III. Surveys

1. Semiotics in Italy from the mid 1970s onward

Semiotics from Decodification to Interpretation

Italian semiotics has largely been influenced by what we may generally call the Saussurean sign conception, inclusive of such trends as that established, for example, by the Prague Circle or by the work of Louis Hjelmslev. But parallel to this influence, or interfering with it, another very strong influence is represented by American semiotics. We could cite Ferruccio Rossi-Landi's monograph of 1953 on Morris, and going back still further, the 1949 Italian translation by Silvio Ceccato of Morrls 1946 *Signs, Language and Behavior*, which appeared just three years after the publication of the original English edition. But even before this, between the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth, Peirce's pragmatism had already exerted a strong influence on philosophy of language in Italy through Giovanni Vailati (for a flashback on the origins of Italian semiotics, see Rossi-Landi 1988).

Two books by Umberto Eco–*A Theory of Semiotics* of 1975 and *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language* of 1984–may be viewed as expressions of this transition. However, Italian semiotics is rich with many other problems and perspectives beyond the Saussurean influence or even the Peircean, which renders the semiotic scene during the years under discussion rather complex and varied. We are alluding to such factors as the work of Mikhail Bakhtin, the rediscovery of Victoria Welby, and the pioneering work inaugurated in the early 1950s by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi.

There are two main reasons for beginning our description with the second half of the 1970s. First, 1975 saw the publication of Eco's *Trattato di semiotica generale*, which may be taken as the point of arrival of the initial phase in Italian semiotics and the point of departure of current orientations which are strongly Peircean as compared with the previous phase. (It is no coincidence that the second edition of Rossi-Landi's 1953 monograph on Charles Morris also appeared in 1975.) Second, the development of Italian semiotics up to 1975 has already been thoroughly examined by Augusto Ponzio in *La semiotica in Italia* (1976), this paper being the beginning of a possible continuation.

The recent ferment in critical thought and theory in Italy should be seen in the context of intellectual developments at the European and world levels, and in relation to various fields. Such interconnections have led to the flourishing of such a great multiplicity of semiotic methodologies, theories, and practices that to speak of the "adventures" of the sign is doubtlessly appropriate (cf. Ponzio 1990a: part 1). Furthermore, semiotic studies have developed interdependently on the vertical axis of historiographical reconstruction, with numerous contributions tracing the life of signs through ancient and medieval thought (cf. Corvino et al. 1982; Eco 1984; Manetti 1987; Ponzio ed. of Peter of Spain 1986 [1230?]; Ponzio 1985c; *Versus* 15, 1976; *Versus* 50/51, 1988), and on the horizontal axis populated by the dissemination of the various specific semiotics. For this reason, one of the best ways to form an idea of the nature and extension of semiotics in Italy today is to consider the great variety of orientations, methods, viewpoints, and objects of analysis.

Two useful volumes which work in this direction include: *Dove va la semiotica?* (1986), edited by Gianfranco Marrone, and *La semiotica letteraria italiana* (1982), edited by Marin Mincu. Both are collections of interviews with various scholars, but they differ in that the first looks toward international semiotics, thereby offering an important point of confrontation for developments in

Italian semiotics, while the second focuses on a specific area in semiotics as it is practiced in Italy–i.e., literary semiotics–thereby verifying on a national scale the various critical and theoretical currents present at an international level. In addition to these as well as Ponzio's book of 1976, other noteworthy publications from the mid 1970s onward include: Calabrese and Mucci 1975; Garroni 1977; Eco 1979, 1984; Bettetini e Casetti 1986; Ponzio 1988b; and Marrone and Ruta 1989; Calabrese, Ponzio, Petrilli 1993.

