

# A European School of Marxist Semiotics

Susan Petrilli

**Abstract:** The five members of the European School of Marxist Semiotics—Adam Schaff, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Jeff Bernard, Augusto Ponzio, and the writer of this paper are of different nationalities, use different languages, and even belong to different generations. We have been bonded together by a profound sense of friendship, but even more by our common mission for life, represented by the conviction that the world needs a new kind of semiotics developed on the foundation laid by Karl Marx and other Marxists for a critique of social praxis with any claim to adequacy. This mission is ever more urgent today, if our concern is for the health of semiosis, therefore of social relations, of life over the globe. The school has been active for almost 60 years ever since the 1960s, and is still flourishing, though it has never been named as such. But it is not too late since both Marxism and semiotics are still full of vitality. The association of Marxism to semiotics is a powerful device for progress both in terms of understanding and of praxis, young and full of promise for the revitalisation of semiotics and semiosis in face of the new century.

**Keywords:** Marxism, semiotics, Adam Schaff, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Jeff Bernard, Augusto Ponzio

## 马克思主义符号学欧洲学派

苏珊·佩特里利

**摘要:** 马克思主义符号学欧洲学派的五位成员——亚当·沙夫、费鲁乔·罗西-兰迪、杰夫·伯纳德、奥古斯托·庞其奥以及本文

的作者都来自不同国家，使用不同语言，甚至不是同一代人。我们因深厚的友谊而彼此联系在一起，但更是因为我们共同的使命，我们都坚信世界需要一种新的符号学，它应在卡尔·马克思和其他马克思主义者对任何宣称社会实践充足论的批判基础之上发展壮大。如果我们关心符号的健康，因而关心社会关系，关心全球生命，那么这一使命在今天则更为紧迫。这个学派自 20 世纪 60 年代以来已经活跃了差不多 60 年，而且现在依然兴盛，尽管它从未被如此命名。但是现在命名为时不晚，因为马克思主义和符号学都仍然充满了活力。将马克思主义与符号学相联系无论在理解和实践方面都是获得进步的强有力手段，面对新世纪，这种联系年轻而又充满希望，可以复兴符号学和符号活动。

**关键词：**马克思主义 符号学 亚当·沙夫 费鲁乔·罗西-兰迪 杰夫·伯纳德 奥古斯托·庞其奥

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## I . With Augusto Ponzio and Ferruccio Rossi-Landi

The authors collected in this book, myself included, are connected by relations of mutual awareness and collaboration, and if we can speak of a “school” it is an *ideal* school. This “school” does not have a common location, given that most of the authors in question lived and operated in different nations: in Poland Adam Schaff (1913 – 2006), in Austria Jeff Bernard (1943 – 2010), in Italy Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921 – 1985), Augusto Ponzio (1942b), and myself (1954b), just as it does not have a head of school. We could speak of a “circle”, but in the sense that together these scholars form a network through which their ideas, visions, plans, projects, and purposes circulated and continue to do so. Hence the interest in coming together and encountering each other, collaborating in co-participative projects, discussions, and meetings of various sorts. The qualification “Marxist semiotics” is appropriate to us all: in fact what we are presenting is the study of signs—and their inexorable interconnection with values and ideologies—in a relation of mutual clarification with Marxism: the study of signs from a Marxist perspective and Marxism from the perspective of the study of signs-semiotics and Marxism in a relation of mutual elaboration and understanding.

Among the figures we have just named, he who in a sense has acted as the *trait d'union*, as the mediator that has kept the group together, even today, is Augusto Ponzio. Ponzio has played a key role from the very beginning in fostering and maintaining relations internally to the whole group—not to mention his role in my own relations to each of these scholars. And since their death—Rossi-Landi first in 1985, followed by Adam Schaff in 2006 and Jeff Bernard in 2010, we have continued engaging in their works and favouring their circulation through publications and organization of meetings and seminars. Discussion, dialogue and confrontation of their ideas has been ongoing, so that they have continued circulating at intense rhythms with the production of essays, books, translations and conference proceedings. In some cases the circulation of ideas has been achieved thanks to translations promoted by Ponzio—and here I am thinking in particular of the Italian translations of works by Adam Schaff from Polish, German and Spanish<sup>①</sup>; in other cases, through publication of new editions of their writings. In fact, thanks to Ponzio, Rossi-Landi's works have continued appearing in rapid succession since his death and the same may also be said of Schaff.

As a consequence of our project to keep Rossi-Landi's work circulating, another great master of the sign has also been relaunched and reread in Italy. Our allusion here is to Charles Morris with republication of his epochal booklet *Foundations of the Theory of Signs* in the original Italian translation by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (*Lineamenti di una teoria dei segni*), first published in 1954, and after Rossi-Landi's death the new editions curated with an introduction by myself, first in 1999, and subsequently again in a second new edition, in 2009.<sup>②</sup> In 1992 we also published the correspondence exchanged between these two great masters of the sign as a special edition of *Semiotica: Journal of the International Association for Semiotic Studies*, complete with an introduction by myself, whose Editor-in-Chief was Thomas

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① Since 1975 most of Adam Schaff's works have been translated into Italian thanks to A. Ponzio, including the last book by Schaff to appear before his death, *Książka dla mojej zoni: Autobiografia problemowa* (2001, It. trans. 2011).

② Continuing on from Rossi-Landi's work I have myself translated into Italian and edited other volumes by Charles Morris including the collection of writings, *Segni e valori: Significazione e significatività e altri scritti di semiotica: etica ed estetica* (Signs and Values. Signification and Significance and Other Writings in Semiotics, Ethics and Aesthetics), 1988, followed in 2000 by the Italian edition of his 1964 book, *Significance and Signification: The Relation of Signs and Values*, and in 2002 of his 1948 book: *The Open Self*.

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A. Sebeok (1920 – 2001). He carried out the role from the time the journal was founded in 1969, to the time of his death in 2001.

Sebeok had already favoured publication of Rossi-Landi's 1975 monograph *Linguistics and Economics*, with de Gruyter Mouton, in the book series "Janua Linguarum. Series Maior 81" (second edition, 1977), and going back a step further, in 1973, another monograph by Rossi-Landi, *Ideologies of Linguistic Relativity*, hosted by Sebeok in his prestigious and long-standing book series, "Approaches to Semiotics", with the same publishers. Now, thanks to initiative taken by Ponzio, Rossi-Landi's *Linguistics and Economics* with its Marxist approach to signs and language is at last also available in Italian (Mimesis, 2016).

In addition to translations, Ponzio has promoted the publication of texts that had remained unpublished during the lifetime of these scholars. I am alluding in particular to a collection of essays by Rossi-Landi, *Between Signs and Non-Signs* (John Benjamins), edited by myself with an introduction, which too published in 1992. But this is only one example of countless editorial initiatives promoted by Ponzio, one I am happy to signal here as a homage to our Chinese readers and their widespread knowledge of the English language. Of course many other volumes have appeared in Italian.

