

Lesson 10

Semiosis and Life: What Lies in Their future?

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As we have repeated throughout these lessons, semiotics as “semioethics” and “philosophy of language” places otherness at the heart of the sign and is associated to the “art of listening”. The vocation of language and communication is otherness and calls for a critique of identity. In the relation with philosophy of language understood as opening toward the other, semiotics oriented as global semiotics privileges the movement of detotalization over totalization, opening over the tendency to englobe and enclose. Such an orientation enables the general science of signs to get free of the tendency toward gnoseologism in its various forms, toward positivistic adjustment to the being of things, and of passive servility toward relations of power and control in the communication-production system. Thus conceived the project for semiotics is not connected to any particular ideology but concerns the capacity for awareness and behaviour informed by responsibility toward semiosis over the entire planet, a prerogative of human animals as “semiotic animals” (Deely, Petrilli, Ponzio 2005).

So, related to the philosophy of language as the art of listening, semiotics, if adequately formulated in terms of a general theory of signs, is oriented in the direction of a third sense, that of sense and value (semioethics), beyond the quantitative (global semiotics) and the theoretical (general semiotics).

By way of conclusion to these lessons for Prof. Paul Bouissac and his Semiotic Institute Online, we will now repropose the following text adapted from my book of 2014, *Sign Studies and Semioethics. Communication, Translation and Values*, published in the book series “Semiotics, Communication and Cognition, directed by Paul Copley and Kalevi Kull (Petrilli 2014: 336-341).

In “Semiosis and Semiotics: What Lies in Their Future?,” Thomas Sebeok (in 1991a: 97-99) briefly considers the possibility of semiosis continuing beyond life understood in strictly organic terms. The different spheres of what he dubs “cybersemiosis”

and its possible developments indubitably amount to an interesting perspective (Floreano and Mattiussi 2008). Another possible response, after Sebeok, is summed up in the ten core theses below, proposed by the Bari-Lecce School research programme in semiotics founded by Augusto Ponzio (see Caputo, Petrilli, Ponzio 2006). Semiotics can contribute toward a better understanding of the behaviour of human beings as semiotic animals and of the sense of the common condition of global implication in each other's lives, in life generally. The "semiotic animal" is capable of signs of signs, of mediation among signs and of reflection with respect to semiosis over the globe.

To meet the task, global semiotics must also be open to the ethical dimension, that concerning the goals and ends orienting human semiosis. For this particular slant in sign studies, focused on the relation of signs to values and human action, Augusto Ponzio and I originally introduced the term "ethosemiotics," then "teleo-semiotics" and subsequently "telosemiotics," though we ended up opting for the term "semioethics," as indicated by the title of our 2003 monograph, *Semioetica* (see also Petrilli and Ponzio 2005: 535-559, and 2010; Petrilli 2010a: 3-48). As semioethics, semiotics is committed to the "health of semiosis" and the "quality of life" globally which implies cultivating the capacity for listening and understanding, oriented by the humanism of otherness at the interface between sign theory and axiology, ethics and pragmatism.

The present is the "future perfect of the future of semiosis" because the conditions are created today for semiotics and semiosis tomorrow – where by "semiotics" is understood not only the general science of signs, but the human species-specific capacity to reflect on signs and behave as a consequence. And given that semiotics is also semeiotics or symptomatology and orients our attention in the sense of caring for the other, the problem is not only of the theoretical order, but also of the practical-ethical order.

The Bari-Lecce School advocates a critical approach to semiotics founded on a series of methodological principles. These include the "logic of otherness" understood as the foundational dimension of the sign; the "dialogical dimension" of semiosis; the ideological, practical and ethical implications of dialogical otherness for human semiosis; the concepts of "listening," "responsive understanding," and of "unindifferent difference" in the relation among signs; thematization of the self as a sign, therefore as an open and dialogic community oriented by the logic of otherness structural to identity.

On the basis of the Marxian critique of political economy applied to signs and language, with special reference to writings by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, other centrally important concepts in our research on signs in the human world include "semiotic

materiality,” “sign residue,” “linguistic alienation” and “communication-production.” Reflection on signs, language and communication must be critical, detotalizing and demystifying. This implies, among all else, a critique of “stereotypes.” Stereotypes are accepted passively and dogmatically, as Adam Schaff has demonstrated. A critique of stereotypes also implies a critique of the related concept of “hard dry facts.” As studies by Morris and Rossi-Landi have clearly revealed, but also studies by Welby before them, “facts” are always mediated by signs and values.