In the framework of the present overview, to narrate the Italian "semiotic adventure" of the past fifteen years means to "narrate" it in the first person and on the basis of the experience of a single individual. This inevitably implies recourse to precise methodological choices (given the characteristics of the discourse genre we are using), and a channeling of the great plurality of semiotic experiences into a single viewpoint. Nonetheless, while recognizing the limitations of a first person narration, the presence of a single voice on a formal level does not necessarily imply univocality and monologism on a substantial level. Should this be the overall effect of the present paper, the result can only be imputed to my own limitations, since the "object" of semiotics is unquestionably plural and polyphonic. The semiotic science is composed of many voices, logic, perspectives, and objects of analysis which all frequently interconnect on the basis of relations that are substantially dialogic. This also emerges from the widely supported proposal of describing semiotics as a "multidisciplinary" or "interdisciplinary" field, or even in terms of "interdisciplinary dissemination", rather than more reductively as a discipline in its own right (cf. Petrilli 1991a). Already in the title of his 1984 book, *Semiotics and the Philosophy of Language*, Eco significantly associates general semiotics with philosophy. Indeed, for a fuller understanding of the specificity of semiotic discourse, it is important to look at semiotics through the eyes of philosophy, and particularly of the philosophy of language (which is not only verbal "language").

Bearing in mind the sign's orientation (by contrast with the signal) toward plurivocality, polylogism, and multivoicedness, and therefore its ability to adapt to new and different situational contexts, we soon realize how important it is to use the right models and methodologies in explaining just these values–i.e., plurivocality, polylogism, multivoicedness, semantic flexibility, etc.–in the science of signs, rather than to expect to force the great variety of sign phenomena into monolithic and unitary thought systems. This occurs, however, when we privilege such categories as "code" and "message", "*langue*" and "*parole*", "collective unitary system" and "differential individual use", typical of decodification semiotics or "code and message" semiotics (cf. Bonfantini 1984) as developed from a distorted approach to Saussurean linguistics and information theory. We are alluding here to the tendency–whose limits today are obvious–to describe the communication process reductively in terms of an object in transit from one place to another. A critique of this orientation had in fact already been formulated by Rossi-Landi in his 1961 book, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, where he describes the decodification approach with ironical overtones as the "postal package theory"; in other words, Rossi-Landi underlines the fact that decodification semiotics reduces messages to the status of packages sent from one post office and received by another. His position is developed by Ponzio in a 1984 paper, "Semiotics between Peirce and Bakhtin" (now in Ponzio 1990a: 251-273). As alluded to in the title, Ponzio establishes a connection between Peirce's interpretation semiotics (which places the sign in the global context of semiosis and of the relation with the interpretant) and Bakhtin's philosophy of language (according to which a sign can only subsist as a sign in the context of dialogism). The "new" model of sign which emerges from this description is at last free from the underlying assumptions of so-called "code and message", or "decodification", or "equal exchange" semiotics.

The "official" date of birth of semiotics in Italy is commonly (though erroneously) considered to be 1966 (cf. for example Bettetini and Casetti 1986)–that is, the year of publication in Italian of Roland Barthes' *Elements de semiologie* (1964), largely accepted as the "manifesto" of the semiotic

movement. This date entails neglecting a series of earlier studies as far back as the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth with Vailati whose approach to language analysis was influenced by Peirce's semiotics and pragmaticism (cf. Rossi-Landi 1988). Nonetheless, there is something significant in this error: the year 1966 is important in Italian semiotics because of Barthes' proposal to invert the relation between linguistics and semiology as established by Saussure in *Cours de linguistique generale.* Apart from one's position regarding this issue (including incorrect interpretations of Barthes' inversion)–i.e., whether semiotics encompasses linguistics (Saussure) or vice versa (Barthes)–the success and dissemination of semiotics in Italy was wholly conditioned by its close association with linguistics, and in particular structuralist linguistics. At the same time, however, the wealth of theories and empirical researches of structuralist orientation characterizing the transition from the 1960s to the mid 1970s was also accompanied by a critique of structuralism, thereby creating a need for new solutions.

From the mid 1970s onward, Peirce's intellectual inheritance began to be more substantially remembered and considered as a fundamental point of reference not only in Italy (cf. Bonfantini, Eco, Proni, Sini, etc.), but throughout the world. As regards Italy, an international conference on Peirce was held for the first time in November 1990 in Naples, representing a climax in the recovery of Peircean semiotics in this country. Considering that, in Italy, studies in semiotics began with an interest in Peirce and subsequently in Morris (whose epochal 1938 volume, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, was translated into Italian in 1954), we might see this "new phase" of the mid 1970s as a return to the research of the 1950s after a decidedly "Saussurean phase", and therefore a return to the minor Italian tradition such research recalls.