In 1970 at an early stage in his intellectual career, Augusto Ponzio reviewed Ferruccio Rossi-Landi's 1968 book, *Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (English translation, *Language as Work and Trade*, 1983), for *Filosofia*, an important Italian journal directed by the philosopher Augusto Guzzo (1894 – 1986). Subsequently, Ponzio contacted Rossi-Landi, to propose an essay for *Ideologie*, a journal with a Marxist orientation, founded by Rossi-Landi himself. The essay was titled "Ideologia della anormalità linguistica" (Ideology of Linguistic Anormality), and presented a discussion, among other issues, of the problem of linguistic anormality, occasioned by publication of a book, *Il linguaggio schizofrenico* (*Schizophrenic Language*) (1967), by the renowned psychiatrist Sergio Piro whom at the time was engaged in the battle against the institutional structures of psychiatric hospitals.

Augusto Ponzio reviewed his essay keeping account of all critical comments and suggestions from Rossi-Landi, offered in a long letter of response to him. Ponzio's essay appeared in n. 15 of *Ideologie* (1971, 50 – 73). This exchange was the

beginning of a lifelong relationship based on close scientific collaboration and warm friendship, which also involved Sergio Piro. When the journal and the editorial activity revolving around it ceased (in 1972), with Ponzio, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi founded the four-monthly journal, *Scienze umane*. Given that the new publisher was Dedalo in Bari (the city where Ponzio lived and taught at the University there), the editorial staff was located in Bari and directed by Ponzio. The first issue appeared in April 1979. Unfortunately, however, the journal lasted only for a short time because of the difficulties involved in finding another publisher once relations had ceased with Dedalo. The sixth and last issue was published in December 1980.

*Ideologie*, a quarterly and programatically non academic journal opposed to specialism, was founded in the spring of 1967 by Rossi-Landi, the director, and Mario Sabbatini. The initial issue opened with an essay by Rossi-Landi titled, “Ideologia come progettazione sociale” (Ideology as Social Planning) (pp. 1 – 25), subsequently repropoed in his book of 1968, *Language as Work and Trade*. This was the first of his “Bompiani Trilogy”, the other two being *Semiotica e ideologia* (*Semiotics and Ideology*) (1972), followed by *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (*Philosophical Methodics and Science of Signs*) (1985). From publication of the journal *Ideologie* in Rome, there stemmed another new important editorial activity with inauguration of the book series “Edizioni di Ideologie”, which from the theoretical-ideological perspective was oriented in the same direction as the journal.

Through a critique of socio-historical reality under its various aspects, through demystification of various ideologies, including scientific separatism upheld in the name of specialisation and specialism,<sup>①</sup> *Ideologie* aimed to orient social planning in terms of innovation, revolution, disalienation. It's project for the recovery of an unprejudiced and unconventional vision of socio-historical reality, for renewal and transformation was expressed in the subtitle: “Quaderni di storia contemporanea” (Notebooks in Contemporary History). *Ideologie* dedicated ample space to

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① For a critique of separatism in the sciences, let me also refer the reader to my Sebeok Fellow Plenary Address, “Semioethics and Responsibility. Beyond Specialisms, Universalisms, and Humanisms”, delivered on October 17 2008, at the thirty-third Annual Meeting of the Semiotic Society of America, on the occasion of my installation as the 7th Sebeok Fellow of the SSA. This text was first published with other texts by myself as a special monographic issue of *The American Journal of Semiotics* (TAJS 24. 4. 2008), and subsequently as Chapter 1 in my book, *Sign Crossroads in Global Perspective. Semioethics and Responsibility*, 2010, a version of which is now available in Chinese translation by Zhou Jingsong with Sichuan University Press, 2014.

historiographical interpretation. In addition to numerous articles it also dedicated a whole double issue (1968, pp. 7 – 8) to *Le radici storiche della rivoluzione cubana* (*The Historical Roots of the Cuban Revolution*) and another double issue (1970, pp. 14 – 15, of no less than 600 pages) to *Studio della rivoluzione cinese* (*Study on the Chinese Revolution*) which includes a “Bibliografia italiana sulla Rivoluzione cinese (1945 – 1970)” (Italian Bibliography on the Chinese Revolution [1945 – 1970]), of 300 pages in lower body, organised across two columns per page.

In the same cultural climate, in 1972, the important essay “Grammatica trasformazionale e ideologia politica” (Transformational Grammar and Political Ideology), by A. Ponzio, was published in this same journal (*Ideologie*, pp. 16 – 17; 1972, pp. 137 – 212). Ponzio critiques linguistic theory according to Noam Chomsky, thanking Genevieve Vaughan (1939)—at the time Ferruccio Rossi-Landi’s wife, and currently an American expatriate semiotician, peace activist, and feminist, whose ideas and work have been influential in intellectual movements around the Gift Economy and Matriarchal Studies. Vaughan suggested to Ponzio that he should clarify the recondite ideological orientation of Chomsky’s theory of “linguistic creativity” by comparing certain of his statements of the sociological-political and linguistic orders with certain others made in the *Declaration of Independence*, in other writings by Thomas Jefferson and in the *Bill of Rights* as formulated in the *Federal Constitution* of the United States of America.

This essay by Ponzio was published in French translation that same year (1972) in a monographic issue titled *Linguistique, structuralisme et marxisme* (*Linguistics, Structuralism and Marxism*), of the journal *L’Homme et la société* (28, pp. 93 – 111), together with essays by Henri Pierre Jeudy, Serge Latouche, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, and Adam Schaff (this volume was published in a new Portuguese edition under the title *Linguística, Sociedade e Política*, Lisbon, Edições 70, in 1975). Ponzio’s essay also appeared in the form of a small volume (of 120 pages) in 1974 with Nueva Visión Publishers in Buenos Aires. He also included it as Part I of his 1973 monograph, *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (*Linguistic Production and Social Ideology*). This particular book was translated into Spanish (*Producción linguística e ideología social*), in 1974, into Serbian (*Jezična proizvodnja i društvena ideologija*), in 1978, and into French (*Production linguistique et idéologie sociale*, revisited and enlarged with respect to the Italian

original), in 1992.

With reference to the 1974 Spanish edition, Professor Sirio Possenti made the following observation during a recent seminar (8 November, 2010), held at the University of Campinas (Unicamp) in Brazil:

As a young man I read Augusto Ponzio's book, *Producción lingüística e ideología social*, with enormous "ideological pleasure". Brazil was still a dictatorship and the left refused what in Chomsky was perceived as bourgeois, owing to its *illuminist* identification, so to say (in spite of the fact that some of his attitudes were considered to be interesting, because they were "anti-american"). The Chomskyan "ideal speaker listener," innatism, etc. were detested. When in Ponzio's book I read of the comparison between certain aspects of Chomsky's work and fragments from the USA's *Declaration of Independence*—in support of his thesis that "Chomsky's position was not distant from that held by Paine and Jefferson"—I thought I had found excellent reasons for not being Chomskyan.