Relations emerge among human beings, where it was previously thought that there only existed relations among things (commodities) and reified relations among signs (stereotypes). Furthermore, as Louis Hjelmslev illustrates, form and matter of the sign do not belong to the sphere of the a priori, but rather are developed in the processes of semiosis (Caputo 2010a, b). All this leads to the need for critique focused on the material foundations of social reproduction and on the production of sense.

The original ten core theses proposed by the Bari-Lecce school of semiotics read as follows, here revised and reformulated:

Thesis 1: A general theory of signs must avoid glottocentrism which takes the verbal sign as its general sign model and the linguistics of verbal sign systems as its model science. General semiotics transcends the limits of semiotics understood as semiology according to a tradition that can be traced back to Saussure, or better to a distorted reading of Saussure. Semiology studies the signs of social life and should not be confused with general semiotics. It excludes “natural” signs and all non-conventional signs that do not enter communication understood in this restricted sense, as social communication.

At the beginning of the 1960s, Barthes in his *Éléments de sémiologie* clarified that, in reality, the sign systems studied by Saussurean *sémiologie* are translinguistic systems, that is to say, sign systems supported by verbal signs. Once semiology was identified as translinguistics, Barthes rightly proposed an inversion in the relationship between semiology and linguistics as established by Saussure: semiology does not contain linguistics, as one of its parts, but rather linguistics contains semiology. Saussure effectively asserted, and rightly so, that it was necessary to construct a general science of signs before constructing a general linguistics. Consequently, it was necessary to explain what a sign in general is in order to explain what a verbal sign is. Nonetheless, in his own interpretation of the relationship between semiology and linguistics, his conception of the general sign science clearly privileged the verbal sign and was modelled as a consequence.

However, once semiotics is understood in terms of global semiotics Saussure is right. The general science of signs is the wider circle in which is inscribed the smaller circle represented by linguistics. But in this case the science of signs is not semiology, vitiated by glottocentrism, but rather semiotics understood as the study of verbal and nonverbal signs. Instead, semiology unmasked by Roland Barthes as translinguistics forms an even smaller circle englobed within the circle of linguistics. So that Barthes too was right. Here “linguistics” is understood in Morris’s sense as formulated in his epochal 1946 monograph, *Signs, Language, and Behavior*. Linguistics, according to Morris is not “linguistics” of the linguists, but is understood in far broader terms to concern human language in general, which in his own words is not only made of “verbal bricks.” Sebeok (who studied with Morris) was subsequently to develop this particular meaning of the term “language” in the sense of “primary modelling” as distinct from “speech.” The animal *homo* is equipped with primary modelling from his early appearance as a hominid.

Thesis 2: A general sign model cannot be constructed on the basis of the verbal sign. This approach is subtended by the fallacy that we can only deal with signs, all types of signs by speaking about them, through verbal signs, by transposing and translating signs verbally. On the contrary, for the construction of a general sign paradigm, our model must refer to the sign most refractory to verbal translation, the sign most resistant, most irreducible, in this sense most other. A sign that responds to such characteristics with its relative language is the musical sign, the language of music. The musical sign escapes imperialism of the word, which means to say it escapes the limits of the glottocentric approach to semiotics characteristic of semiology.

Semiotics, understood as a general sign theory can be described as musical semiotics, semiotics which refers to the musical sign as the term of verification of its own general validity, of its effective capacity as general semiotics. This is not a matter of semiotics applied to music, but of semiotics that keeps account of semiosis in music, that keeps account of the interpretive and expressive practices of music, of the signs of music: from this point of view “of music” is understood as a subject genitive and not as an object genitive. The general theory of sign takes that which is essential in music as its own methodological condition: the capacity for listening. The “methodics” of semiotics is the “methodics “of listening (Ponzio and Lomuto 1997; Petrilli 2007; Petrilli and Ponzio 2016).

Thesis 3: Listening is an interpretant of responsive understanding, a disposition for

the welcome and hospitality, in the house of semiotics, toward signs that are other, signs of otherness: these signs reach such a high degree of otherness that overall they can only be named in the negative with respect to the verbal, that is, as nonverbal signs. Listening is the condition for a general theory of sign insofar as it is oriented by the logic of otherness.

Thesis 4: In terms of extension, semiotics must tend toward the global. From this point of view, an exemplary text is *Global Semiotics*, Thomas A. Sebeok's book of 2001, the last to appear before his death that same year and the point of arrival of his lifelong research. Whatever one's specific interest in the study of signs, the specific territory, the trajectories outlining the sphere of attention, semiotics must construct a general map showing exactly where we are ("you are here").