Semiotics today may be described as transcending the phase designated as decodification (or, if we prefer, code, or equal exchange) semiotics (cf. Bonfantini 1984: 28ff), with its subdivision into communication semiotics (Saussure, Buyssens, Prieto) and signification semiotics (Barthes 1964), and as working in the direction of so-called interpretation semiotics (Peirce, Bakhtin, Barthes, etc.). The categories developed by decodification semiotics have often proven to be reductive, especially when applied in such areas as discourse analysis, writing, and ideology; on the contrary, interpretation semiotics accounts better for signifying processes in all their complexity thanks to its theories of sense, significance, and interpretability (*interpretanza,* as Eco says–cf. 1984: 43), and therefore to its broad, flexible, and critical conception of the sign.

To describe sign processes as the ongoing deferral of interpretants in an unending chain-like formation leads to the necessity of considering the terms and sense of this deferral–that is, the problem of "the limits of interpretation", as expressed in the title of Eco's 1990 book. Eco proposes two concepts of interpretation: on one hand, to interpret means to consider the objective nature of a text, its essence, its independence relatively to the effort of interpretation; on the other hand, we have a concept of the text as something open to infinite interpretation in a process tagged as "hermetic semiosis". Eco is critical of the latter and maintains that, despite appearances, it proposes something altogether different from the Peircean theory of "unlimited semiosis". The main object of his criticism is Jacques Derrida's notion of "infinite deferral" as it is developed by "deconstructionism". And to show how the concept of "infinite drift" in Derrida, and above all in the deconstructionists, is different from Peirce's "infinite semiosis", Eco refers to the Peircean notion of "habit", which, being fixed by community convention, underlines the intersubjective character of interpretation (see Eco 1990: 350).

Eco's specifications concerning the Peircean notion of "unlimited semiosis" may be associated with the dialogic character of interpretation as theorized by the philosopher of dialogism, Mikhail Bakhtin. Thanks to Bakhtin, we are today in a position to recognize that the relationship among interpretants is essentially dialogic (i.e., the logic binding interpretants is a dia-logic; cf. Bonfantini

and Ponzio 1986). This implies that an interpretant sign cannot impose itself arbitrarily on the interpreted sign; that is, it does not relate to the interpreted sign authoritatively or unconditionally. To understand the Peircean chain of interpretants in terms of dialogism means to escape the risk of considering the interpretation process as being equivalent to a free reading in which the will of the interpretants (and with them of the interpreters) beats the interpreteds "into a shape which will serve their own purposes" (cf. Eco 1990: 42). This makes the association between Peirce's position and Bakhtin's even more interesting (cf. Ponzio 1990a).

Studies in the field of semiotics of literature are particularly effective in illustrating the inadequacy of reducing sign value to exchange value. The expression "of literature" is here intended as a subject genitive (cf. Ponzio 1986); in other words, literature stands to semiotics in the sense that the sign is considered from the viewpoint of literature–of the unfunctionality, unproductivity, and excess of literature as regards the logic of equal exchange–and not in the sense that prefixed models and categories are applied to literature. In this connection, the research of such authors as Julia Kristeva, Roland Barthes, Maurice Blanchot, and Mikhail Bakhtin has exerted considerable influence on Italian studies. The following oppositional pairs of concepts help underline the difference in semiotic theory and practice of the 1960s by comparison with the 1970s and 1980s: "static nature of sign" and "dynamic nature of semiosis", "univocality" and "plurivocality", "monologism" and "polylogism", "monolingualism" and "plurilingualism", "identity" and "otherness", "equivalence" and "exccss", "decodification" and "interpretation".

The association of Peirce's semiotics with Bakhtin's philosophy of language has not only helped to place the sign in the dynamic context of inference, interpretation, and dialogism, but also contributes to emphasizing still other aspects in the relation among signs in signifying practices. For example, Ponzio (1985a) proposes that we consider the meaning of signs, verbal and nonverbal, in terms of an interpretive route. This concept in fact proposes interesting solutions for a series of problems at the heart of current semiotic-philosophical debate. These include: the question of the plurivocality and ambiguity of signs; the relation of meaning and referent; the intersemiotic relation between signs which opposes the conception that signs and sign systems are reciprocally independent to the point of seeming autonomous; the relation of the signifier (sign vehicle, signans) and the signified (designatum, significatum, signification, signatum), with special focus on signifier excess with respect to the signified as determined in the interpretation process.

