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Trailblazers Paving the Way to Semioethics

RT 33

European Semiotics, Old and New Trends

11th World Congress of the International Association
for Semiotic Studies,
5–9 October 2012, Nanjing, China

1. Historical and theoretical perspectives. By way of a premise

The first Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies, founded in 1969, was held in Milan, June 1974. A widespread interest in semiotic research had officially existed in Italy from the second half of the 1960s in a wide range of fields, though Charles Morris had already been introduced to the intellectual scene in Italy with the translation of his 1946 monograph *Signs, Language and Behavior* into Italian (by Silvio Ceccato) in 1949.

In 1952 Ferruccio Rossi-Landi translated Morris's epochal booklet *Foundations of the* titled *Charles Morris*. Charles S. Peirce had been introduced to the semiotic scenario in Italy even earlier, at the end of the nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth century thanks to Giovanni Vailati and to information passed on to him by Victoria Welby. However, this trend in sign studies as delineated by such names, what Thomas A. Sebeok tagged the "major tradition", was completely submerged in Italy and worldwide by the so-called "minor tradition" deriving from Ferdinand de Saussure. Rossi-Landi's work of the 1950s was mostly ignored. And the so-called major tradition referring to Peirce was only revived in Europe from the early 1970s.

Appropriate terminology for semiotics was a common topic of debate worldwide from the 1960s onwards and was never just a terminological issue. Words refer to their objects, to the world and our ideas about them and, in turn, are modified by these objects. Important to explore are goals, intentions and orientations in the analysis of signs, meaning, communication, sign behaviour generally – linguistic/non-linguistic, verbal /non-verbal,

normal/pathological, vocal/written, intentional/unintentional, human/ non-human, responsible/unresponsible, ideological/non-ideological, natural/cultural.

The term “semiotics” was preferred by the Anglo-American and Sovietic traditions and was juxtaposed to “linguistics”, “semantics”, and “semiology”. Morris called the “science of signs”, “semiotic”. John Locke had reintroduced the term from the stoic tradition for his “doctrine of signs” in 1690. Peirce used the term around 1897 in Locke’s sense. In 1964 Jurij Lotman founded today’s most ancient journal of semiotics, *Sign Systems Studies*, “*Sémeiótiké*” and in 1984 he introduced the term “semiosphere” by analogy with Vernadsky’s “biosphere” (1926). However, Jurij Lotman limited the reference of the “semiosphere” to the cultural world, whereas with “biosemiotics” and “global semiotics,” as proposed by Thomas A. Sebeok (2001), the semiosphere coincides with the biosphere. The term “semiology”, which translates the French “*sémiologie*”, was preferred by the Francophone tradition. Saussure used the term “*sémiologie*” for the first time in a note dated November 1894, and Barthes Barthes published his *Elements de sémiologie* in 1964. Although sometimes “semiotic” and “semiology” are interchangeable synonyms, some authors, like Luis Hjelmslev, make a point of clearly distinguishing between them.

On Sebeok’s (1976: 64) account, the variant “semiotics” was publicly introduced by Margaret Mead in 1962 and thereafter widely adopted. Though regarded by some workers as a needless barbarism, Sebeok accepted it as the title of his series, *Approaches to Semiotics*. In contrast, the International Association for Semiotics Studies decided on the Latin compromise *Semiotica* for its official international journal.

Like the Roman divinity Janus, Western semiotics has two faces, one turned towards Europe inclusive of the Tartu-Moscow tradition, now renominated the Tartu-Moscow-Bloomington tradition keeping account of the contribution to semiotic studies made by Sebeok and his “global semiotics”, and the other turned towards semiotics in the United States (Petrilli and Ponzio 2001, 2002).

For what concerns Italy, an important line of research is that which is delineated by the philosopher of language Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. Going back to the beginning of the twentieth century another important orientation in research on signs and language is that traced by Giovanni Vailati, a philosopher and mathematician, whom Rossi-Landi recovers in his own research. Together with Vailati and Rossi-Landi, other noteworthy figures on the

scene of semiotic studies in Italy include the world famous Umberto Eco, but also the philologist Cesare Segre, the writer Maria Corti and the major Peirce expert Massimo A. Bonfantini in addition to many other less well known figures, but just as praiseworthy, including, for example, the oncologist Giorgio Prodi, or the philosophers Emilio Garroni and Maria Elisabetta Conte.

