times impossible: the term "extracommunitarian," coined by the European Union, belongs to the same series of names for an alterity that won't let itself to be identified. Capitalist development takes place on the basis of underdevelopment, the north of the world flourishes thanks to the south, dominating and exploiting it. The absolute other of capitalist development cannot be transformed into development because underdevelopment is a structural condition for development.

Alterity at the very heart of the identity of capitalism: alterity is generated by the capitalist social reproduction system and is at once irreducibly other with respect to the latter. At once a need and a threat: a threat in the form of a request for hospitality rather than of opposition, of struggle against capitalism. A mass request, a demand, an excess which as such accuses identity; not only is it impossible for identity to satisfy this demand, but it cannot even acknowledge it. Underdevelopment englobed in the worldwide capitalist system today demands hospitality from developed countries: this is the phenomenon of migration.

Instead, the phenomenon of *emigration* from less developed to more developed areas is a phenomenon that can be controlled and contained. But *migration* exceeds the fact of emigration. Migration does not arise as the transfer of labour-force, and as much as it is an antagonist to capital it is at once a complementary part of

it. Migration is the displacement of human beings who arrive in masses from underdeveloped areas and desperately request hospitality from developed countries, a place to live, and not simply a work-place. The request for hospitality is also interrogation of the people who already have a place (and not just a work-place) in the developed world, a request for justification from those who have a place and who have never had to account for it.

In the case of migration, the need to interrogate, the request for justification comes from absolute alterity, and not from the relative alterity of labour-force, alterity internal to the community, or if it is external, alterity that can be englobed by the community. With its request for hospitality, absolute alterity questions identity. But this request cannot be acknowledged and resounds like an accusation, even if unintentionally. The phenomenon of migration with its request for hospitality evidences a bad conscience in the good conscience of identity, it evidences aspects of the capitalist system that are felt to be better ignored: underdevelopment, oppression, segregation, poverty, famine, illness, death, war – all irreducible excesses produced by this same very system, the globalized, capitalist social reproduction system.

The request for hospitality from migration comes from an alterity that cannot be assimilated by the community – an absolute request from the extracommunitarian. The request for hospitality cannot be translated into a request for work, a job, it cannot be assimilated to the request for work from the unemployed. The extracommunitarian cannot find a place in the totality, in the order of the identical, and cannot be assimilated by the dialectics internal to social reproduction today, by its identity logic: a request from absolute alterity, the migrant, does not fit the preordained plan of *monologic* dialectics, but on the contrary denounces the risk of exposure to *dialogic* dialectics.

This request is not even made in the name of “human rights,” which in fact are normally understood as the rights of identity. Instead, this is a question of the rights of a form of humanism that is other, the rights of the *other* man, to say it with Emmanuel Levinas, of the other human being, the rights of alterity. The rights of difference. But difference that does not belong to a genus, gender, genre, to a group or class of some

sort, a community, difference that is not relative, that is not internal to community identity and its dialectics. Difference of the extracommunitarian.

16. Extracommunitarian sensibility

The community produced by capitalism and based on identity logic is neither interrogated nor put into crisis by the conflict of interests among different identities. On the contrary, the community is a result of this. As exasperated or violent as they may be, these conflicts are part of the logic of capitalism and in a sense are physiological, functional to the system. This is true to the very point that these conflicts may even be solved by resorting to the *extrema ratio* of war – it too a product, merchandise in the capitalist system.

Extracommunitarian alterity puts into question and interrogates the community produced by capitalism on the basis of the logic of identity. With migration the request from extracommunitarian alterity for hospitality reduces the possibility of constructing alibis, a good conscience, indifference on the basis of which difference can be constructed in terms of identity logic.