Ponzio describes meaning as a possible interpretive route in the sign network; a route that interweaves with other routes, with other meanings irradiating from the same sign. On moving away from a sign intersection, the sign may shift among the various alternative signifying routes, which accounts for the indeterminacy, openness, and semantic availability of signs, for their semiotic materiality (cf. Petrilli 1990b; Ponzio 1990a). Therefore signs find their place in the context of dialogic relations, which is determined by: (1) the relation of signs and interpretants, which ln argumentation is (2) the relation between premises and conclusions (the latter is characterized by varying degrees of dialogism depending on whether we are dealing with deduction, induction, or abduction [Peirce]); (3) the relation between the multiple interpretants, verbal and nonverbal, constituting the open trajectory of an interpretive route; and (4) the relation among interpretants of different interpretive routes (cf. Ponzio 1985a, 1990a).

Signs, Values, and Ideology

Another aspect which has strongly emerged during the 1980s is the relation between semiotics and axiology, thanks also to the association with studies on ideology (Rossi-Landi offers a detailed analysis of the relation between sign value and economic value in his so-called Bompiani trilogy: cf. Rossi-Landi 1985, 1992, 1994; Ponzio 1988a). Greater efforts are now being made to recover

and develop that particular bent in semiotics oriented toward questions of an axiological order. This involves a more global reconnaissance of man and his signs, which means that a significant feature of presentday trends in semiotics is this very extension of its boundaries to include the problem of the relation of signs and values. Until recent times official semiotics has mainly operated as a cognitive science with claims to being neutral consequently emerging as a descriptive science. Nonetheless, as mentioned earlier, sign theory had already been introduced to the problem of value with Saussure who adapted his theory of exchange value from marginalistic economics. Morris (1964) too underlined the need for examining the relation between signs and values. Going back still further toward the end of the last century, let us remember that Victoria Welby had already coined the term "significs" (cf. Welby 1983, 1985) in her effort to highlight the difference between her own approach to the study of signs and meaning and the predominantly cognitive orientation of contemporary trends in semantics and semiotics. A selection of her writings is now available in Italian translation in a booklet entitled *Significato, metafora, interpreta zione* (1986). As far as the problem of value is concerned, we must also note the strong influence exerted in Italy by the school of Algirdas J. Greimas. Greimasian thought and its followers in Italy thematize the relation of signs and values with particular reference to developments in semiotics of passions (cf. Pezzini 1991).

An original chapter in Italian semiotics is offered by studies on semiotics and ideology, which go back at least as far as the 1960s. To analyze ideology semiotically is not simply a question of applying semiotical instruments to the study of ideology; even though signs can exist without ideology, ideology cannot exist outside a sign medium. Therefore we must study the ideological nature of signs where applicable, and the semioticaal nature of ideology (which is constitutive of ideology), and in this perspective review our model of sign. Such an approach should also involve reflexion on the ideological nature of the science that studies ideology–in this case semiotics (cf. Ponzio l991a, 1992b).

Rossi-Landi uses the concept of "social reproduction" articulated into three levels (structure, sign systems, and superstructure) to explain the dialectic relation of ideology and social structure. According to Rossi-Landi this relation is mediated by sign systems; the entire process of social reproduction is pervaded with ideology through sign systems. After a phase in which the problem of ideology seemed to have been ousted from semiotics (not only in Italy), it is now finally being reconsidered. The problem of the relation of semiotics and ideology is also linked to the relation of semiotics and Marxism. And in both *I Think I Am a Verb* (1986) and *Semiotics in the United States* (1991), Sebeok refers to studies carried out in Italy (with particular reference to Rossi-Landi and Ponzio) as possible examples of a critical and nondogmatic approach to the relation of semiotics and ideology, and semiotics and Marxism. Unfortunately, however, dogmatic approaches have often prevailed in this field, provoking a general neglect of important categories originally developed from Marx and present in various forms in the study of signs.