Semiotics today is the result of different phases of development across the twentieth century: these can be summarized in terms of the transition from so-called “semiotics of communication” or “code semiotics”, to “semiotics of signification” through to “semiotics of interpretation” or “semiotics of significance” (given that interpretation is involved in all phases) (Petrilli 2010: 49–88; Ponzio 1990; Petrilli and Ponzio 2007)).

A significant issue concerns the role of structuralism in language and sign studies. Structuralism arises with linguistics, therefore with Saussure, the Moscow school, the Prague school, and subsequently extends to other fields as in the case of anthropology with Claude Levi-Strauss. But as Gilles Deleuze observes in “À quoi reconnaît-on le structuralisme?”, structure can only be traced in language, even if a question of esoteric or nonverbal language. If the unconscious has a structure this is because the unconscious speaks and is language, if bodies have a structure this is because bodies speak through the language of symptoms. Deleuze even claims that objects have a structure insofar as they speak silently, through sign language. Structuralism has exerted a profound influence on Western thought on signs, language and behaviour and has developed in different directions. The approach developed by Algirdas J. Greimas in semiotic studies is *sui generis*, but all the same has exerted a strong influence on semiotic studies in Europe including Italy.

In the framework of Western semiotics as we are delineating it, other authors emerge as giants thanks to the theoretical consistency and originality of their work, in some cases influencing the development of general semiotic research, its goals, methods and trends. Limiting our list to developments from the end of the nineteenth century across the twentieth century through to today, the following scholars at least should be signalled some of whom have already been mentioned: Peirce, Welby, Husserl, Wittgenstein, Jakobson, Cassirer, Langer, Prieto, Saussure, Morris, Sebeok, Rossi-Landi, Garroni, Eco, Kristeva, also Barthes, Hjelmslev, Levi-Strauss, Lotman, Greimas, Deleuze, Bakhtin, Foucault, Derrida.

No doubt a key role must be acknowledged to Thomas A. Sebeok both for the importance of his theoretical contribution to the advancement of semiotic studies worldwide, and for his commitment to establishing semiotics as a discipline internationally.

In addition to responding to the needs of semiotic studies generally and to the search for new horizons (which are not only geographical), that the 2012 International IASS Congress should have taken place in China and for the first time beyond the boundaries of the so-called “Western world” (and certainly beyond Europe), is also an outcome of the cultural politics advocated by Sebeok during his academic lifetime. As regards developments across the second half of the twentieth century in particular, it is now time to ask, again like two-faced Janus, what remains from the past, and where lies the future?

Here we will only consider some among the main authors who oriented their research in the same direction as our own (for many years now), leading into that particular perspective in semiotics known today as “semioethics”.

2. Two Italian forerunners: Vico and Vailati

But let us return to research on signs and language as they were taking shape at the end of the nineteenth century / beginning of the twentieth century with Giovanni Vailati in Italy. As anticipated, the latter collaborated with Welby in their research on signs and language and thanks to her he introduced Peirce onto the scene of sign studies in Italy. Vailati was among the first in Italy to appreciate the importance of Peirce’s writings. Rossi-Landi, in turn, was a Vailati scholar and edited a collection of his writings in 1967, *Il metodo della filosofia. Saggi di critica del linguaggio* (1967).

Vailati was aware of the need to reflect on the functioning of metaphor. He worked with his colleague Mario Calderoni and was in contact with Welby. He used Welby’s and Peirce’s research for his own reflections on logic and meaning with special reference to the spheres of ordinary and scientific discourse. He also underlined the need to reflect on metaphor and how it works.

In his article of 1905 “I tropi della logica” (in Vailati 2000), occasioned by Welby’s book *What is Meaning?*, Vailati examines metaphors used to discuss reasoning or logical operations. Even when we discuss discourse and thought, our discourse (or metadiscourse)

resorts to metaphors which condition the way we understand linguistic and logical operations themselves. Reflecting on metaphors Vailati distinguishes between three types of images: images that 1) *support* (as when we speak of conclusions that are “founded,” “based,” “depend on,” “connect up with”); images that 2) *contain or include* (conclusions “contained” in the premises); images that express the movement 3) to “come from” or “go to” (conclusions “coming from” given principles). Vailati interrogates the use of such images in relation to reasoning and underlines their connection with a hierarchical view of things (to base, to be founded on), or with the distribution of certainties (in premises) which only call for explication. But the assertion of certainty must be bidirectional, not unidirectional. The associative-metaphorical relation among concepts is described in terms of attraction and mutual support (see Vailati 2000: 80).