On one hand we have a claim to difference connected to a community or a group of some sort (sex, class, race, ethnic group, nation, individual, region, religion, history, political party, etc.), based on difference-indifference, alibis, limited responsibility, negation of unindifference; therefore we have a claim to the rights of identity, relative alterity, which is a claim from individuals identified on the basis of that community or group. On the other hand we have a request for hospitality, a claim to the rights of otherness, otherness outside a given group, class, or community. Such outsidersness, strangeness, absolute alterity, emerges in spite of efforts (which it resists) made to include it within the boundaries of a community committed to justifying its acts of refusal, emargination, expulsion. Absolute alterity is absolute alterity characterizing the unique human being and not the individual relating to a given community. The extracommunitarian demands a response that interrogates community identity and its laws, that interrogates the logic of identity. In turn, this

response can only come from alterity, from otherwise than being, otherness with respect to identity logic and the community based on such logic.

The demand for hospitality made by the extracommunitarian can only receive a reply from the perspective of the condition of “strangers to ourselves” (Kristeva), of extracommunitarians with respect to ourselves and the communities we belong to (whether collective or individual). In these communities to which we belong, our alterity as unique human beings is segregated and excluded, though never totally eliminated.

The extracommunitarian’s request is for the community to open to alterity, to the request of hospitality for alterity. However, this is a threat to identity and to community assemblages built on identity logic, a threat to reproduction of the capitalist social system. How many measures – political, economic and juridical – are necessary to avert this demand? How many armies, justifications, alibis? At the same time, however, this request is a chance – the last? – to free our alterity from the hard crust of identity, from identification based on community, from the situation of interchangeability among individuals as foreseen by identification logic. Encounter with the extra-communitarian, the migrant, the absolute other is a chance for unique human beings to manifest themselves as such, human beings made unique by unindifference, by the uniqueness of responsibility without alibis for the other; a chance to overcome the social understood as the place of mutual indifference, of encounter and clash among private interests; a chance to open all community spaces to the extracommunitarian, both within and beyond ourselves. Communities that are structurally extracommunitarian, oriented by continuous detotalization processes, beyond identity, the closed community, refounded and reformulated on the basis of alterity.

17. Alterity and proximity between migration and unemployment

The unemployed person and the migrant, both *excesses*, constitute an uneliminable limitation on the possibility of exploiting free-labour. This is a condition they share and that unites them. However, the unemployed person and the migrant are at once

divided and kept apart by a juridical and socio-political difference: the difference between *belonging* and *not belonging* to the national territory of reference. This is the difference between “communitarian” and “extracommunitarian.”

All the same, the unemployed person and the migrant are connected by an objective process. However, this objective process is not traditional *internationalism* founded on the (*concrete*) *abstraction of labour*. The delusory character of this kind of internationalism clearly emerges each time it must measure itself with the realistic solution of war: war and labour in general, abstract labour, are part of the same reality, and in this context, war – the extreme solution – has always appeared as the most realistic solution possible.

Instead, the objective process we are alluding to is represented by the fact that the (extracommunitarian) migrant and the (communitarian) unemployed person are united by a common characteristic: their *irreducibility to a (concrete) abstraction*. Such irreducibility permits *encounter outside identity*, beyond the limits of identity, *encounter among alterities, absolute alterities*.

Present-day unemployment is structural to global communication-production. If this is true, if unemployment is structural and not a transitory phase in a cycle, then it represents a decisive turning-point in relations of social reproduction. Structural unemployment is the beginning of the end of “free-labour,” of exchange between labour and salary. On this basis, a close connection can be established between unemployment and migration. In both cases expulsion is structural to the system. Neither unemployment nor migration (two growing phenomena of our time) can be absorbed by the system, neither are functional to the reproductive system that generated them. Both are excesses: the unemployed person and the migrant together represent an unavoidable limitation on the possibility of exploiting free-labour.

As communitarians the unemployed contradict communion with migrants, and variously (though uselessly) attempt to recover their threatened identity. The unemployed person defends his or her right to a job to the point of provoking new forms of racism; to the point of expelling, if not physically eliminating, the extracommunitarian. But, whether we like it or not, the truth is that the capitalist

system in its current phase of development transforms the unemployed person, an excess, the communitarian into a migrant. This means to transform the unemployed person into an individual that, differently from the emigrant and what we customarily understand as the unemployed person, is constitutively useless in the production process and cannot be absorbed by it.