Thesis 5: Semiotics as a science must be conscious of its very conditions of possibility and consequently deal with the problem of its foundations. Semiotics understood as the general science of signs is founded on a special capacity, that is, on semiotics understood as a species-specific modality of using signs, that is, specific to the human being, the only semiotic animal existing. This special capacity has been tagged metasemiosis (or "semiotics" in this second sense). It distinguishes the human being from other living beings that are only capable of semiosis. To investigate the foundations of semiotics means to extend the gaze beyond the boundaries of identity logic, beyond the boundaries of institutional semiotics, to contemplate the conditions that make semiotics understood as metasemiosis possible. What emerges is the syntactical capacity specific to human beings designated by Sebeok as primary modelling, nonverbal and not directed to communication, nor to language understood as a verbal or nonverbal communication system.

Thesis 6: Language-syntactics tells of the metaoperative capacity specific to human beings, namely the capacity to act in the absence of objects and goals (nonfunctionally), the capacity for invention and abstraction; it tells of the capacity for metasemiosis which distinguishes human beings from all other living beings that are endowed exclusively with a capacity for semiosis. Language as modelling is a condition for semiotics understood as metasemiosis, the capacity for reflection or recognition and description of semiosis.

Thesis 7: Semiotics is connected with responsibility. Metasemiosis, understood as the capacity to reflect upon signs, is exclusive to human animals and is connected with

responsibility: the human being, a semiotic animal, is the only one capable of responding to signs in the sense of accounting for signs and behaviour, for the self. This means to say that the human being is subject to and subject of responsibility. To the extent that semioticians practice metasemiotics, they are doubly responsible: semioticians must account for self and for others and as global semioticians, for all life-forms over the planet.

Thesis 8: Semiotics is a critical science not only *à la* Kant, in the sense that it investigates its own conditions of possibility and its own limits, but also *à la* Marx. In other words, semiotics as a critical science questions the contemporary human world on the assumption that it is not the only possible world, that it is not defined once and for all, as, instead, conservative ideology represents it. Critical semiotics considers the world-as-it-is as one only among many possible worlds, a world susceptible to confutation. Thus described, the critical instance of semiotics aims to recover the sense of sign production, exchange and consumption for humanity, the sense of the world, the sense of life, the sense itself of humanity.

Thesis 9: As global semiotics, metasemiotics, critical semiotics (in the double sense suggested, twice subject to responsibility), semiotics must be concerned with life over the planet – also in the pragmatic sense of concern for keeping life healthy, of caring for life. From this point of view, as hinted above, semiotics recovers its relation to medical semeiotics, or symptomatology, which beyond historical awareness of the origins, is also a question of the ideologic-programmatic order.

From this point of view, semiotics emphasizes listening in the sense of medical semeiotics, or symptomatology. No doubt an important task for semiotics today is to listen to the symptoms of our globalized world and identify the different aspects of *malaise* (in social relations, international and intercultural relations, in the life of single individuals, in the relation to the environment, in life generally over the planet). By contrast to a globalized world tending toward its own destruction, the goal is to formulate a diagnosis, a prognosis and to indicate possible pathways for the health of semiosis and new and better forms of globalization.

Thesis 10: This programme outlines a special approach to semiotics as practised by the Bari-Lecce School and designated as semioethics. Semioethics promotes semiotic research for a better understanding of global communication and the possibility of a future.

The notion of “global communication” itself is understood in a double sense. In ordinary language, in the mass-medial version of the expression, with reference to the current economic, sociological, political situation, “global communication” is associated with “globalization” as interpreted by today’s social reproduction system. From this point of view, global communication is connected with progress in technology and expansion of the market – but such aspects also constitute its limits. According to this description, global communication in the context of today’s social reproduction system reflects only one dimension of the great web of communication that is life over the planet Earth. Instead, as a biosemiotic phenomenon, global communication is a condition for evolutionary development and the proliferation of life.

From this point of view, the vital challenge for human beings today is to reconcile globalization with global communication thus described, therefore with life or better the quality of life over the whole planet (Petrilli 2004e, 2008; Petrilli and Ponzio 2002a; Ponzio 2002d). “Vital” here is understood in the sense of crucial, essential, but also in the sense that it is a matter of life, that life is at stake. Such issues involve human beings as unique “semiotic animals,” or, better, as unique “semioethical animals.” Given that we live in a sign network where interconnection with the other, involvement with the other is inevitable (whether we like it or not), indifferent difference, that is to say, difference that is indifferent to the other, is ultimately impossible in the relation among human beings. If the other is acknowledged as structural to signs, then the ethical dimension of life, which revolves around the otherness relationship, emerges from the very dynamics of semiosis; and the discipline that studies semiosis, “semiotics,” emerges as “semioethics.”