For which concerns our own relationship, in particular Ponzio's and my own with Noam Chomsky, let me sum it up in the words of A. Ponzio (2011, p. 68)—who has dedicated several works to Chomsky's theory of language, beginning from the 1973 book we have just cited:

For that which concerns "Chomsky the linguist"—contrary to "Chomsky the politologist", who has always responded and generously so to some of our "petitions" (for example, *à propos* the 1991 "Gulf war") and to our invitations to collaborate in volumes of our *Athanor* series (I believe there exist two Noams who do not talk to each other, one who deals with language leaving aside ideology and the other one who deals with ideology without keeping account of its indissoluble relation to signs and language)—I would describe my relationship with him as one of solitary dialogue (apart from a few evasive letters), and still ongoing.

The Spanish edition of Ponzio's 1973 book attracted quite a lot of attention from numerous scholars at the time of its publication. Among them, in Brazil, was Carlos Faraco whom we met personally in November 2010 in São Carlos (Brazil), at a

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conference dedicated to Mikhail M. Bakhtin. Subsequently, in 2012, Faraco translated the new 2006 edition of Ponzio's book (Bari, Graphis) into Portuguese, *Linguística Chomskyana e ideologia social*.

An immediate consequence of the 1974 Madrid edition, *Producción lingüística e ideología social*, was the relationship of collaboration and friendship with Jenaro Talens (Valencia). This led to the publication of a collection of essays by Ponzio, *El juego del comunicar. Entre literatura y filosofía*, in Talen's book series "Episteme" (Valencia, 1995), and to the Spanish translation of Ponzio's 1997 monograph on Bakhtin, *La revolución bajtiniana. El pensamiento de Bajtin y la ideología contemporánea* (1998), published with Cattedra in Madrid.<sup>①</sup>

But return to Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. As he clearly states in his writings (e. g. , in his introduction to the 2016 Italian edition of *Linguistics and Economics*), though it would seem that economics and linguistics are two separate disciplines, in reality the relation between them is complex and subtle and calls for an explanation. Neither economics nor linguistics are accepted by Rossi-Landi *tout court*, as they are presented in specialised texts. His focus is on the objects of these two disciplines: namely, human language as the main object of the linguistic sciences, and economic exchange as the main object of the economic sciences, which he is interested to investigate insofar as they may be analysed in unitary terms. Rossi-Landi examines the two social processes in question from a semiotic perspective. He identifies them provisionally in terms of the production and circulation of goods (in the form of commodities) and the production and circulation of utterances (in the form of verbal messages), the two fundamental modalities of human social development. Though they are usually the object of attention of separate disciplines, Rossi-Landi advances the hypothesis that they are the same thing, at least in the same sense in which the two branches of a tree can be recognised as "the same thing". In other words, Rossi-Landi formulates the belief that when goods circulate in the form of

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<sup>①</sup> Regarding Jenaro Talens most recently we have contributed to a collective volume dedicated to him on his 70th birthday, edited by Giulia Colaizzi, Santos Zunzunegui, Manuel de la Fuente and Santiago Renard, forthcoming in Spain: by Augusto Ponzio "Inquadrature e sequenze: Orfeo ripreso in Campo di battaglia di Jenaro Talens", and by Susan Petrilli, "Jenaro Talens lettore di Luis Bunuel", both of which underline the importance for a better understanding of language and consciousness of interpretative work through the magnifying lens of literary writing and artistic discourse generally, in this particular case through the language and images of filmic discourse.



commodities they are messages, and when utterances circulate in the form of verbal messages they are commodities.

News of Rossi-Landi's premature death on 5 May 1985 came to us as an unbearable shock. He had been with us in Bari not long before, to present his book *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni (Philosophical Methodics and the Science of Signs)*, at a seminar held on the 19 April that same year. The title of the seminar was "Segno, autore e riproduzione sociale"(Sign, Author and Social Reproduction) and was conducted by Rossi-Landi and Ponzio together. It was dedicated specifically to Chapter 8 of *Metodica filosofica*, "Il corpo del testo tra riproduzione ed eccedenza"(The Body of the Text between Reproduction and Excess), originally published for the first time in the journal *Quaderni latinoamericani (Latin American Notebooks)* (1976, n. 2, pp.167 - 192), under the title "Criteri per lo studio ideologico di un autore"(Criteria for the Ideological Study of an Author).

Rossi-Landi describes "social reproduction" in anthroposemiosis, that is, in historical-social semiosis as "the beginning of all things", the arché at the origin of philosophical thought. Similarly to Thomas, inventor of "global semiotics" (Sebeok, 2001), when he describes "semiosis" in terms of "biosemiosis" and claims that semiosis and life converge, so that it is impossible for life, our own included, to exit the great sign network that is our biosphere, Rossi-Landi claims that with reference to "anthroposemiosis", or more specifically "anthroposociosemiosis", it is impossible to exit social reproduction, the historical-social dimension of semiosis. And putting together Sebeok and Rossi-Landi, we now know that the anthroposemiosphere belongs to the larger biosphere, as one of its parts.

This is as much the case as the question of the "author", whether the author of literary or non literary texts. The author is part of his socio-historical context. On this account a central problem is to describe the extent to which an author can "exit" the historical situation to which he belongs and establish the degree of "excess" that his thought is able to achieve with respect to his own socio-historical context. For an ideological study of the author, reference to social reproduction in a specific historical context is inevitable. But such reference calls for identification, description and evaluation on the basis of precise criteria. Furthermore, another issue is to understand how, in what terms, to what extent an author can contribute to his own socio-historical context and, eventually, overcome its boundaries, or at

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least perspective the possibility of transcending, going beyond any limitations, which are the limitations of socio-historical context, precisely.

In relation to such issues, and in particular on the problem of “consensus”, Rossi-Landi refers to the work of the Italian philosopher, linguist, and politician Antonio Gramsci (1891 – 1937), co-founder of the Italian communist party, in 1921. The production of consensus is a semiotic phenomenon. In other words, consensus is achieved through our use of sign systems, whether verbal or nonverbal, characteristic of civil society. And this is where Rossi-Landi’s analyses of the author become particularly significant, being a question of analysing the author producer of signs and the relationship between the author and the production of consensus of social reproduction in general (Petrilli, 2015, Chp. 10).

In 1987, under Augusto Ponzio’s guidance, I was entrusted with the task of preparing a special issue in Rossi-Landi’s honour of *Il Protagora* (XXVII, ed. and intro. S. Petrilli), a prestigious journal in philosophy and culture founded by Bruno Widmar. The issue was titled very simply, *Per Ferruccio Rossi-Landi*. The call for papers attracted international attention featuring contributions from Europe, Australia and the United States of America. In alphabetical order it included such names as Felice Accame, Massimo Bonfantini, Silvio Ceccato, Umberto Eco, Janos Kelemen, Romano Luperini, Roland Posner, Thomas Sebeok, Giuseppe Semerari, Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, Vittorio Somenzi, Walter Schmitz, Tullio Tentori and Terry Threadgold, and of course A. Ponzio and myself.

Rossi-Landi’s research had exerted a radical influence on research on signs and language generally, and not only in Italy—more so than was commonly recognised—thanks not only to his essays and books, but also to his translations, involving authors who have proven to be no less than fundamental in the shaping of semiotics and philosophy of language across the twentieth century: Charles Morris, Ludwig Wittgenstein, Gilbert Ryle, Gustav Bridgman, etc.