The Special Semiotics

Another issue which should at least be mentioned here concerns the relation between the specific semiotics, general semiotics, and philosophy. In Eco's opinion (1984), as grammars of particular sign systems, the specific semiotics need not concern themselves with philosophical reflection on the categories in which they are grounded, which does not mean denying their philosophical foundations. This statement is also made as a reply to Emilio Garroni (cf. Garroni 1977, and his polemic response to Eco in Mincu 1982), who takes the opposite stand. Garroni maintains that even though the specific semiotics may privilege empirical research, they must be fully conscious of the categories through which they operate. Cesare Segre (in Marrone 1986: 153-163) also believes that the so-called "specific semiotics" must deal directly with problems of a philosophical order, for they

work within a specific theoretical framework and therefore at some stage must inevitably deal with the general problems of semiosis as well.

The practitioners of semiotics in Italy work in a great variety of different fields including esthetics, psychology, information theory, literary theory, literary criticism, philology, mathematics, biology, etc., in addition to philosophy and linguistics. Semiotic theory has benefitted from the contribution of theories and methods imported from different territories, which in turn have been enriched through their use of semiotic instruments. In response to the request that he identify the major Italian representatives of semiotics and underline their originality with respect to other European schools, Eco (in Mincu 1982: 68) mentions the field of architecture, reflexion on iconic signs and on literature, the importance of philosophical speculation ("it was precisely in Italy that the transition was achieved from a structuralist semiotics of Saussurean derivation to a philosophical semiotics of Peircean derivation"), and the stronger characterization of Italian semiotics as social semiotics (with interesting grafting from Marxism) as compared for instance with French semiotics, which is decidedly oriented toward studies in psychology, with graftings from psychoanalysis.

Literary theory has shifted its attention from textual structure to the text considered in its historico-cultural context and in its dialectic-dialogic relations with the intertextual tradition. The rediscovery of Bakhtin, the theorizer of language and literature (cf. Ponzio 1992a), has been fundamental for developments in this direction, but we must also remember the research of Yuri Lotman and Boris Uspensky on the typology of culture, and more generally the notion of culture as developed by the Russian tradition in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (cf. Avalle 1982; Prevignano 1979). As regards the relationship between Russian and Italian literary semiologists, Segre (in Marrone 1986: 161) recalls their common background as philologists or historians of literature.

Italian literary semiotics is deeply rooted in the great tradition of linguistics and philology . Segre explicitly attributes his own inclination toward literary criticism to his background studies in philology and linguistics, and states that good work in this area requires "a sense of the text, knowledge of the ways in which it is developed and diffused, recognition of the necessity of keeping account of all the facts and of historico-cultural precedents" (in Mincu 1982: 44). As underlined in the title of his 1979 book, *Semiotica filologica*, Segre believes that critical analysis and philology are always closely correlated and together produce the sign models he privileges.

In Italy, Giorgio Prodi's research (cf. 1977, 1982, 1983b) has taken a direction similar to Sebeok's. Prodi identifies the most significant connection between the natural sciences and the human sciences in the "contact" between biology and semiotics, which he believes may become a solid connection under the banner of "general semiotics". It is not a question of interdisciplinarity, altogether vain in most cases where it was attempted, nor of good relations among neighbourig corporations: but of a new language, a new unitary perspective that does not coincide with any of the perspectives from which the question arose. In short, it was a new way of outlining the problems of knowledge. On the basis of the assumption that human knowledge is grounded in the proposition of "being significant in relation to ...", and that the entire apparatus of knowledge focuses on the interpretation of meaning Prodi too, in line with Sebeok and using organismic metaphors that recall Welby's analyses of signifying processes (cf. Welby 1983), identifies the association of biology with semiotics in research on meaning:

We have observed that the deciphering of meaning is at the very root of all biological machines. All reactions and structures composing any organism whatever are decipherings of meaning and exist insofar as they produce selective actions in which each term is a sign for the reader who reads it. Biology is pure natural semiotics. Biological processes are "sign translations". The organism's capacity to survive over the environment is connected with the discrimination of significance in the environment: but this would not be possible if the organism itself were not defined, internally, as a confederation of meanings. (Prodi, in Marrone 1986: 122)

Even though the numerous trends, standpoints, and topics in Italian semiotics have only been briefly outlined in this paper, we hope to have at least given the reader some idea of the liveliness and ferment of Italian semiotic research with reference not only to Italy, but also to its reception internationally. No doubt Italian semiotics has felt the influence of what we have generically called the Saussurean conception of the sign (comprising the work of the Prague Circle and of Hjelmslev); but parallel to this orientation, or complementing it, influences from other semiotic traditions including in particular the American and the Russian have also played a determining role on the Italian scene. Consequently, an important characteristic of Italian semiotics is its intimate association with the theories and practices of other countries.