Vailati does not use the Peircean term “abduction,” but speaks of a “particular type of deduction” used in thought processes which has allowed for the development of modern science. In this “particular type of deduction,” as Vailati says in his essay “Il metodo deduttivo come strumento di ricerca,” initial propositions call for proof more so than the propositions eventually reached. Consequently, final propositions, or conclusions, must communicate belief or certainty reached through experimental verification to initial propositions or hypotheses. This is a special type of deduction based on supposition, conjecture, guessing, hypothesis, that is, “deduction as a means of anticipating experience,” and which, differently from deduction proper, “leads to unsuspected conclusions” (Vailati 1972: 80). In this new type of deduction or abduction relations of similarity, which are not immediately given, are established among facts, phenomena, and occurrences. In other words, this new type of abduction, what Vailati tags “hypothetical deduction,” identifies analogies among facts which to immediate experience would not seem to be related. This type of inferential process allows for progress in knowledge at more powerful levels than induction, so that, as an effect of hypothetical deduction, or abduction, according to Vailati “we are able to discover intimate analogies among facts that would seem to be different, and that immediate observation is incapable of revealing” (Vailati 2000: 80).

Pushing backwards even further in time, we must also refer to Giambattista Vico even if briefly. In his *Principi di scienza scienza nuova*, Vico (1999: 444) observes that philologists in good faith believe that natural languages signify “*a placito*”, that is, by convention. On the

contrary, he makes the interesting observation that most words are formed through metaphors and are generated by the senses. Vico cites Aristotle: “Nihil est in intellectu quin prius fuerit in sensu”. In other words, the human mind understands nothing that has not been first perceived by the senses (1999: 363). Languages form words through metaphors; and metaphors generally carry out a central role in all languages (1999: 444). Vico claims that in the face of words that produce confused and indistinct ideas and whose origins are unknown, the grammarians universally established the rule that articulate human words signify *a placito*, by convention (1999: 444). This solution served to remedy their ignorance and was also attributed to Aristotle, to Galen and to other philosophers:

Ma i grammatici, abbattutisi in gran numero di vocaboli che dànno idee confuse e indistinte di cose, non sappiendone le origini, che le dovettero dapprima formare luminose e distinte, per dar pace alla loro ignoranza, stabilirono universalmente la massima che le voci umane articolate significano a placito, e vi trassero Aristotele con Galeno ed altri filosofi [...] (1999: 444).

According to Peirce metaphor is a type of icon. It is an expressive modality that cuts across all languages and connects them to nonverbal expressive systems activating interpretive routes that relate sections in the sign network that may even be very distant from each other, as occurs in inference of the abductive type. With Vico, it becomes clear once and for all that metaphor cannot be reduced to the status of a mere rhetorical device, decorative covering with respect to a given “nucleus of meaning,” presumed “simple and literal” meaning. On the contrary, with Vico metaphor emerges as a device for the generation of sense. From this point of view his work is particularly important. Like abductive inference, the cognitive capacity of metaphor depends on the type of similarity (simple and superficial *analogy* or structural and/or genetic *homology*) established among things that are different from each other. Meaning is developed through metaphor, through relations of “*interinanimation*” among words (Richards 1936). The processes of metaphorization are present in discourse even when we are not aware of it. In fact, a distinction is possible between metaphorical signifying trajectories that are practiced automatically by speakers and would seem to express simple, “literal” meaning, on the one hand; and metaphorical trajectories that are immediately recognizable as such, with a strong charge of inventiveness, creativity and innovation thanks to new and unexpected associations among interpretants that

are distant from each other (as in the case of abduction), on the other (see Petrilli 2012a: 191–230; Petrilli and Ponzio 2008).