Rossi-Landi not only contributed to the constitution of the science of signs as it presents itself today, but also—and the two things go together in the history of the sciences—to the creation, choice and definition of its key terms. In fact, as Umberto Eco remarks, the influence of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi’s research can be identified even where it was ignored. In an article published in *La Repubblica*, 10 May 1985, Eco expresses his wish to recall Rossi-Landi to the attention of those who

think they do not know him because they have never read him, adding that: “I’d like to tell them that, even if they do not address philosophy of language *ex professo* and are interested, for example, in things like everyday discourse, from journalism to politics, to literary works, or visual languages, they can do what they do because in the distant 1950s Ferruccio Rossi-Landi had worked for them and debated a whole series of fundamental questions as a pioneer.”(Eco in Petrilli, 1987, p. 8).

This issue of *Il Protagora* was followed by several other events that have kept Rossi-Landi’s ideas alive in Italy and beyond. To recall just two that stand out in my memory because of our close involvement: the International Conference “The Relevance of Rossi-Landi’s Semiotics Today”, hosted by Augusto Ponzio and myself, at the University of Bari (now University of Bari “Aldo Moro”), from 14 – 16 November, in 2002 (promoted by the International Ferruccio Rossi-Landi Network, the Semiotic Societies of Austria and Hungary, the Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis at the University of Bari, under the auspices of the International Association for Semiotics Studies). The proceedings were published as a monographic issue of the series “Athanos. Semiotica, Filosofia, Arte, Letteratura” (2003 – 2004, XIV, 7), under the title *Lavoro immateriale (Immaterial Work)*. The themes covered are all central in Rossi-Landi’s research: messages and merchandise; the linguistic worker; communication-production; linguistic production and linguistic alienation; the work of sign material; the division of linguistic work; machines and language; the dominant class and control over communication; sign capital, ideology and immaterial work; language, production and war; language as gift and as market. Jeff Bernard from Vienna, was not only there with us, but also actively involved in the overall organisation of what turned out to be a truly memorable event.

In 2005 two international conferences were organised jointly by Jeff Bernard to commemorate Rossi-Landi twenty years after his death. At the IRICS International Conference, “Innovations and Reproductions in Cultures and Societies”, the special section entitled “Social Reproduction and Cultural Innovation. From a Semiotic Point of View” for Rossi-Landi took place between 9 – 11 December 2005, in Vienna (Austria) (Organised by the Institute for Austrian and International Literature and Cultural Studies INST, with the Institute for Socio-Semiotic Studies [ISSS], Vienna, and the International Ferruccio Rossi-Landi Network [IFRN]). This

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meeting was continued with the International Symposium “Language, Literature, and Semiotics. Round Table and Symposium in Memoriam Ferruccio Rossi-Landi 20 Years after his Death”, between 13 – 15 December, 2005, in Budapest (Hungary) (Organised by the Italian Culture Institute in Budapest, together with the Institute of Philosophy, University ELTE, Budapest, the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, the Institute for Socio-Semiotic Studies [ISSS], Vienna, and again the International Ferruccio Rossi-Landi Network [IFRN]).

Let me add that the “International Rossi-Landi Network” as founded in 1999 as part of the activities connected with the International Association for Semiotic Studies, and was directed from the time of its inauguration through to the year 2004 by myself with Janos Kelemen (University of Budapest). Since then it has been organised and directed by Augusto Ponzio who has also created the relative website (on all these aspects and more, see Jeff Bernard’s essay “Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and a Short History of the Rossi-Landi Network”, available on the Rossi-Landi Network website).

### II . With Mikhail Bakhtin and His Circle

At this point, I wish to pick up the threads of the story I began telling above and mention the influence exerted on the semiotic sphere from the end of the 1970s onward by the great Russian philosopher Mikhail M. Bakhtin (1895 – 1975) and his circle thanks to Augusto Ponzio, and particularly Pavel N. Medvedev (1891 – 1938) and Valentin N. Vološinov (1885 – 1937), author of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*. In addition to promoting publication of their writings in Italian translation, Ponzio’s interest in Bakhtin and his collaborators led to his monograph on Bakhtin, the first at a worldwide level (*Michail Bachtin. Alle origini della semiotica sovietica* [ *Mikhail Bakhtin. At the Origins of Sovietic Semiotics* ]), published in 1980, followed by a second the subsequent year, *Segni e contraddizioni. Tra Marx e Bachtin* (*Signs and Contradictions. Between Marx and Bakhtin*), 1981, and a third, *Tra semiotica e letteratura: Introduzione a Michail Bachtin* (*Between Semiotics and Literature: Introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin*), published in the book series “Il campo semiotico” (The Semiotic Field), directed by Umberto Eco, in 1992 (new edition, 2016), and a fourth in 1997, *La rivoluzione bachtiniana* (*The Bakhtinian Revolution*), which we have already

mentioned above.

Ponzio's focus on Bakhtinian philosophy since the second half of the 1970s has produced various results: in addition to the Brazilian translation by initiative of Valdemir Miotello (2008, new edition, 2012) of Ponzio's 1997 Italian monograph, *La rivoluzione bachtiniana*, the remarkable volume, *Opere. 1919 – 1930*, by authors “Michail Bachtin e il suo Circolo” (Michail Bakhtin and His Circle), was published in the prestigious Bompiani Book Series directed by Giovanni Reale, “Il pensiero occidentale”, in 2014. This is a bilingual, Russian-Italian critical edition, curated by A. Ponzio with the collaboration of his son Luciano, of works by Mikhail M. Bakhtin, Valentin N. Vološinov and Pavel N. Medvedev from 1919 to 1930, as recited in the title; another expression of the work led by A. Ponzio specifically on Bakhtin and his circle is my own monograph, *Altrove e altrimenti (Elsewhere and Otherwise)*, 2012, too translated into Brazilian by initiative of Valdemir Miotello, 2013.

Influenced by Ponzio and in dialogue with him, Rossi-Landi himself also took an interest in Bakhtin with special reference to the Bakhtinian conception of ideology. In fact, in the second new and enlarged 1982 edition of his monograph *Ideologia* (1st edition, 1978; 3rd edition presented by A. Ponzio, 2005), Rossi-Landi on the question of ideology confronts his work with writings by Bakhtin and Vološinov and their interpretation of the concepts of “sign”, “ideology”, and “ideological creativity” (pp. 278 – 281, pp. 284 – 286ff), adding a new perspective with respect to the original 1978 edition of his monograph. To the problem of ideology considered in a semiotic key is also dedicated, *Signs, Dialogue and Ideology*, 1993, by Ponzio, a collection of essays translated from Italian into English by myself. In this particular book Ponzio highlights the positions of both Bakhtin and Rossi-Landi.