2. Contributions to Bakhtinian Readings in Italy

During the 1970s the following books by Mikhail M. Bakhtin appeared in Italian translation: his 1975 Russian collection translated with the title, *Estetica e romanzo*; his *Rabelais* of 1965 translated as *Rabelais e la cultura popolare nel Medioevo e nel Rinascimento*; and thanks to Augusto Ponzio, the trilogy–recently reprinted in Russia under the general title *Bakhtin's Masks–Freudianism* (1927), *Il metodo formale nella scienza della letteratura* (1928), and *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio* (1929) (the main text is translated from the English while the introduction is translated directly from the 1930 Russian edition which had been excluded from the English). All three are signed by two of Bakhtin's collaborators as the result of work done collectively by the Bakhtin Circle during the 1920s: Valentin N. Voloshinov for *Freudismo* and *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio,* Pavel N. Medvedev for *Il metodo formale nella scienza della letteratura.* Two important anthologies collecting writings by different authors also appeared during the same period: *Problemi di teoria del romanzo* (see Strada 1976 ed.), which included Bakhtin's "Epos and romanzo" (1938-41) (published again both in *Teoria e realtà del romanzo* and in *Estetica e romanzo*), and *Michail Bachtin. Semiotica, teoria della letteratura e marxismo*, (see Ponzio 1977 ed.: collecting essays by V.V. Ivanov, J. Kristeva, L. Matejka, I.R Titunik, and A. Ponzio with the addition of Bakhtin's "Problema teksta", 1959-1961), appearing for the first time in Italian.

During the 1980s Bakhtin's work was at the centre of attention in Italy. In 1984 his biography found its Diogenes Laertius in Michael Holquist (with the collaboration of Katerina Clark) with the monograph, *Mikhail Bakhtin*. In any case, Augusto Ponzio authored the first monograph ever on Bakhtin at a world-wide level under the title, *Michail Bachtin. Alle origini della semiotica sovietica*, published in 1980.

Ponzio examines Bakhtin's research in all its complexity and in the historico-cultural context of its development evidencing the specific orientation of Bakhtin's research as against other philosophical, literary, psychological, and culturological currents of the time. Ponzio's monograph is theoretical by comparison with the biographical orientation of the Holquist-Clark monograph, and far broader than Tzvetan Todorov's, *Mikhaïl Bakhtine. Le principe dialogique*, 1981. The latter together with the Holquist-Clark 1984 monograph and Holquist's subsequent monograph of 1990, *Dialogism: Bakhtin and his World*, do not do justice to Bakhtin's work because of their misunderstanding of the Bakhtinian concept of dialogue.

Ponzio in his monograph reconstructs the historico-cultural context in which Voloshinov, Medvedev and Bakhtin published their writings on literature, with a particular focus on "La parola nella vita e nella poesia", signed by Voloshinov. Differently from the Russian formalists, Voloshinov insists on the homological relation between ordinary discourse and literary writing rather than on the contrast, and in this light concentrates on the specificity of the literary text. To

contextualize Bakhtin's contribution to the critique of "Freudian philosophy" as formulated in *Freudismo*, Ponzio describes the debate on psychology in the USSR during the 1920s. He analyzes the relationship between Bakhtin and Vygotsky, as well as the latter's interest in the psychology of art. In his desciption of the relationship between the Bakhtin Circle and Russian Formalism Ponzio reconstructs the itinerary leading from Medvedev and Voloshinov and their analysis of the ideological character of verbal material, from the concept of "extralocality" presented in Bakhtin's early writings, from "representation" in Medvedev's book of 1928, to the difference between the objective word and the objectified word developed by Bakhtin in his book on Dostoevsky, where he works on the concepts of the "dialogically internal word" and "polyphony" characterizing the Dostoevskyian novel.

Ponzio also analyzes Bakhtin's monograph on Rabelais in which the distinction (introduced in *Freudanism*) between "official ideology" and "non official ideology" is developed in relation to popular culture, carnival and the relationship between "high genres" and "low genres". He also works on the analogies and differences between Bakhtin and Vladimir Propp with reference to their interests and methodologies employed in their study of culture.