3. New semiotics horizons in Europe today

3.1. Mikhail Bakhtin: existence of the single individual in literary perspective

Our interest in Mikhail Bakhtin, Emmanuel Levinas and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi as much as in Karl Marx, Adam Schaff, and Thomas Sebeok consists in what they share in spite of their differences: the idea that whatever the object of study and however specialized the analysis, we must account for the life of human individuals in their concrete singularity and involvement without alibis in the destiny of others, according to Sebeok in the destiny of life over the planet.

An early text by Bakhtin from the 1920s entitled “K filosofii postupka” (Toward a philosophy of the act) was only published in Russia in the volume *Filosofia i sotsiologija nauki i tekhniki: Ezhegodnik* 1984-85, edited by S. G. Bocharov (pp. 82-138), in 1986. This text is of great interest not only because of its intrinsic theoretical value, but also because it yields an understanding of the overall sense of Bakhtin’s research as it stretches into the first half of the 1970s. Furthermore, it is closely related to the first chapter of another text written by Bakhtin during the early 1920s, “Autor i geroj vi esteticeskoi dejatel’nosti” (Author and hero in aesthetic activity), it too only published later, in 1979, in the volume *Estetika slovesnogo tvorcestva*. However, this chapter was not published in a complete version; the first section was judged too fragmentary and was excluded only to be published in 1986 with “K filosofii postupka,” in the same volume. The connection between these two texts, “K filosofii postupka” and “Autor i geroj vi esteticeskoi dejatel’nosti” (in particular the first section of the latter) is immediately obvious: both are part of the same research project where “Autor i geroj vi esteticeskoi dejatel’nosti” is the continuation and development of “K filosofii postupka” and both privilege the same literary text as their object of analysis, the poem *Razluka* (*Parting*), by Pushkin.

In the introductory fragment, Bakhtin considers the problem of the possibility of capturing the moment of “event-ness” (1993: 1) of the act in its value and unity in actual

becoming and self-determination. As soon as the sense of the act is determined from a theoretical — scientific, philosophical, historiographical — or aesthetic point of view, it loses its character of unique and self-determined event, a truly lived act and assumes a general value, an abstract meaning.

Bakhtin describes the “concrete architectonics” of the actual world of the performed act as a unitary and once-occurrent act, the basic emotional-volitional aspects of the latter and the way they are organized. All values, meanings and spatial-temporal relationships are organized as a function of the architectonics of the act and organized in terms of the logic of otherness. The main coordinates include: “I-for-myself, the other-for-me, and I-for-the-other” (Bakhtin 1993: 54). But according to Bakhtin interpretation and understanding of the architectonics of the act presuppose the other in a relation where the parts are reciprocally participative. This means to say that the centres of value are two and not one, myself and the other, the two value-centres of life itself around which is organized the architectonics of the answerable act. These two value-centres remain reciprocally other in a relation where two spatial-temporal and axiological points of view persist without one dominating over the other. Bakhtin claims that the architectonics he intends to analyse is readily available in literature, with specific reference to the author/hero relationship.

Bakhtin’s reflections on the philosophy of the answerable act shed light on the itinerary which led him to his 1929 monograph on Dostoevsky.

Dostoevsky carried out, as it were, a small-scale Copernican revolution when he took what had been a firm and finalizing authorial definition and turned it into an aspect of the hero’s self-definition. [...] Not without reason does Dostoevsky force Makar Devushkin to read Gogol’s “Overcoat” and to take it as a story about himself [...]

Devushkin had glimpsed himself in the image of the hero of “The Overcoat,” which is to say, as something totally quantified, measured, and defined to the last detail: all of you is here, there is nothing more in you, and nothing more to be said about you. He felt himself to be hopelessly predetermined and finished off, as if he were already quite dead, yet at the same time he sensed the falseness of such an approach. [...]

The serious and deeper meaning of this revolt might be expressed this way: a living human being cannot be turned into the voiceless object of some secondhand, finalizing cognitive process. *In a human being there is always something that only he himself can reveal; in a free act of self-consciousness and discourse; something that does not submit to an externalizing secondhand definition.* [...]

This text is indicative of the direction Bakhtin's research takes from his early writings through to his 1929 monograph on Dostoevsky. Bakhtin develops a great interest in the vision of literature, where "of literature" is a subject genitive: the worldview which literature, verbal art, makes possible (cf. Petrilli 2012b; Ponzio 1992, 2008b, 2008d).