To recognize this state of affairs means to re-dimension the defence of work, which either divides people on the basis of difference generating racist and ethnic-nationalist attitudes, or unites them on the basis of internationalism constructed on the indifference of abstract work. This form of internationalism is less felt in the present day and age because of the crisis of abstract labour which no longer allows for the general and alienated identity of the working class.

Instead, to recognize that unemployment and migration (the jobless and the extracommunitarian) share a common denominator means to reorganize the social. From our perspective, a fundamental aspect of this process is the project for converting liberation from abstract labour, undifferentiated labour, into free-time for alterity, absolute alterity; and increased production (thanks to development in production forces) into labour functional to the needs of all.

The prospect is that of a postcapitalist social system that is as global as the capitalist system from which it derives. However, differently from the latter, this postcapitalist social system must be open to alterity and free from obsession with identity. It must not be based on the logic of identity, but rather is extracommunitarian, other, with respect to itself. This new postcapitalist social system knows no boundaries, territories, roots, affiliations. It is not founded on labour, whether useful or abstract, but on time available for alterity, neither difference nor indifference, but unindifferent difference. Such an orientation can transform every human being on earth into a neighbour for every other.

18. Sensibility as the possibility of being *in*, but not *of* the globalized world

The world of globalization, globalized communication-production, is intimately connected with politics. The globalized world is connected with politics as a projection,

a project, as the space for the satisfaction of needs, with politics as a totalizing perspective and functional system, a strategy for production, efficiency, with politics as unquestioning acceptance of reality, guarantee for the *conatus essendi* of this world as it is, mediation of the interests of both individual and collective subjects, awareness and orientation of becoming in the light of a realistic view of the present to which even the past is also accommodated, rational administration of duration, the economy of endurance, of persisting, of progressing in being, at all costs: even at the cost of war. War is part of the world, it is foreseen by the world, it is part of world logic, of ontology, of the *conatus essendi* of this world as it is. The world is Being constitutively based on identity, the world foresees war because it needs and exploits the *other* in order to maintain, consolidate and reproduce the *same* ever more extensively. *This world is ready, is predisposed to sacrifice the other as a function of identity.*

Peace is momentary rest, reintegration of energy, truce after war, return home, repose, preparation time for new threats of continuing war; just like rest, free time, the night functional to continuing work and to the necessities of the day. Work and war: war as manifest and familiar “collective labour” in pre-capitalist production systems. Peace flourishes in and for war, just as rest, the night, flourishes in and for work, in and for the day.

The question is whether to be in and for the world is the only sense possible for Being? This is the philosophical question on the basis of which alone can we formulate an effective critique of world and globalized communication. Is there another way of experiencing the world, of being in and for the world? Is the properly human transcendent with respect to the space and time of ontology? Do there exist relations that cannot be reduced to the logic of identity? And that have nothing to do with relations between subject and object, with relations of exchange, equivalence, functionality, interest, productivity. The question is whether there exist interhuman relations that are completely *other*; but that do not belong to another world or to another dimension of being; that are not just alternatives, modalities of being otherwise.

On the contrary, the interhuman relations we are alluding to belong to the sphere of what Levinas calls *otherwise than being*, outside ontology, outside the World, but which all the same are *material* and earthly relations, an otherwise than being to which one's body can open: an earthly transcendence with respect to the World, a sense that is other with respect to an intra-worldly sense, a type of humanism that is different from the humanism of identity, from being, in other words, a humanism that is *humanism of alterity, of otherwise than being*.