Furthermore, in his 1980 monograph Ponzio also reconstructs the dispute of 1950 between Stalin and Marr concerning language theory and the false problem as to whether language is or is not a superstructure. According to Ponzio, Bakhtin's approach to signs and ideologies reveals that linguistic and sign phenomena are not generally characterized by the concept of "superstructure", but that, on the contrary, the concept of "superstructure" is explained non-mechanistically through the study of verbal and nonverbal signs which inexorably mediate between so-called "base" and so-called "superstructure". From this viewpoint, of great interesting are both the original introduction to *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio* (eliminated from the English edition), and the first chapter of *Il metodo formale e la scienza della letteratura.*

In 1980 Umberto Eco also contributed to discussion on Bakhtin's *Rabelais* with an article entitled "Il *Rabelais* di Bachtin". Nonethless, in his work on literature theory, the author-reader relation, the problem of the "limits of interpretation" Eco does not take Bakhtin into consideration. In 1980 other articles on *Rabelais* are published by the French studies specialist Giovanni Macchia, the anthropologist Clara Gallini, and by Ponzio in collaboration with the anthropologist Maria Solimini (1981). In 1980 Ponzio publishes in Italian translation a collection of writings by Voloshinov originally published in Russian journals between 1926 and 1930, *Il linguaggio come pratica sociale* (Bakhtin and Voloshinov 1980)

In 1981 an essay by V. Strada, "Dialogo con Bachtin," and the Italian translation by C. Strada Janovic of Bakhtin's 1970-71 "Appunti" were published in the first issue of the journal *Intersezioni.* The same text was subsequently included in the 1988 Italian translation of the 1979 Russian collection of Bakhtin's writings, published as *L'autore e l'eroe*. In Ponzio's opinion the first Italian translation of this text is better than the second, having the merit of rendering Bakhtin's interesting distinction between *tisina* and *molcanie* with the terms "silenzio" and "tacere" (silence and taciturnity) (cf. below, 1V.3) and unfortunately replaced by "silenzio" and "mutismo" in the 1988 version.

In "Dialogo con Bachtin", V. Strada refers to the Italian translations (promoted by Ponzio) of the books by Medvedev and Voloshinov, and is more rigid concerning the distinction between what belongs to the author Bakhtin and what does not. On the contrary, in his 1976 introduction Strada (1976 ed.) accepts the interpretation according to which texts by Medvedev and Voloshinov contain ideas that "are substantially Bakhtin's". However, he does not yet take an extreme position in "Dialogo con Bachtin" on the question of private property relatively to the works of the Bakhtin

Circle. Strada claims that books by Voloshinov and Medvedev, "having appeared in the USSR when Bakhtin was forbidden all possibility of publishing, doubtlessly develop Bakhtin's ideas, but in a 'Marxist' context which is not Bakhtin's" (*ibid*.: 116). Indeed, as a reading of their works reveal, the Marxist context of the books by Medvedev and Voloshinov was by no means "Marxism intended as the only 'scientific' and above all 'state' philosophy", but rather critical Marxism which, as declared in the texts in question, was still to be constructed in relation to studies on individual consciousness and cognitive processes, verbal and nonverbal signs, and the problem of the specificity of the literary text. Strada identifies two "key concepts" for literary works in Bakhtin's "dialogic model": "great time" and "extralocality" (*ibid*.: 123), though he does not succeed in grasping the specificity of this "dialogic model" being concerned as he is with tracing analogies between Bakhtin and neokantianism, Heideggerian philosophy, Hans Gadamer's philosophy and–considering his aim to describe Bakhtin as a "personalist philosopher"–the work of Martin Buber and "perhaps" Max Scheler (*ibid*.: 118). As observed by P. Jachia (*Introduzione a Bachhn* 1995: 132), Strada overlooks the fact that Bakhtin criticizes the philosophy of both Max Scheler and Martin Buber for their total lack of scientific rigor.