Augusto Ponzio's interest in Mikhail Bakhtin and his circle began from the 1973 English translation of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, by Valentin N. Vološinov, one of the more important voices of the so-called “Bakhtin Circle”. This book was originally published in St. Petersburg, at that time Leningrad, in 1929. By Ponzio's initiative it was published in Italian translation in 1976, from the English. Another starting point for Ponzio's studies on Bakhtin are the essays by L. Matejka and I. R. Titunik, the editors of the English edition, included in that same

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volume. These essays too were translated into Italian and included in the collective volume, *Michail Bachtin. Semiotica, teoria della letteratura e marxismo* (*Mikhail Bakhtin. Semiotics, Literary Theory and Marxism*), 1977, edited by A. Ponzio, complete with his introduction. Other essays in that volume include: “Significato delle idee di M. Bachtin sul segno, l’enunciazione e il dialogo per la semiotica contemporanea” (Meaning of the Ideas of M. Bakhtin on Sign, Utterance and Dialogue for Contemporary Semiotics), by V. V. Ivanov, 1973; “Il problema del testo” (1960 – 61) (The Problem of the Text), by M. M. Bakhtin, 1960 – 1961; and “La parola, il dialogo e il romanzo” (1969) (Word, Dialogue and Novel), by Julia Kristeva, 1969.

Subsequently, A. Ponzio promoted the Italian translation of Valentin N. Volosinov’s 1927 book, *Freudismo. Studio critico* (*Freudism. A Critical Sketch*), 1977, followed by a new translation by his son Luciano, in 2005; and of Pavel N. Medvedev’s 1928 book, *Il metodo formale nella scienza della letteratura* (*The Formal Method in the Science of Literature*), in the book series “Teoria del linguaggio e della letteratura” (Theory of Language and of Literature), founded and directed by A. Ponzio. In 1980 *Il linguaggio come pratica sociale* (*Language as Social Praxis*) was published in the same book series. This volume proposes a collection of writings by Vološinov which had appeared in the original Russian between 1926 and 1930, with the important essay “La parola nella vita e nella poesia” (Discourse in life and discourse in poetry). The same collection was republished in a new translation by Luciano Ponzio under the title “Linguaggio e scrittura” (Language and Writing), in 2003.

The third part of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, entitled “Per una storia delle forme dell’enunciazione nelle costruzioni linguistiche” (Toward a History of Forms of Utterance in Language Constructions), was published in 1995, in another Italian collection, *Bachtin e le sue maschere* (*Bakhtin and His Masks*), edited by A. Ponzio, M. de Michiel and P. Jachia, with writings by various members of the Bakhtin Circle (Bakhtin et al., 1995). More recently the Italian translation of Vološinov’s text (Part III of *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*), “Toward a History of Forms of Utterance in Language Construction”, was published (in a new translation from the Russian by L. Ponzio) under the title “Parola propria e parola altrui nella sintassi dell’enunciazione” (One’s Own Word

and the Other's Word in the Syntax of the Utterance), as an independent volume in the book series "Il segno e i suoi maestri" (The Sign and Its Masters), directed by Augusto Ponzio, Cosimo Caputo and myself (Lecce, Pensa Multimedia, 2010). The year before, in 2009, Bakhtin's 1920 - 24 essay appeared in a critical edition by L. Ponzio, *Per una filosofia dell'atto* (*Towards a Philosophy of the Act*), together (in the Appendix) with "Frammento del primo capitolo di *L'autore e l'eroe nell'attività estetica*" (Fragment from the First Chapter of *Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity*) (1924).

Philosophy of language is practiced by the Bari-Lecce school of semiotics in terms of what we have proposed to call the *philosophy of listening*, listening to the word of the other, a philosophy of the word's reception and of responsive understanding. As I am attempting to illustrate in this introduction to the collection of writings we are now proposing to our Chinese readers with the present volume, among the many authors who have inspired this orientation are those mentioned thus far—Bakhtin, Vološinov, Rossi-Landi, Adam Schaff. And the extent to which they are present in the Bari-Lecce school of semiotics emerges clearly in other books by A. Ponzio, *The Dialogic Nature of Sign*, 2006; his new introduction to the Brazilian edition of our 1994 book, co-authored with Patrizia Calefato, *Fundamentos de filosofia da linguagem* (pp. 9 - 68); in books by myself which have appeared in English or Italian (all independent monographs and not translations of each other) (in addition to those already listed, see, for example, Petrilli, 2011, 2012b, 2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, 2016); moreover and most recently, in a co-authored book by Ponzio and myself, *Lineamenti di semiotica e di filosofia del linguaggio* (*Foundations of Semiotics and Philosophy of Language*) (2008, new edition, 2016), which includes the introduction to the Brazilian edition of our 1994 book (co-authored with Calefato), reworked and represented as the first chapter, where philosophy of language is discussed explicitly in terms of the "art of listening" (also see the volume, *Philosophy of Language as the Art of Listening*, 2007).

Marxism as professed by the Bakhtin Circle was not what was commonly recognised as orthodox Marxism of the times (Ponzio, 2011, p. 45ff). Nor was it "academic Marxism", thus classified by Patrick Sériot ("Preface" to Vološinov, *Marxisme et philosophie du langage*, 2010, 57). According to Sériot, Vološinov's Marxism is "a metatheory of the human sciences". He claims that Vološinov never

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cites Marx. As disproof of this claim, let it suffice to draw attention to the epigraph in Vološinov's 1927 book on Freud and Freudism which cites Marx's VI thesis on Feuerbach and which was eliminated (unorthodoxically) from the English translation. It reads as follows in the German original: "*Menschliche Wesen ist kein dem einzelnen Individuum innewolmendes Abstractum. In sein Wirklichkeit ist es das Ensemble der gesellschaftlichen Verhältnisse.*" (The human being—or human essence—is not an abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is a system of human relations.)

This utterance resounds in completely different senses according to how the expression *Menschliche Wesen* is translated, that is, whether as "human essence", or as "human being" in the sense of the human existent, of the human individual. This is the problem around which revolves the entire debate that took place between Adam Schaff and Lucienne Sève in the journal *L'Homme et la société*. The texts forming this discussion were collected and translated into Italian by A. Ponzio in the volume *Marxismo e umanesimo* (Marxism and Humanism), authored by Schaff and Sève, 1975. Ponzio's comments are available in his introduction, "Il problema dell'individuo umano e la traduzione e il senso delle 'Tesi di Marx su Feuerbach'" (The Problem of the Human Individual and the Translation and the Sense of "Marx's Theses on Feuerbach") to that volume (pp. 5–48).

Contrary to common practice of the time, Vološinov, like Bakhtin, Medvedev and other members of the Bakhtin Circle, as much as like Lev Vygotsky, were not in the habit of invoking the authority of Marx. In other words, they were not in the habit of appealing to his authority through recourse to the *ipse dixit* formula. However, in his introduction to *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (eliminated from the English edition of this book), Vološinov courageously opens his discourse with the following statement:

There does not exist so far a single Marxist work in philosophy of language, nor can considerations on language somewhat defined and developed be traced in Marxist works on similar themes. [...] To this we must add that mechanistic categories are firmly established in all sectors only touched upon or completely neglected by the founders—Marx and Engels. All these sectors are still fundamentally at the stage of predialectic mechanistic materialism. (English translation from the Italian as presented



in Bachtin e il suo Circolo, 2014, pp. 1462 – 1463)

As to Bakhtin, apart from the fact that to claim that there are never any references to Marx in his writings is not true, Bakhtin, in his 1965 monograph *Rabelais and His World*, develops an idea expressed by Marx in Book III of *Capital*. Namely, the human being comes to full development and reaches freedom only with the end of the reign of necessity. This idea is central in Bakhtin's works overall and is at once in net contrast with dominant and reductive interpretations of Marx and Marxism.