These interhuman relations are *dialogic*, but not in the sense of formal dialogue or dialogue based on agreements, accords, conventions, or on dialectics in which contradictions are overcome in synthesis. On the contrary, dialogue here is understood as dialogue at a risk, exposition to alterity, hybridization of identity, break down of globalized monologism. *A critique of globalized communication is critique from the perspective of dialogic reason.*

19. Sensibility and responsibility

An approach to semiotics that is global and detotalizing is connected with the logic of alterity, of otherness, demanding a high degree in availability for the other, readiness to listen to the other, the capacity for opening to the other. Such opening must be understood not only in quantitative terms (with reference to the omnicomprehensive character of global semiotics), but also in qualitative terms. All semiotic interpretations by the scholar of signs (especially at a metasemiotic level) cannot prescind from a dialogic relationship with the other. In fact, dialogism is a fundamental condition for an approach to semiotics that is oriented globally and at once privileges opening towards the local and the particular, which is not simply enclosed and englobed by the global system. Accordingly, this approach privileges the tendency towards detotalization rather than totalization.

As Emmanuel Levinas above all has demonstrated, otherness obliges the totality to reorganize itself ever anew in a process related to what he calls "infinity." Levinas's concept of infinity can be associated with Charles S. Peirce and his concept of "infinite semiosis." The relation to infinity is far more than a cognitive issue: beyond the

established order, beyond the symbolic order, beyond our conventions and habits, the relation to infinity is a relation of involvement and responsibility. The relation to infinity is the relation to *absolute otherness*, a relation to that which is most refractory to the totality. Therefore, the relation to infinity implies a relation to the otherness of others, to the otherness of the other person, not in the sense of another self like one's own self, another *alter ego*, another I belonging to the *same community*, but rather in the sense of the other that is alien, the other in its extraneousness, strangeness, diversity, difference towards which we must not be indifferent in spite of all the efforts and guarantees to the contrary offered by identity of I, of self.

The approach we are delineating does not orient semiotics according to any specific ideological plan. Rather, semiotics concerns our understanding of behaviour in relation to the human being's unique responsibility as a "semiotic animal." Properly understood, the "semiotic animal" is a responsible agent capable of *signs of signs*, of mediation, reflection, and awareness with respect to semiosis over the entire planet. In this sense global semiotics must be adequately founded in cognitive semiotics, but it must also be open to a third dimension beyond the quantitative and the theoretical, that is, the ethical. Given that this third dimension concerns the ends we work towards and wish to reach, we have variously designated it with the expressions "teleosemiotics," "telosemiotics," and now "semioethics."

If global semiotics is to meet its commitment to the "health of semiosis" and to cultivate its capacity to understand the entire semiotic universe, it must continuously refine its auditory and critical functions, that is, its capacity for listening and critique. To accomplish this task we propose the trichotomy that distinguishes between (1) cognitive semiotics, (2) global semiotics, and (3) semioethics, which we believe is no less than decisive not only in theoretical terms but also for reasons of a therapeutic order.

20. Towards new forms of sensibility and the critical work of semioethics

In the light of what has been said so far, semioethics may be considered as proposing a new form of humanism as against the humanism of identity. As anticipated, beyond

the cognitive level, semioethics is committed to an ethical perspective on the life of signs, therefore to the pragmatic level. Furthermore, semioethics aims to transcend separatism among the sciences and to connect the natural sciences and the logico-mathematical sciences, on the one hand, to the historical-social or human sciences, on the other, recovering interconnections that were originally inscribed in the various fields of human knowledge. In particular, as we have attempted to demonstrate with this paper, semioethics evidences the connection between the problem of humanism and the logic of alterity, working for the assertion of a new form of humanism, the *humanism of alterity*. And, in fact, as maintained by Levinas throughout all his writings (see, for example, *Humanisme de l'autre homme* 1972), this new form of humanism must be nothing less than the *humanism of alterity*.