3.2. Emmanuel Levinas: the inevitable relation to the other

The problem of otherness and the critique of identity – an imperative category in Occidental Reason – are central issues in the work of Emmanuel Levinas.

Identity contains more than it is possible to contain given that it is founded on otherness: the finite contains the infinite, as Descartes says. Levinas who reads Descartes clarifies that "infinite" means both non-finite and inside the finite.

The relation of otherness according to Levinas is neither reducible to *being-with*, Martin Heidegger's *Mitsein*, nor to the condition of being made an object as thematized by Jean-Paul Sartre. Otherness is located inside the subject, the I which is a dialogue in itself, a relation between the same and the other.

The other cannot be separated from the I, the same (*Même* as described by Levinas); at the same time as the absolute other, as *étranger*, it cannot be included in the totality of the same. The other is necessary to the constitution of the I and its world, but at the same time it is refractory to all those categories that tend to eliminate its otherness, thereby subjecting it to the identity of the same.

Otherness is part of the sphere of the I. All the same, this otherness is not assimilated by the I but quite on the contrary acts as an impediment to the I's integrity, to compact Identity, to the totality, the same. The relation to the other is a relation of excess and surplus. It transcends objectifying thought and is the condition for release from the subject-object relation and from the relation of work and trade.

The same/other relation irreducibly transcends the realm of knowledge, the concept, abstract thought, even though they are all possible thanks to this relation.

Instead, the I/other relation, as proposed by Levinas, has an ethical foundation. But what does "ethical" mean in this context? Levinas gives the following explanation:

We call ethical a relationship between terms such as are united neither by a synthesis of the understanding nor by a relationship between subject and object, and yet where the one weighs or concerns or is meaningful to the other, where they are bound by a plot which knowing can neither exhaust nor unravel ("Langage et proximité," in Levinas 1967, Eng. trans.: 116, note).

Identity and *étrangeté*, otherness: these are the two faces of the real which realism does not capture. In a paper significantly entitled "La réalité et son ombre," 1948, Levinas says:

Being is not only itself, it escapes itself. Here is a person who is what he is; but he does not make us forget, does not absorb, cover over entirely the objects he holds and the way he holds them, his gestures, limbs, gaze, thought, skin, which escape from under the identity of his substance, which like a torn sack is unable to contain them. Thus a person bears on his face, alongside of its being with which he coincides, its own caricature, its picturesqueness. The picturesque is always to some extent a caricature. Here is a familiar everyday thing, perfectly adapted to the hand which is accustomed to it, but its qualities, color, form, and position at the same time remain as it were behind its being, like the "old garments" of a soul which had withdrawn from that thing, like a "still life" (1948, Eng. trans.: 6).

Taking his distance from a tradition of thought that thematizes dialogue in terms of an exchange of rejoinders among predefined subjects, Levinas conceives dialogism as an essential condition characterizing human beings and their consciousness, a sort of *a priori*. This is what Mikhail Bakhtin calls *substantial dialogue* as distinct from *formal dialogue*. Substantial dialogue also structures the I. Therefore language understood as contact, proximity, being one-for-the-other, witness, involvement, intercorporeity, exposition to the other, intersubjectivity, complicity antecedent to accord and to disaccord already involves dialogue. Moreover, the dialogic relation is connected to responsibility (Ponzio 2008a).

Responsibility is involvement, exposition, proximity, one-for-the-other. The condition of unlimited responsibility testifies to our commitment to the otherness relationship, to dialogism. Otherness is present at the very heart of identity, is structural to identity, a condition for the realisation of identity. As anticipated, the I is dialogue in itself, an I/other relationship.

To speak not only means to speak with the words of the other, but also to keep account of the other in a relation of inevitable involvement and implication, such that to speak is always to answer, also in the sense of to answer for, in the first place, to answer for oneself, to justify oneself. The I speaks and in doing so answers to the other. As Levinas says in "Nonintentional Consciousness" (in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans. 122-132), the first case in

which I is declined is not the nominative but the *accusative* (Ibid. 129). The other interrogates the I. The question of being is inseparable from the question of the I which must first answer for itself, for the place it occupies in the world, and for its relation to others.