As we have repeated throughout these lessons, semiotics as “semioethics” and “philosophy of language” places otherness at the heart of the sign and is associated to the “art of listening”. The vocation of language and communication is otherness and calls for a critique of identity. In the relation with philosophy of language understood as opening towards the other, semiotics oriented as global semiotics privileges the movement of detotalization over totalization, opening over the tendency to englobe and enclose. Such an orientation enables the general science of signs to get free of the tendency towards gnoseologism in its various forms, towards positivistic adjustment to the being of things, and of passive servility towards relations of power and control in the communication-production system. Thus conceived the project for semiotics is not connected to any particular ideology but concerns the capacity

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However, once semiotics is understood in terms of global semiotics Saussure is right. The general science of signs is the wider circle in which is inscribed the smaller circle represented by linguistics. But in this case the science of signs is not semiology, vitiated by glottocentrism, but rather semiotics understood as the study of verbal and nonverbal signs. Instead, semiology unmasked by Roland Barthes as translinguistics forms an even smaller circle englobed within the circle of linguistics. So that Barthes too was right. Here “linguistics” is understood in Morris’s sense as formulated in his epochal 1946 monograph, *Signs, Language, and Behaviour*. Linguistics, according to Morris is not “linguistics” of the linguists, but is understood in far broader terms to concern human language in general, which in his own words is not only made of “verbal bricks”. Sebeok (who studied with Morris) was subsequently to develop this particular meaning of the term “language” in the sense of “primary modelling” as distinct from “speech”. The animal *homo* is equipped with primary modelling from his early appearance as a hominid.

Thesis 2: A general sign model cannot be constructed on the basis of the verbal sign. This approach is subtended by the fallacy that we can only deal with signs, all types of signs by speaking about them, through verbal signs, by transposing and translating signs verbally. On the contrary, for the construction of a general sign paradigm, our model must refer to the sign most refractory to verbal translation, the sign most resistant, most irreducible, in this sense most other. A sign that responds to such characteristics with its relative language is the

musical sign, the language of music. The musical sign escapes imperialism of the word, which means to say it escapes the limits of the glottocentric approach to semiotics characteristic of semiology.

Semiotics, understood as a general sign theory can be described as musical semiotics, semiotics which refers to the musical sign as the term of verification of its own general validity, of its effective capacity as general semiotics. This is not a matter of semiotics applied to music, but of semiotics that keeps account of semiosis in music, that keeps account of the interpretive and expressive practices of music, of the signs of music: from this point of view “of music” is understood as a subject genitive and not as an object genitive. The general theory of sign takes that which is essential in music as its own methodological condition: the capacity for listening. The “methodics” of semiotics is the “methodics “of listening (Ponzio and Lomuto 1997; Petrilli 2007; Petrilli and Ponzio 2016).

Thesis 3: Listening is an interpretant of responsive understanding, a disposition for the welcome and hospitality, in the house of semiotics, towards signs that are other, signs of otherness: these signs reach such a high degree of otherness that overall they can only be named in the negative with respect to the verbal, that is, as nonverbal signs. Listening is the condition for a general theory of sign insofar as it is oriented by the logic of otherness.

Thesis 4: In terms of extension, semiotics must tend towards the global. From this point of view, an exemplary text is *Global Semiotics*, Thomas A. Sebeok’s book of 2001, the last to appear before his death that same year and the point of arrival of his lifelong research. Whatever one’s specific interest in the study of signs, the specific territory, the trajectories outlining the sphere of attention, semiotics must construct a general map showing exactly where we are (“you are here”).

Thesis 5: Semiotics as a science must be conscious of its very conditions of possibility and consequently deal with the problem of its foundations. Semiotics understood as the general science of signs is founded on a special capacity, that is, on semiotics understood as a species-specific modality of using signs, that is, specific to the human being, the only semiotic animal existing. This special capacity has been tagged metasemiosis (or “semiotics” in this second sense). It distinguishes the human being from other living beings that are only capable of semiosis. To investigate the foundations of semiotics means to extend the gaze beyond the boundaries of identity logic, beyond the boundaries of

institutional semiotics, to contemplate the conditions that make semiotics understood as metasemiosis possible. What emerges is the syntactical capacity specific to human beings designated by Sebeok as primary modelling, nonverbal and not directed to communication, nor to language understood as a verbal or nonverbal communication system.