The claim to human rights centred on the logic of identity, as we have seen, is the approach to human rights that has dominated through to this very moment in history with the humanism of identity. But the humanism of identity has left out the “rights of the other” from the concept of “human rights”, nor does the present-day world offer significant signs of change. However, the humanism of identity must be counteracted by the humanism of alterity where the rights of the other are the first to be recognized, if we intend to safeguard the health of semiosis over the globe, which today is heavily compromised. And when we speak of the rights of the other, these are not only the rights of the other *beyond self*, but also the rights of the other *of self*. The humanism of identity is characterized by the dominant tendency practiced by self to remove, suffocate, segregate the other, that is, to sacrifice otherness on the altar of identity. But identity thus achieved is fictitious, and all efforts made to maintain or recover identity in such terms are destined to fail.

Semiotics can contribute to the humanism of alterity by evidencing the extension and pervasiveness of the sign network that interconnects every human being to every other, where interconnection is a fact of synchrony as much as of diachrony. The worldwide spread of global communication means that the communication sign system is operative on a planetary level and involves living organisms worldwide. As such global communication is a global phenomenon susceptible to synchronic analysis.

Human beings and more generally all living organisms are part of a life system where all terms are interconnected synchronically. But the destiny of the single individual as of all life forms is implied in the destiny of the human species, just as vice versa the human species with all life forms are implied and compromised by decisions and the destiny of the single individual, in the past and in the evolutionary future, in biological terms as well as in historical-social terms. From this perspective global communication also calls for diachronic investigations, staggering at the very least for diversity. The sign network as commonly understood concerns the semiosphere as constructed by humankind, a sphere inclusive of culture, its signs, symbols, artifacts, etc.; but global semiotics teaches us that this semiosphere is part of a far broader semiosphere, the semiobiosphere, which forms the habitat of humankind and of its humanity (the matrix whence we sprang and the stage on which we are destined to act).

Semiotics has the merit of having demonstrated that whatever is human involves signs. Indeed, it implies more than this: whatever is simply alive involves signs. And this is as far as cognitive semiotics and global semiotics have reached. However, semioethics offers a perspective that pushes such awareness even further. We are alluding to the fact that from a semioethic perspective the question of responsibility at the most radical level (that of defining commitments and values) cannot be escaped. Our ethos, but more than this, the cosmos itself falls within the scope of our responsibility. Among other things, this implies that we must interpret the sign behaviour of humanity in the light of the hypothesis that if all the human involves signs, all signs in turn are human. However, this humanistic commitment does not mean to reassert humanity's (monologic) identity yet again, nor to propose yet another form of anthropocentrism. On the contrary, this commitment implies a radical operation of decentralization, nothing less than a Copernican revolution. As Victoria Welby would have said, "geocentrism" must be transcended, then "heliocentrism" itself, until we approximate a truly cosmic perspective – what we might call a cosmo-semiotic perspective. The attainment or approximation of such a perspective is an integral part of our ultimate end, hence a point where global semiotics and teleo- or telosemiotics or semioethics intersect.

Developing a famous saying by Terence (“*homo sum: umani nihil a me alienum puto*”), Roman Jakobson (1963) asserts that: “*linguista sum: linguistici nihil a me alienum puto.*” This commitment on the part of the semiotician to all that is linguistic, indeed, to all that is endowed with sign value (not only relative to anthroposemiosis or zoosemiosis, but to the whole semiobiosphere) should not only be understood in a cognitive sense but also in the ethical. And this commitment means “to be concerned” not only in the sense of “being concerned with...,” but also in the sense of “being concerned for...,” “taking care of...” Returning to Terence beyond Jakobson’s interpretation centred on the commitment of linguists and semioticians, we can now make the claim that as human beings nothing that is a sign can be considered as ‘*a me alienum.*’ As human beings we are not only *semiotic animals* (like all other animals), but also *semiotic* animals, animals capable of critical deliberation and responsibility, and in this sense we are unique. On this basis, nothing semiotic, including the biosphere at large and the evolutionary cosmos whence it sprang, is alien to me as a human being, therefore nothing semiotic “*a me alienum puto.*” And from this point of view human beings are not only *semiotic animals* but also *semioethic animals*.