As Levinas says the main question is not *why is there being instead of nothingness?* (Heidegger), but rather *why is my being here in this place, in this dwelling, in this situation, while another is excluded?* The origin of human signification is not “intentional consciousness” (Husserl) but, as Levinas says, *consciousness that is not intentional*, consciousness understood in an ethical sense and not in a cognitive sense, more exactly “bad consciousness”. Bad consciousness attempts to justify itself, to appease itself, to make itself comfortable regarding questions raised by the other simply by his presence. Bad consciousness thus reconciles itself as illusory “good consciousness” (cf. Ponzio 1996, 2006).

According to Levinas, the real problem in the Western world is not so much to refuse violence as to question the struggle against violence which could be a struggle against the institution of violence (1974, Eng. trans.: 177). “Preventive war” is not a struggle against the institution of violence but is itself violence. In contrast, what we require is *preventive peace*. War against war, war against terrorism perpetuates that which it wishes to eliminate. War against war consecrates war and its virile values with a good conscience. Developing Levinas’s reflexions, “just” and “necessary” wars, “humanitarian” and “preventive” wars are wars waged with a good conscience.

The path to preventive peace is the path of a *bad conscience*, of *patience* that does not ask patience of others and is based on a difference between one self and others, on an *inequality* in a sense that is absolutely opposed to oppression. Preventive peace is in *non-indifference*, non-indifference to the other, to another, non-indifference which is responsibility for the other, “the very difference between me and the other” (Ibid. 178). I am answerable before the other, responsible before all others for all others. I am responsible for the other, although the other is not responsible for me. As Dostoevsky says, I am responsible for another more than anyone else.

Return to a bad conscience, responsibility and non-indifference for the other involves suspension of the rights of identity which deny the other: “a suspension of war and politics which pass themselves off as relation of the Same to the Other” (“Nonintentional Consciousness,” in Levinas 1991, Eng. trans.: 132). The human is the return to bad

conscience (Ibid.), to the possibility, as Socrates says in *Gorgia*, of fearing injustice more than death, of undergoing injustice rather than perpetuating it.

Preventive peace, liberation from the world of war, this opening and *beyond* is traceable in the proximity of our neighbour. The other, my neighbour, concerns me with a closeness that is closer than the closeness of the being of things, of the world. This is proximity closer than presence, proximity even in absence (cf. Ponzio 2009). Proximity of the other is responsibility for the other. Proximity implies responsibility that cannot be delegated, responsibility as a unique human being for the other connected with my singularity, oneness, singularity which involves bearing the crushing charge of alterity.

3.3. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi: from the linguistic market to linguistic work

Rossi-Landi's monograph *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* was published in 1968 (now 2003, Eng. trans. *Language as Work and Trade*, 1983) and is still topical today in terms of foresight and analytical capacity. Rossi-Landi anticipated problems that are now of central importance in today's world capitalist system where communication is a constitutive factor in production and so-called "immaterial work" is the principle resource. Communication plays a dominant role in the intermediary phase in the productive cycle, that is, the *circulation* or *exchange* phase according to market logic. But it also plays a dominant role in the phases of *production* and *consumption*, especially with progress in technology, therefore with automation, computerization and development of the communication network at large. After realizing that *commodities are messages* and now that *messages are commodities*, it has become obvious that *consumption is consumption of communication* and that *production is production of communication*, and vice versa (cf. Ponzio 2012).

Rossi-Landi elaborated such concepts as "linguistic production", "linguistic work" and "linguistic capital" in relation to social reproduction and identified homological relations between "linguistic production" and "material production". Certain expressions now in use in everyday language reveal how such concepts are no less than fundamental in today's social reproduction cycle. These expressions include "immaterial resource," "immaterial capital" and "immaterial investment" and circulate with awareness of the importance of education, information and specialized knowledge for development and competition in today's

knowledge society. Until recent times “linguistic production” and “material production” in the form of “intellectual work” and “manual work” were conceived as separate. But, as Rossi-Landi has demonstrated, they are already related homologically at the genetic-structural level. In the world of global communication “linguistic production” and “material production” have at last come together in computers where *hardware* and *software* form a single unit. The connection between work and material artifacts, on the one hand, and work and linguistic artifacts, on the other, is now manifest and the superior capacity of linguistic work, which is “immaterial work”, has also emerged. In other words, linguistic work leads the processes of production and development.

