

**Ten theses for the future anterior of semiotics.
The Bari-Lecce School Program for semiotics**

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We shall attempt to indicate in ten theses what we believe are the conditions for the future of semiotics, the conditions thanks to which semiotics may have a future. In this sense we may speak of the *anterior future* of semiotics – *anterior future* which is our *present* and, therefore, depends on us. We today are responsible for the anterior future of the future of semiotics.

What we are now presenting may be considered as the *Bari-Lecce program for semiotics*, which may be articulated into the following ten theses.

Thesis 1

Semiotics must base itself on a *general theory of signs*. This general theory and the related notion of the sign in general must avoid the limit often presented by semiotics especially when it takes the form of *semiology* of Saussurean derivation: in other words, a general theory of sign must avoid *glottocentrism*. Glottocentrism means to refer to the verbal sign as the model of sign in general and, therefore, to linguistics as the model science of semiotics. (Consequently, from this point of view, Barthes was right when he said that being infected by glottocentrism “semiology” is englobed by linguistics, despite Saussure’s intention to the contrary of having semiology englobe linguistics).

The model of sign in general as proposed by a general theory of sign to which semiotics must refer cannot be constructed on the basis of the verbal sign. This approach is based on the fallacy that we can only deal with any kind of sign by *speaking* about it, by using *verbal signs*, that is, by transposing and translating signs verbally. For the construction of a *general* model of sign, our model should be the sign most refractory to verbal translation, the most *resistant*, the most *irreducible*, in this sense the most *other*. A sign that responds to these characteristics, with its relative language, is the *musical sign*, therefore the language of *music*. The musical sign evades imperialism of the word and consequently cannot be dealt with in terms of a glottocentric semiotics as in fact occurred with semiology.

Thesis 2

Semiotics understood as a general theory of sign must be *semiotics of music*. In other words, a general theory of sign must refer to the sign of the language of music as a way of verifying its own effectively general character, its effective capacity as general semiotics. This

is not a question of applying semiotics to music, but of constructing semiotics keeping account of music: in this sense “of music” is intended as a *subject genitive* and not object genitive.

Thesis 3

An immediate consequence of the fact that general semiotics is semiotics of music, semiotics that is “musical”, in other words, semiotics in a musical key, is that the general theory of sign takes that which is essential in music as its methodological condition: the capacity for *listening*.

The methodics of semiotics is a *methodics of listening*. Listening is the interpretant of answering comprehension, it is the disposition for hospitality, for welcoming the signs of others, the signs of the *other person*, for welcoming signs that are *other* into the house of semiotics, into the building of semiotics: signs that are other to such a high degree that generally we can only denominate them in the negative, that is, *nonverbal signs*. *Listening is the condition for a general theory of signs*.

Thesis 4

As to the *extension* of semiotics, semiotics must tend toward *global semiotics*. From this point of view, an exemplary text is *Global Semiotics*, the last book of 2001 published by Thomas A. Sebeok before his death in that same year, and point of arrival of all his research. Semiotics must construct a general map that is able to inform us as to our whereabouts, that is able to say: “you are here”, whatever the specific territory and trajectory at the centre of one’s interest in the study of sign.

Thesis 5

Semiotics as a science must become conscious of the conditions that make it possible. Semiotics as a science is founded on a special capacity, the allusion is to *semiotics* understood as a species specific modality of using signs by the *semiotic animal*, that is, by the human being. This is the capacity for *metasemiosis* that distinguishes the human from other living beings, capable only of semiosis.

Thesis 6

Differently from semiotics understood as metasemiosis specific to all human beings, semiotics as a science presents itself as meta-semiotics. If man is a *metasemiosical animal*, the semiotician, the person who practices the semiotic science, is a *metasemiotical animal*.

Thesis 7

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

Thesis 8

Semiotics is a *critical* science not only in Kant's sense, that is, in the sense that it investigates its own conditions of possibility, as mentioned before. Semiotics is a critical science in the sense that it interrogates the human world today on the assumption that it is not the *only* possible world, not the *definitive* world as established by some conservative ideology. Critical semiotics looks at the world as a possible world, one among many possible worlds, therefore a world subject to *confutation*.

Thesis 9

As global semiotics, as metasemiotics, as critical semiotics (in the double sense mentioned), as semiotics subject to responsibility in a dual sense, *semiotics must concern itself with life over the planet* – not only in a cognitive sense, but also in the pragmatic. In other words, semiotics must *care for life*. From this point of view, semiotics must recover its relation with medical semiotics. And this is not only a question of history, of remembering the origins, but far more radically what we are signaling is a question of the *ideologic-programmatic order*.

From this point of view semiotics is *listening*, it is turned to listening, this time not in the sense of the general theory of signs subtending semiotics, but in a medical sense, semiotics must be listening in the sense of medical semeiotics or symptomatology, semiotics must listen to the symptoms of today's globalized world and identify the different expressions of unease and disease– in social relations, in international relations, in the life of single individuals, in the environment, in life generally over the entire planet.

The aim is to make a diagnosis, a prognosis and to indicate possible cures to the end of making a future for globalization, for the health of semiosis in opposition to a globalized world tending towards its own destruction.

Thesis 10 – by way of conclusion

This entire program may be indicated as an orientation in semiotics that characterizes the Bari-Lecce school in semiotics, an orientation we have chosen to call *Semioethics*.