Semioethics does not have a program to propose with intended goals and practices, nor a decalogue, nor a formula to apply more or less sincerely, more or less hypocritically. Semioethics contrasts with *stereotypes* as much as with *norms* and *ideology* and proposes a *critique* of stereotypes, norms and ideology, consequently a critique of different types of value (see, for example, Charles W. Morris 1964). Semioethics is a capacity for critique with a special vocation to render sign networks manifest where it seemed there were none, evidencing and evaluating connections, implications, involvement, (hi)stories which cannot be evaded, where it seemed there were only net separations, distinct boundaries and distances with relative alibis. Alibis serve to limit responsibility and to safeguard one’s “clean conscience.” The component “*telos*” mentioned above in the expression “teleo-” or “telosemiotics” does not indicate an external value or pre-established end, an ultimate end, a *summum bonum* outside the sign network. On the contrary, it is intended to indicate the *telos* of semiosis itself understood as an orientation beyond the totality, beyond the closure of

totality, transcendence with respect to a given entity, a given being, infinite semiosis, movement towards infinity, desire of the other. And in the present context, we propose that one of the special tasks of semioethics must be to expose the illusoriness of a common claim to the status of indifferent differences, that is to say, of differences that are mutually indifferent to each other.

Semiotics not only as a science but also as an attitude characteristic of the “semiotic animal” arises within the sphere of anthroposemiosis. This is to say that semiotics is uniquely connected with the *Umwelt* of human beings, with the species-specific modeling capacity proper to human beings, capable of producing a great plurality of different worlds and worldviews (and not with the *Umwelt* of any other animal species). Semiotics is a fact of the human species and is decided as a part of the world produced historically and socially by human beings. In other words, the effective potential to develop semiotics as an attitude, the human capacity for responsible understanding, is a fact of the historical-social order which also presupposes the biological order. Our *Umwelt* is determined by the species but it is also a historical-social product. The possibility of transformation, of alternative hypotheses has its effective point of departure, terms of confrontation, materials and instruments for critique and programming in historical-social reality as it gradually emerges in the biological and historical-social reality of semiosis.

The critical work of *semioethics* shows how differences indifferent to each other is an illusion, and how the whole planet’s destiny is implied in the behaviour of human beings. Semioethics must necessarily develop unprejudiced analysis and interrogation of the social system from which it arises, it must begin from where we are today historically and socially, from a rigorous and precise analysis of contemporaneity, therefore of today’s communication-production relationships.

We know that globalization with its worldwide spread of communication-production has homologated social models of production to high degrees, which from the point of view of analysis is an “advantage”. A single type of market dominates the planet, a single type of production, exchange and consumption system. And, to repeat, this favours homologation not only of human behavior, habit, fashion (including dress

fashion), but also of the imaginary. Considering the general social reproduction system as it dominates and englobes the planet today, difference understood in terms of *otherness* is clearly being replaced by difference understood in terms of *alternatives*. And, in fact, the “advantage” just mentioned consists in the reality of being faced with a unified object of analysis, which means that a great variety of different issues will not be accounted for, making analysis easier, less demanding. But the word “advantage” is intended ironically for the implication is that we are dealing with reality taken as a single, compact, monolithic block. This is the false advantage of *monologism*, which inevitably backfires on the capacity for critique, and obstacles responsible awareness, by contrast with the condition of plurivocality and polylogism, which instead favours creative interpretation and critical questioning. Moreover, the work of critique is also made difficult by the fact that appropriate conceptual instruments are not yet readily available; new categories and assumptions capable of responding to innovation, and which cannot be taken for granted in the present phase of development in history, must be constructed. Semioethics offers a broad and critical perspective for human beings in their role of semiotic animals, therefore of *cosmically* responsible agents. Today, perhaps more than ever before, not only must we explain this perspective but we must insist on the need to develop it in the most conscientious, creative, and responsible way possible.

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