### III. With Jeff Bernard and Adam Schaff

Like Ferruccio Rossi-Landi before him, Jeff Bernard left us far too prematurely, in February 2010. In addition to being a scholar of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, he was also a good friend to him.

We originally met Jeff Bernard as the Secretary General of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (President, Roland Posner; Treasurer, Gloria Withalm). He served very actively in that role from 1994 to 2004. After our initial encounter at the IV International Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS), “Signs of Humanity/ L’ Homme et ses signes”(the first I had ever attended myself), which took place between Barcellona (Spain) and Perpignan (France) from 31 March to 6 April 1989, we met Jeff at various international IASS conferences and again as our invited guest to a series of seminars hosted by our Department—at that time Department of Linguistic Practices and Text Analysis (PLAT), The University of Bari(now the University of Bari “Aldo Moro”). Once again on invitation by A. Ponzio and myself, Jeff Bernard with Gloria Withalm over the years have held courses in sociolinguistics at the University of Bari for our undergraduate and graduate students.

An important meeting with Jeff Bernard took place in February 1992, occasioned by a conference dedicated to Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, at the Hungarian Academy in Rome, organized by his good friend, Janos Kelemen. The proceedings were collected in the volume, *Reading su Ferruccio Rossi-Landi: Semiotica come pratica sociale (Readings on Ferruccio Rossi-Landi: Semiotics as Social Practice)*, edited by J. Bernard, M. A. Bonfantini, J. Kelemen, A. Ponzio, 1994.

As the director of *Semiotische Berichte*, Jeff Bernard published a selection of

essays by Augusto Ponzio and myself in a special issue of that journal. This collection appeared in 1998 under the title “Signs of Research on Signs”, as volume 22/3,4. In addition to this, Bernard also promoted publication of another collection of essays under the title “Semiotic Studies in Bari”, edited by myself, as a special issue of the journal, *S/European Journal for Semiotic Studies* (1999), which he also directed.

For what concerns his interpretation of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi’s *oeuvres* and the latter’s contribution to the relationship between semiotics and Marxism, see the two essays by Jeff Bernard included in the present volume as well as our own essay on him in the same.

As regards Adam Schaff, the origin of Augusto Ponzio’s friendship with him and consequently of my own, is the publication of Ponzio’s essay “Grammatica trasformazionale e ideologia politica” in *L’Homme et la société* (1973, p. 8). Being published together in the special issue titled “Linguistique, structuralisme et marxisme” (mentioned above) led to an intense exchange of letters and to Ponzio’s interest in Schaff’s works. A direct result was Ponzio’s first monograph on Schaff, *Persona umana, linguaggio e conoscenza in Adam Schaff* (*Human Person, Language and Knowledge in Adam Schaff*), 1974. This monograph was subsequently reviewed and enlarged for a new edition of 2002, *Individuo umano, linguaggio e globalizzazione nella filosofia di Adam Schaff* (*Human Individual, Language and Globalisation in the Philosophy of Adam Schaff*).

Preparation of the second edition of this monograph benefited from Schaff’s direct participation—he wanted to be an active part of the process: he arrived in Bari on 24th January 2000 and stayed until the 29th of the same month, especially, contributing to this new edition with information, reflections, memories, anecdotes. Our meetings took place in my home, just a few blocks away from the university, where we also organised a few meetings with students and colleagues. At the grand age of 87 Schaff would climb the stairs stoically up to my study and once accomodated, immediately engaged our attention with his beguiling stories, scientific and personal. It was a unique time during which I was privileged with listening to this great thinker, able to appreciate the scientific rigour of his discourse and the passion and dedication with which he addressed the issues that came up in his conversations with Augusto Ponzio (all of which are recorded).

In *Introduction to Semantics* (Polish original, 1960, Eng. trans., 1962), Schaff takes a critical stand against “sign fetishism”, which he considers as a recurrent limitation in interpretations of language. According to Schaff, sign fetishism reduces the sign-situation to a relation among signs, or rather to a relation between sign and object, between sign and thought, between the sign, on one hand, and the thought, the object, on the other, etc. Schaff develops Marx’s analysis of commodities, identifying analogies between the critique of the notion of exchange value in economics and the critique of linguistic value. As he explains in his introduction to this volume, in the struggle against what he calls “sign fetishism”, he borrowed from Marx who in *Capital* coined the concept of “commodity fetishism” in relation to a problem that Schaff considered very similar to his own.

Schaff was engaged in searching for the sense of “meaning”, and Marx had endeavoured to explain the sense of “value”. In the course of his analyses, Marx soon realised that people studying the exchange of commodities on the market were influenced by the idea that commodities exchanged themselves with each other, so that relations of economic value were thought to be relations among commodities. Marx had the great merit of demonstrating that in reality there exist relations among the producers of commodities, that is to say, among people, so what we are dealing with ultimately are *social* relations among people and not simply relations among things. Schaff explains that social work is incorporated in commodities and becomes the basis and measurement of exchange relations, therefore of what we call “value”. Discovery with Marx of so-called “commodity fetishism” has provoked a real and proper revolution in the interpretation of economic relations. Schaff has evidenced an analogous phenomenon in the case of meaning and the sign-situation: there too prevails a specific “sign fetishism”, which largely obstacles the understanding as much as the solution to the problem.

On addressing the problem of *linguistic social production*, both Rossi-Landi and with him Ponzio have taken up and further developed the critique of sign fetishism as formulated by Adam Schaff.

Once language is recognised as work, and is invested with the character of work, the linguistic system does effectively appear as a human manifestation, in the sense in which “human” is understood by Marx: *langue* (in Ferdinand de Saussure’s sense) is the result of operations whose end is not the activity itself, and where the

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needs that must be satisfied are not satisfied in immediate terms; in other words, the *langue* is the product of work, *linguistic work*. This means to say that to understand the way language functions and to account for the values, programs and ideologies that it vehicles, it will not suffice to remain at the level of the “linguistic market”. On the contrary, it will be necessary to pass from the level of the “linguistic market” to the level of “linguistic production”.

With his notion of “linguistic work”, Rossi-Landi refers to what is now called “immaterial work” (as anticipated above) as a result of the metamorphosis of work in today’s world. Compared to “material work”, so-called “immaterial Work” is now considered the main resource at the level of production (on this account see the books already listed by Schaff, *Umanesimo ecumenico, Il mio secolo XX, and Meditazioni*; André Gorz, 1988; and the volume, *Lavoro immateriale [Immaterial Work]*, Athanor, XIV, 7, cited above).