The underlying assumption of Rossi-Landi’s 1968 monograph is that “linguistic production” is a fundamental factor in social life and is homologous with the production of utensils and artefacts. (This assumption was developed more systematically in theoretical terms in his subsequent books including *Linguistics and Economics*, 1975). Verbal and nonverbal sign systems are described as systems of verbal and nonverbal artefacts. According to this approach such concepts as “consumption”, “work”, “capital”, “market”, “property”, “exploitation”, “alienation” and “ideology” originally thematized in relation to nonverbal sign systems are applied to studies on language. Vice versa, concepts developed in relation to studies on verbal language are applied to nonverbal sign systems: these include, as anticipated above, such concepts as *linguistic consumption*, *linguistic work*, *linguistic capital*, *linguistic alienation*, and so forth. Rossi-Landi’s research lays the foundations for an approach to *general semiotics* that unites *linguistics* and *economics* as well as other *social sciences*. He develops a global view on human behavior and evidences with great foresight that separatism among the sciences is untenable and certainly anachronistic in globalized communication-production society.

Rossi-Landi develops an original approach to language with respect to Wittgenstein in *Philosophical Investigations*, though he elaborates on various aspects of the latter. Rossi-Landi recovers such concepts as words are tools, language globally is an instrument oriented by our interests, speech is a human activity among others with which it interacts, a language has meaning in a public context, to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life, and the like. In contrast to Wittgenstein, Rossi-Landi’s interpretation of language as work underlines, in the first place, the inadequacy of simply maintaining that language is a “public”

fact and that linguistic behavior necessarily occurs between two or more persons. Instead, as Rossi-Landi insists the “public context” of language is a “social context”. It will not suffice to describe communication as occurring among speakers who are predefined antecedent to any form of interaction and before they begin speaking to each other; on the contrary, all speakers develop socially into what they are precisely *because* they speak a given language. As Marx (1953 [1857-58]) says in *Grundrisse*, the individual only relates to a language as *his own* insofar as he is a natural member of a given human community.

The theory of “meaning as use” has also proven inadequate insofar as it describes the word use reductively in terms of linguistic games, neglecting to investigate *how* a given use is produced, that is, the processes of production. This leads to describing the instruments used for communication as given and natural rather than as historical-social. “I would say,” writes Rossi-Landi,

[...] that Wittgenstein lacks the notion of labor-value; that is, of the value of a given object, in this case a linguistic object, as the product of a given linguistic piece of work. From the linguistic object, he moves only forward and never backward (Rossi-Landi 1968, Eng. trans.: 31).

According to Rossi-Landi’s point of view, linguistic analysis cannot be limited to simply observing or describing word use. Instead, the focus must be on the “linguistic work” through which any specific meaning comes to exist, and consequently on its various component factors including motives, social relation networks, interests, economic conditions, historically specified needs of the subject using the pieces of language under examination.

According to Rossi-Landi, the production and circulation of commodities and the production and circulation of messages are different aspects of the same social process, that is, the process of communication. No “natural” divisions exist compelling us to allocate messages and commodities to different provinces. In Rossi-Landi’s view this justifies the use of categories taken from the economic sciences and applied to the study of language. It is not only by pronouncing and writing words that we speak to each other and exchange messages. “*Man communicates with his whole social organization*”, writes Rossi-Landi (1968, Eng. trans.: 67). “The study of any sign-system becomes useful for the study of any other [...] especially because, in studying one system or the other, what one studies is *fundamentally the*

same thing” (Rossi-Landi (1968, Eng. trans.: 57). This becomes clearer when we consider that both in the case of commodities and of linguistic messages semiotics addresses the same problems – the work that produces them and that makes exchange and communication possible.

Rossi-Landi formulated his thesis of the *homology* between verbal and nonverbal communication on the basis of his recognition of human beings as the concrete subjects of history, the responsible agents of culture and communicative systems. Linguistic work and nonlinguistic work can be placed on the same level (cf. Rossi-Landi 1968, Eng. trans.: 36). And given that human beings are constructed historically through the production of tools and verbal messages, the definitions of man as a speaking animal (*homo loquens*) and as a working animal (*homo faber*) at last come together in a unitary definition, where the two modes of social behavior indicated are considered to be homologous.

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