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Thesis 7: Semiotics is connected with responsibility. Metasemiosis, understood as the capacity to reflect upon signs, is exclusive to human animals and is connected with responsibility: the human being, a semiotic animal, is the only one capable of responding to signs in the sense of accounting for signs and behaviour, for the self. This means to say that the human being is subject to and subject of responsibility. To the extent that semioticians practice metasemiotics, they are doubly responsible: semioticians must account for self and for others and as global semioticians, for all life-forms over the planet.

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Thesis 9: As global semiotics, metasemiotics, critical semiotics (in the double sense suggested, twice subject to responsibility), semiotics must be concerned with life over the planet – also in the pragmatic sense of concern for keeping life healthy, of caring for life. From this point of view, as hinted above, semiotics recovers its relation to medical

semeiotics, or symptomatology, which beyond historical awareness of the origins, is also a question of the ideologic-programmatic order.

From this point of view, semiotics emphasizes listening in the sense of medical semeiotics, or symptomatology. No doubt an important task for semiotics today is to listen to the symptoms of our globalized world and identify the different aspects of *malaise* (in social relations, international and intercultural relations, in the life of single individuals, in the relation to the environment, in life generally over the planet). By contrast to a globalized world tending towards its own destruction, the goal is to formulate a diagnosis, a prognosis and to indicate possible pathways for the health of semiosis and new and better forms of globalization.

Thesis 10: This programme outlines a special approach to semiotics as practised by the Bari-Lecce School and designated as semioethics. Semioethics promotes semiotic research for a better understanding of global communication and the possibility of a future. The notion of “global communication” itself is understood in a double sense. In ordinary language, in the mass-medial version of the expression, with reference to the current economic, sociological, political situation, “global communication” is associated with “globalization” as interpreted by today’s social reproduction system. From this point of view, global communication is connected with progress in technology and expansion of the market – but such aspects also constitute its limits. According to this description, global communication in the context of today’s social reproduction system reflects only one dimension of the great web of communication that is life over the planet Earth. Instead, as a biosemiotic phenomenon, global communication is a condition for evolutionary development and the proliferation of life.

From this point of view, the vital challenge for human beings today is to reconcile globalization with global communication thus described, therefore with life or better the quality of life over the whole planet (Petrilli 2004e, 2008; Petrilli and Ponzio 2002a; Ponzio 2002d). “Vital” here is understood in the sense of crucial, essential, but also in the sense that it is a matter of life, that life is at stake. Such issues involve human beings as unique “semiotic animals,” or, better, as unique “semioethic animals”. Given that we live in a sign network where interconnection with the other, involvement with the other is inevitable (whether we like it or not), indifferent difference, that is to say, difference that is indifferent to the other, is ultimately impossible in the relation among human beings. If the other is acknowledged as structural to signs, then the ethical dimension of life, which revolves

around the otherness relationship, emerges from the very dynamics of semiosis; and the discipline that studies semiosis, “semiotics,” emerges as “semioethics”.

To conclude, then, on a note for the future of semiosis and semiotics, which means to say for life, for the other, for our well-being, health and safeguard, let us we even dare for our happiness: Semiotics as global semiotics has a vocation for life and communication. Semiotics as semioethics evidences this vocation for life and communication as the vocation for otherness, based on listening to the other, alias responsibility for the other, hospitality toward the other, ultimately caring for the other. Listening is closely connected with music. In the first and second volumes of *Semiotik/Semiotics. A Handbook on the Sign-Theoretic Foundations of Nature and Culture* (Posner, Sebeok, Robering 1997-2004), music is treated as a topic in the study of signs, and is analyzed in different cultures and successive eras in Western history: sign conceptions in music in Ancient Greece and Rome (Riethmüller 1997), in the Latin Middle Ages (Gallo 1997), from the Renaissance to the early 19th century (Baroni 1998), from the 19th century to the present (Tarasti 1998). And as part of the discussion on the relationship between semiotics and the individual disciplines, the third volume includes an article on semiotics of music as well (see Mazzola 2003). As for other disciplines, reflections in musicology focus on the epistemologically relevant question of the extent to which the subject matter, methods, and forms of presentation in this discipline as well may be understood in terms of sign process.