What the speaker expresses on using language (*langue*) is not something nonlinguistic that calls to be organised linguistically. Instead, what the speaker expresses already subsists as the material and instrument of preceding linguistic processing. So that as Marx and Engels say in *Die Deutsche Ideologie*, it would appear that language is effectively the real, practical consciousness which also exists for other people and therefore is the only consciousness that exists for myself as well.

The concept of “linguistic work” is pivotal in Rossi-Landi’s research and was already thematized in his 1968 monograph *Language as Work and Trade*. In fact, in this book he already discusses language in terms of “linguistic work”, “linguistic market” and “linguistic capital”, evidencing what he calls homological relations between “linguistic production” and “material production” that unite these social processes.

Truly noteworthy is the fact that Rossi-Landi should have developed his critique of communication and society in such terms at a time when capitalism had not yet reached its current phase of development, and the determining role of communication and so-called “immaterial resources” in the productive process was not yet as obvious. What Rossi-Landi foresaw is the reality of the present day and age. With his concept of “linguistic work” he established a connection between material production and linguistic production and between linguistics and economics (as recited by the title of his 1975 Mouton book), at a time when such an operation

could have seemed strange or, to say the very least, simply metaphorical. Rossi-Landi's "linguistic work" converges with what in today's "knowledge society" is described with such expressions as "immaterial resource", "immaterial capital", "immaterial investment" and is recognised as a central factor in development, competition and occupation (employment). Material production and linguistic production have at last come together, and yet not long ago they still appeared separately in the form of "manual work" and "intellectual work". The interconnection between work (or labour) and material artifacts, on the one hand, and work (or labour) and linguistic artifacts on the other, has materialized before our very eyes in the union between computer hardware and software, where the priority of "linguistic work", that is, "immaterial work", is now obvious.

With Rossi-Landi, Adam Schaff as well may certainly be considered as a great master in the study of signs. But this is not only thanks to the numerous books he has authored, not least of all his *Introduction to Semantics*, renowned worldwide. In addition to this, Schaff authored many other significant, indeed epochal works, some of which I will cite below in their Italian translations (rather than in the original Polish), given the point of view of this narrative, the perspective from which we are telling this story and from which its various voices have come together.

Schaff's books in philosophy of language and semiotics include such titles as *Il concetto e la parola* (*The Concept and the Word*) (1946), *Linguaggio e conoscenza* (*Language and Knowledge*) (1964), *Lineamenti di filosofia del linguaggio* (*Foundations in the Philosophy of Language*) (1967), *La grammatica generativa e la concezione delle idee innate* (*Generative Grammar and the Conception of Innate Ideas*) (1972), *Umanesimo, filosofia del linguaggio e teoria della conoscenza nel marxismo* (*Humanism, Philosophy of Language and Theory of Knowledge in Marxism*) (1973), *Sociolinguistica* (*Sociolinguistics*) (1976), *Gli stereotipi e l'agire umano* (*Stereotypes and Human Action*) (1980). And Schaff has dedicated many other works to theory of knowledge, logic, epistemology, and to the study of the relationship between language and ideology.

With Lucien Sève Adam Schaff was at the centre of international debate during the years of 1971 - 72, to which he contributed directly in first person. As we have already observed, this debate took place in the journal *L'Homme et la société* (22 - 26). The immediate object of discussion revolved around the translation of Marx's

*Thesen über Feuerbach (Theses on Feuerbach)*, and this was closely connected to the problem of the relation between Marxism and humanism.

Moreover, beyond his publications, Schaff also promoted a series of meetings in different cities across Europe, beginning in 1984, all dedicated to the same problematic, “The semiotic interpretation of the Final Act (1975) of the Conference in Helsinki”, and to the question of development and collaboration in Europe.<sup>①</sup>

But these are not the only reasons why Adam Schaff is a master in the study of signs. Schaff is a central figure in contemporary European culture and further to his engagement at a theoretical level as we have described thus far, he has made a significant contribution to reading the signs of our times.

Schaff concludes an unpublished text of 1999 with an accusation directed at UNESCO, which in reality involves us all, whether the intellectual, the professional politician, or the everyday man namely, of not having done enough, indeed of not even having taken the first step. (This text has been included by Ponzio in Italian translation in the 2002 edition of his monograph on Schaff, under the title “Ragionamenti. La disoccupazione strutturale e la grande trasformazione” [Discussions. Structural Employment and the Great Transformation]).

In the face of exploitation, economic oppression and social alienation at the national and international levels, Schaff expresses his concern for humanity viewed in its globality, in its condition of essential interrelationship from the planetary perspective, with a gaze that is ecumenical, predictive, projected towards the future. In addition to its uniqueness, the life of each single individual is the expression and consequence of the life of the community to which that individual belongs, a community which in turn is interconnected with the larger community, and so forth in a spiral progression of concentric circles on the synchronic axis of contemporaneity and on the diachronic axis of history.

Schaff analyses problems in today’s world with extraordinary acumen—with a

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<sup>①</sup> Meetings organised by Adam Schaff took place in various cities across Europe. At that time he was honorary president of the European Coordination Centre in Vienna. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and Augusto Ponzio participated together in the meeting in Budapest. Among the results of this project here we wish to recall: the new German edition (Wilhelmsfeld, Egert, 1990) of “Helsinki Final Act” by initiative of the European Coordination Centre for Research and Documentation in Social Sciences; the French edition of the same document, *L’Acte Final d’Helsinki. Texte et Analyse*; and the book edited by Ch. Villain-Gandossi *et alii*, *The concept of Europe in the process of the CSCE*, Tübingen, Gunter Narr, 1990.

special focus on the politico-social dimension—thanks to his participative sensibility and together the interdisciplinary range of his understanding and ongoing dialogue between linguistic-semiotic, political-ideological and psychological-social competencies. Schaff is a politically engaged scholar, with an interest in social praxis, and concern for human rights—including the right of each single individual to the quality of life—supported by his special attention for the question of scientific method, which he recounts having learnt above all from his philosophical studies subsequent to his studies in economics.

In his response to a question asked by Augusto Ponzio, “What does it mean to be a Marxist in this phase of history characterised as it is by the end of wage labour?” Schaff maintains that this is mainly a historical problem, precisely: “history decides on the response” (Ponzio, 2002, p. 232). With the end of wage labour, with the end of the proletariat, the capitalist class—that can only exist if the proletariat exists—is also disappearing. Consequently, a new social organisation is “*ante portas*,” as Schaff says (Ibid., 232). However, Schaff also observes that this new social world will not come to existence automatically, without being programmed and promoted. What he does believe is, inevitable in the dominant social reproduction system, a maximum degree of degradation and unsustainability—if this new form of social organisation is not programmed or promoted. Therefore, the problem today is to find new and adequate responses to the “great transformation”, to invent new forms of sociality, thus create new forms of conviviality both national and global.

