The general reports and communications included in this volume were written for the first congress organized by the International Association for Semiotic Studies and as such they offer a semiotic landscape, which provides a description of the state of the art in 1974. As it happened, the 1974 congress was the first to be officially devoted to semiotics. In light of this both the organizers and the participants of the congress also had a fundamental and 'archaeological' task: they not only had to discuss the state of the discipline but also 1) the right of the discipline to exist, 2) its history, and 3) the possibility of providing the discipline with a unified methodology and a unified objective.

It would have been possible to ask every participant to make a theoretical statement about his own conception of semiotics. The result would then have been a somewhat disconnected series of philosophical opinions without any recognizable common terminology. First of all, what kind of people should have been invited to define semiotics? Semioticians is undoubtedly the correct answer. But how could a 'professional' semiotician be distinguished from his 'fellow companions' if the purpose of the meeting was precisely to discuss (to accept or to reject) such a distinction? Suppose one had to prepare a general bibliography of semiotic studies: which books or papers would have to be considered as dealing with semiotics? The ones which explicitly use the term semiotics in their titles? Those which the bibliographer considers useful to his own scientific perspective? Is Locke's Essay Concerning Human Understanding a book on semiotics since in the last chapter it proposes that semiotics be one of the three main branches of science? Is Husserl's Logische Untersuchungen a semiotic work, even though the term semiotics is never used, since it deals extensively with the problem of signification and provides interesting tools for a unified approach to both perceptual and linguistic meaning? There are books explicitly designated as pertaining to the so-called 'semiotics of visual arts' which only reiterate the traditional clichés of academic art criticism, while there are other books which are really masterpieces on visual semiotics in which such a term is never even mentioned. In order to academically recognize a discipline one ought to have 1) an object whose
existence or nature can hardly be questioned and 2) a set of unified method-
ological instruments, one of which is an unambiguous terminology. Many disci-
plines can claim such a fortunate status. But how could one, on these grounds, 
organize a congress on philosophy, or even on the philosophy of art or the 
philosophy of religion?

The case of art is rather illuminating. It seems that there existed through 
the ages some human activity which produced 'art objects'; it also seems that 
men, in different epochs and cultures, have elaborated different notions of 
'art' and of 'artistic value'. Notwithstanding this, can one outline an 'objective' 
set of criteria according to which it would be possible to admit and exclude 
people to and from a congress on aesthetics? There is not, among so-called 
aestheticians, a common terminology, a common methodology, or a common 
definition of their own objective. Nevertheless it would really be nonscientific 
to assume, on these grounds, that it is impossible to study art from a theore-
tical point-of-view and that people should not meet to discuss 'aesthetics'.

A short introduction to 'Art' by the Italian philosopher Dino Formaggio 
opens with this quasitautological statement: 'Art is what men call art.' This, 
however, is not a boutade; rather it is a serious example of nondogmatic 
procedure. Different cultures have used, in order to designate certain objects 
or processes, certain terms considered as appropriate translations of other 
terms, produced by other cultures, that were used to designate partly similar 
and partly dissimilar objects and processes. Is there, underlying these linguistic 
uses, something constant which a theory of art ought to define and describe? 
It is commonly recognized that aesthetics is, if not the 'discipline' itself, then 
at least the disciplinary field or the interdisciplinary project concerned with 
the above question. Let me say that, in order to invite people and to outline 
a possible program for the first semiotics congress, the organizers have taken 
the same nondogmatic attitude.

The first report to the congress, delivered by Roman Jakobson, illustrates 
that a 'science' dealing with signs and with processes of communication has 
an impressive pedigree; and that, in spite of the different approaches, all 
thinkers who belonged to this lineage (and maybe more who still have to 
be identified) were dealing, more or less consciously, with the same theoret-
ical object, with a unique relationship manifesting itself through the most 
disparate phenomena, a relationship which Jakobson called 'renvoi'. *Aliquid 
stat pro aliquo*. This relationship of referring back must be taken into account 
by the linguist who not only studies the relationship between *signans* and 
*signatum* in words and phrases but also (as happens now with text linguistics) 
the multiple relationships between the surface of a text and the indefinite 
series of its meanings, its presuppositions, its relations with the universe of 
'intertextuality', by the meteorologists who infers from certain clues the 
forthcoming atmospheric conditions, by the medical doctor who establishes
the relationship between a given spot on an X-ray and an anatomical peculiarity, by the political scientist, who is concerned with the links between a given public behavior and an ideological attitude, by the ethologist studying how animals signal to each other about things and situations which are outside their perceptual range, by anthropologists interested in gestural or culinary conventions, by architects knowing that a given urban or architectural form will tell people how to live and what to do in order to live in a given space, and so on.