In any case, we must observe that music is not just another subject among many others in semiotics. Music is a special subject. Music carries out a very special function in sign and communication processes and is capable of providing methodological indications for an adequate understanding of such processes by the disciplines that study them, if we are ready to listen.

With respect to semiotics and the other sciences of language, music has proven to be a particularly difficult topic to deal with in terms of the verbal language paradigm. Of the various languages, music more than any other resists the phonocentric approach to semiosis. Semiotics of music must in fact address the question: “what semiotics for semiotics of music?”.

In relation to the signs of music, semiotics must be ready to interrogate its own categories and methods. Music may be understood in terms of sign processes on the condition that semiotics is understood as “semiotics of music” where “of music” signifies

the subject genitive. That is to say, we are not concerned with semiotics applied to music, but with music as the perspective of semiotics.

Music is inconceivable without *listening*, from which it follows that semiotics of music implies *semiotics of listening*. Instead of interrogating different types of signs on the basis of preexisting categories, semiotics described relatedly to music is in the first place listening. Global semiotics is global not only in terms of extension, but first and foremost because of its capacity for listening (on these aspects of general semiotics and semiotics of music, see Ponzio 1993: 138-154; Lomuto, Ponzio 1997; Petrilli 2018a).

Listening evokes auscultation, a medical attitude. In Ancient Greece music was thought to be therapeutic. On the other hand, semiotics possibly originated from semeiotics, classified by Galen as one of the principal branches of medicine (on sign conceptions in medicine in Ancient Greece, see Langhoff 1997; on the medical origin of semiotics, see Sebeok 1994: 50–54; on Galen in medical semiotics, see Sebeok 2001: 44–58). In addition to auscultation and other ways of investigating symptoms, the activities of diagnosis and anamnesis, following Galen, include listening to the patient who is invited to discuss his ailments and to tell the story of his troubles. But medicine today, as denounced by Michel Foucault, is functional to exercising what he calls “bio-power,” that is, to promoting the techniques of subordination of the body to the knowledge-power of *biopolitics*.

Medicine contributes to the controlled insertion of bodies into the production cycle. With its specialisms and manipulation of bodies as self-sufficient entities, medical discourse today reinforces the dominant conception of the individual as belonging to spheres of interest that are separate from each other, indifferent to each other, in pursuit of needs and aspirations that fail to keep account of the other or of the individual’s condition of dependency upon the other, ultimately of the inevitable semiosical, which in the anthroposemiosphere is also the semiotical, condition of intercorporeity, interconnectedness, in this sense interdependency with the other, thus of the individual’s need for listening to the other, for responsivity towards the other, which in the human world is also responsibility towards that other, whether the other of self or the other from self, before and beyond self.

In such a context listening becomes “direct, univocal listening,” imposed by the Law (Barthes, Havas 1977: 989), by the “order of discourse” (Foucault 1970), it becomes “applied listening,” “wanting to hear,” imposition to speak and, therefore, to say univocally. *Listening* is one thing, *to want to hear* is another. Listening is responsive understanding: “listening speaks,” says Barthes (Barthes, Havas 1977: 990), similarly to Bakhtin; listening is turned to signs in their constitutive dialogism.

On excluding responsive listening, the will to hear or applied listening belongs to a “closed universe of discourse” (Marcuse), which fixes interrogation and responsive roles and separates listening from responsive understanding (answering comprehension). Unlike listening understood as dialogue and responsive understanding which continuously produces new signifiers and interpretants without ever fixing or freezing sense, instead “applied” listening takes place in a rigid network of speech roles: it maintains the “ancient places of the believer, the disciple, the patient” (Barthes, Havas 1977: 990).

Listening is decisive for the task of global semiotics, for the capacity to understand the entire semiotic universe and to discuss the different forms of separatism with the different tendencies to exchange the part for the whole, whether by mistake or in bad faith. Such a tendency is characteristic of individualism in social and intercultural life and of the current “crisis of overspecialization” (Posner *et al.* 1997: xxix) in scientific research.

The capacity for listening is a condition for semiotics to recover its early vocation and expression as medical semeiotics, or symptomatology, as described Thomas Sebeok. If semiotics is concerned with life and communication throughout the entire globe, given that life and semiosis coincide (for a critical discussion of the equation between “the concepts of life process and sign process,” see Kull 2002), and if the original reason stimulating the study of signs is the “health” of semiosis, alias the health of life, the claim is that a non negligible task for semiotics – especially today in the era of globalization – is to care for all of life and communication over the planet earth in its globality.