From this perspective and as part of new social planning, independently of denominations—whether “socialism”, “postcapitalism” and so forth—Schaff, already towards the end of the twentieth century, proposes that all humanisms unite and collaborate for the development of new forms of living together and of resistance in the face of situations and events that are ever more pressing, ever more dangerous, for the destiny of humanity worldwide. Schaff identifies four problems which he represents with the metaphor of the “Four Cavaliers of Apocalypse”: ecological disaster, structural unemployment, migration, and war. He thematises the problem of responsibility which involves us all and introduces the expression “ecumenical humanism” (as recites the title of one of his books) to underline the need for collaboration among various humanisms. He emphasises the aberrant use

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that has been made, instead, in the contemporary world of such concepts as “humanism” and “humanitarian” with our “armed humanitarian interventions” and “humanitarian wars” even, as though the referents of such expressions can be reconciled!

Beginning from the 1970s Augusto Ponzio has promoted the Italian editions of Schaff's essays and books, amongst which the collection in three volumes of his *Saggi filosofici (Philosophical Essays)* (Bari, Dedalo, 1977 – 1978), followed by *L'alienazione come fenomeno sociale (Alienation as a Social Phenomenon)* (Rome, Editori Riuniti, 1985), *Il mio ventesimo secolo (My Twentieth Century)* and *Umanesimo ecumenico (Ecumenical Humanism)* (published respectively in 1993 and 1994 with the same publishers, Bari, Adriatica), and *Meditazioni (Meditations)* (Bari, Edizioni dal Sud, 2001).

At the 9th World Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies (IASS/AIS), “Communication: Understanding/Misunderstanding”, 11 – 17 June 2007, hosted by the University of Helsinki and the International Semiotics Institute at Imatra, in Finland, Augusto Ponzio and myself organised a special session in his honour under title, “Homage to Adam Schaff”. Contributions, including our own, an introductory text, “Adam Schaff: From Semantics to Political Semiotics”, were published in the relative proceedings (*Communication: Understanding/Misunderstanding*, Tartu, Greif, 2009).

As we move towards the conclusion of this introduction we wish to draw attention once again to a figure we have already nominated in our discourse, for his important contribution to promoting the school we have been describing, though he was not part of it with us (that is, with Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Augusto Ponzio and myself): Thomas A. Sebeok. To Sebeok, Ponzio and myself dedicated an essay titled “The Concept of Language. Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and Thomas A. Sebeok”, published in *Lavoro immateriale* (cited above). We owe much to Sebeok, but here we wish only to recall once again the publication of Rossi-Landi's book, *Linguistics and Economics*, and subsequently the essay by Ponzio titled “Semiotics and Marxism”.

Ponzio had already published such titles as *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale (Linguistic Production and Social Ideology)*, 1973, *Dialettica e verità. Scienza e materialismo storico-dialettico (Dialectics and Truth. Science and Historico-dialectic*



*Materialism*), 1975, *Marxismo, scienza e problema dell' uomo* (*Marxism, Science and the Problem of Man*), 1977, *Michail Bachtin. Alle origini della semiotica sovietica* (*Mikhail Bakhtin. At the Origins of Sovietic Semiotics*), 1980, and *Segni e contraddizioni. Fra Marx e Bachtin* (*Signs and Contradictions. Between Marx and Bakhtin*), 1981. It was against this background that Sebeok, in the early 1980s, commissioned Ponzio with an essay on the relation between semiotics and Marxism for publication in his well established Mouton Book series, "The Semiotic Web" (Ponzio, 1989).

Just as the Saussurean model of sign is influenced by the marginalistic theory of the School of Lausanne, the Marxist critique of political economy can be related to the question of sign and sign value and thereby contribute to a better understanding of the social relations of production, exchange and consumption of commodity-messages and message-commodities. As demonstrated by Ponzio, with the semiotic analysis of social signs and the Marxist analysis of commodities, we progress from the level of sign exchange and sign market to the subtending levels of the social work of communication and signification. Sign structures are at last made to emerge for what they are, namely structures of human relationships.

Our image of the world is made of signs, language and ideology, just as human social behaviour, social consciousness and scientific theories are all made of signs, language and ideology. This is a direct consequence of the action of signs, verbal and nonverbal, which influence social praxis and in turn are influenced by it, by social relations in turn modelled by signs and language (on the question of semiosis and modeling, Sebeok, 1986, 1994). The human capacity for making choices and behaving as a consequence can only be fully understood by keeping account of such factors.

As observed by the English philosopher Maurice Cornforth in his book of 1965, *Marxism and Linguistic Philosophy*, what is unique about the human capacity of choosing, and makes us claim that we are able to choose what to do freely or deliberately or rationally or morally is that human individuals, unlike other animals, are endowed with language (and here the reference is to verbal language), a social acquisition, and language presents us with alternative worlds for us to choose from. Today, in light of the most recent findings in biosemiotic research as pioneered by Sebeok, we will add that yes, human beings, unlike other animal life forms, are

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able to make choices among alternative worlds. Even more, human beings are able to create infinite new worlds thanks to language where by “language”, however, as Sebeok teaches us, is not simply understood as verbal language, but rather as a *syntactical modeling device*, a human species-specific capacity for modeling and creativity, for innovation which appears well before the appearance of verbal language for communication (Petrilli & Ponzio, 2003, 2005, 2013).

The extent to which language, verbal and nonverbal, converges with the reality of thought and influences the formation of human consciousness was never underestimated by the classics of Marxism. However, as Georg Klaus—another author promoted by Augusto Ponzio with the translation into Italian of his book *Die Macht des Wortes (The Power of Words)*, first published in the original German in 1964, and subsequently in Italian in 2006 in the books series “Gli strumenti” (Instruments), directed by A. Ponzio, P. Calefato and S. Petrilli—observes, more than as a primary factor, language was considered as a derivative of social reproduction. Today research on the foundations of the Marxist theory of knowledge and historico-dialectical materialism and on the sign nature of culture and society evidences the inexorable interconnection between semiosis, modeling and our vision of the world, therefore between sign, language, ideology and human behaviour.

The aim of the present introduction is not to name all the actors of European Marxism, but to call the attention, without making claims to exhaustiveness, to a group of scholars in Europe who have dedicated their research and writings specifically to signs and language from a Marxist perspective and to Marxist theory from the perspective of semiotics and who have somehow come together indicating pathways to continue, theoretical and practical. And even with respect to an approach thus focused, the domain to be explored is so rich in facts, figures and folios that there is still much to recount. The threads to a story are infinite, always unfinished, open to development as is this story about the story spun by Augusto Ponzio with a lifetime’s work dedicated to people and problems revolving around the question of semiotics and Marxism.

### **Acknowledgements**

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#### Author:

Susan Petrilli, vice president of International Association of Semiotics Studies (2014 – present), assistant professor in Philosophy and Theory of Languages, the University of Bari, Italy. Her research fields are semiotics, Marxist semiotics and semiotics of communication.

#### 作者简介:

苏珊·佩特里利, 国际符号学协会副主席 (2014 年至今), 意大利巴里大学哲学与语言学理论副教授。她的研究方向为符号学、马克思主义符号学与传播符号学。

Email: susan.petrilli@gmail.com