Is that enough to assert that there is a discipline (to call it semiotics or something else would be a mere nominalistic decision)? I think there is at least enough to assert that there is a phenomenon, which can be reduced to a theoretical object and which is of interest to many other disciplines without being reducible to any one of them. Wittgenstein, dealing with the concept of ‘game’, spoke once of ‘family resemblances’. I think that even a family resemblance is a good starting point for a scientific endeavor.

The fact that for a supposedly unique phenomenon there are many theories and terminologies, does not give anyone the right to say that the phenomenon is not worthy of being studied. In Manzoni’s Promessi Sposi there is a character, Don Ferrante, who denies the existence of the plague because it cannot be described according to Aristotelian categories, that is, it cannot be isolated as a substance or as an accident. Call it a substance or an accident, define it by Aristotelian or Platonic concepts, try only to ascertain its statistical occurrences, name it by poetic metaphors—the variety of approaches only attests to the complexity of the phenomenon but the phenomenon is there. Maybe the comparison with the plague is not the most encouraging one, but why not decide to equate semiotics with medicine rather than with anatomy (a discipline which has acquired a precise status, establishing its recognizable object and its ‘objective’ methods): a network of different objects and purposes, of conflicting doctrines, oscillating between theory and practice—notwithstanding that this centered around the phenomenon of human health? As far as semiotics is concerned, there are recognizable bodies of theoretical instruments, clearly outlined general approaches as well as tentative inquiries, partial perspectives, still unshaped proposals emerging from other researches which may be labelled by other names, whose authors perhaps deny the possibility of inserting their own research into a more global field.

To organize a first international congress of semiotics necessarily required respect for all these types of approaches. It meant to try to design, through the general reports, a field of interest, to be isolated by the inspection of diverse and interrelated other fields of interest, and to gather a large corpus of proposals coming from all those who in some way believed that their contribution was serving to outline a semiotic endeavor.

Such is the spirit in which these proceedings should be read. Every reader
naturally has the right to refuse many approaches as unsatisfactory to his own requirements for a semiotic discipline. The task of the congress was, however, to provide every reader interested in semiotics with some evidence regarding the state of current opinions about what semiotics should be.

Seymour Chatman, assisted by Kathleen Weaver and Alan Francovich, edited the English papers; Jean-Marie Klinkeberg, assisted by Jeannine Angelique, Claude Bouche, Christian Delcourt, Philippe Dubois, Joseph Keutgen and Françoise Lerusse edited the French papers. As is usual in international congresses, the majority of papers were not written by native speakers. The editors were obliged to make some linguistic interventions—obviously trying to be as faithful as possible to the author's intentions. Authors were consulted by the editors only in cases of deletions. None of the authors have had the opportunity to revise the final draft of their papers after editing.

The individual bibliographies have been combined into one for the sake of economy, i.e. not to unduly increase the size of the volume. It was therefore necessary to establish a standard criterion for references. The task of collating these bibliographies was undertaken by Patrizia Magli, Lucrecia Escudero and Marco De Marinis. Since not all books were cited in their original language or edition and since an author frequently referred to the pages of the edition from which he quoted, the bibliography contains many redundancies and it sometimes lists the same book in two different editions. It is not to be considered as a general bibliography on semiotics but rather as a unified (as far as it was possible) list of the works quoted in the different papers. There was, of course, a predictable unevenness in the way different authors furnished their references: some of them provided a sort of general list of their auctores, others limited themselves to listing only the authors they cited verbatim. Therefore, it would be imprudent even to take the reference list as a statistical survey on the bibliographical background of the first international semiotics congress. The final revision of the manuscript and of the proofs has been made by Mouton's editorial staff.

U.E.