In the same year, 1981, another book appears by Ponzio, *Segni e contraddizioni. Tra Marx e Bachtin*, in which he analyzes Bakhtin's theories of language and literature with the aim of constructing a theoretical perspective in which the problems of language and translation are dealt with in terms of the relation of alterity and contradiction. Another important element in this book is the confrontation of Bakhtinian ideas with Marx as freed from prejudice and stereotyped interpretations.

In 1982,*Tempo e segno* by Patrizia Calefato inaugurates the book series "Segni di Segni," directed by Ponzio and Maria Solimini. In the paragraph entitled "Festa e tempo gioioso in Bachtin," Calefato confronts the Bakhtin's perspective on time with the dominant Western view grounded in a cumulative concept of history, according to which the subject's experiences take place linearly as established by a fixed idea of progress, speed, and anticipation.

In the same year the second edition of *Ideologia* by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi is published with a section on "Linguaggio e ideologia in Bachtin e Voloshinov" (1982: 192-203). Rossi-Landi observes that Bakhtin, Medvedev and Voloshinov have the merit of signalling the "need for a new and creative Marxist approach to problems of language, ideology and their relations" (ibid.: 203), and of denouncing the fact that mechanistic categories were established in all fields only just touched on or completely left aside by Marx and Engels.

Ponzio's "trilogy" of three books (*Spostamenti*., *Tra linguaggio.e letteratura*, *Lo spreco dei. significanti*) published as a sequence in the above-mentioned book series, "Segni di segni", are rich in references to Bakhtinian theory not simply as the direct object of study but as the theoretical perspective according to which problems of philosophy of language, text theory, and theory of literature are reconsidered. Ponzio relates Bakhtin's contribution to R. Barthes, J. Kristeva, J. Derrida, M. Blanchot, and E. Lévinas. Another interesting publication is the collective volume *Polifonie* edited by Ponzio, in relation to which I shall simply signal the latter's essay, "La polionimia di Kierkegaard," in which Bakhtin's approach is ascertained in the "author's extralocality," achieved by Kierkegaard through the expedient of pluri-pseudonomy.

The Second International Conference on Bakhtin, "Bachtin teorico del dialogo" was organized in Cagliari in 1985. The conference proceedings were published in 1986. Ponzio's paper which unites his studies on Bakhtin and Emmanuel Lévinas (cf. Ponzio 1995a), was subsequently included in his book *Filosofia del linguaggio 1*, together with "Abduzione e alterità", in which Bakhtin's dia-logic is confronted with what we might call Peirce's semio-logic.

This double reference is also present throughout another volume by Ponzio (written with the collaboration of Massimo A. Bonfantini), *Dialogo sui dialoghi.*. Ponzio's 1986 volume *Interpretazione e scrittura*, is also dedicated to the relation between Peirce's semiotics and Bakhtin's philosophy of language with a focus on language and dialogue from the viewpoint of "literary space". References also return to the expert of otherness, Lévinas.

Another International Conference on Bakhtin was organized in 1989, in Urbino (Italy), by the Centro internazionale di semiotica e linguistica, on "Bachtin e l'epistemologia del discorso". Foreign participants included M. Holquist, C. Thomson, and I. Zavala; among the Italians Ponzio held a paper with Angela Biancofiore entitled, "Dialogue, Sense and Ideology" (in Ponzio 1993d), Susan Petrilli (1990d) confronted Bakhtinian theory with Welby's "significs" in "Dialogue and Chronotopic Otherness in Bakhtin and Welby", and Paolo Jachia presented "Bachtin e il marxismo".

In 1990 another volume by Ponzio appears entitled *Man as a Sign*, which though reproposing earlier papers originally published in Italian, does not have an Italian equivalent organized in the form of a unitary volume. Bakhtinian categories are present in Ponzio's sign theory: otherness, dialogism, answering comprehension (or responsive understanding), and therefore the difference between sign and signal. Bakhtin is also present as the direct object of analysis, with Ponzio's return to confrontation with Lévinas and Peirce in addition to Rossi-Landi, Schaff, and Welby. Using Bakhtin in conjunction with Peirce and Rossi-Landi, Ponzio signals the direction in which code semiotics may be overcome. This volume also includes an appendix by S. Petrilli ("The Problem of Signifying").

In 1991 Ponzio published another two books in which Bakhtinian thought plays a primary role both as the general perspective and as the object of analysis. The first, *Dialogo e narrazione*, comprises the chapters: "L'acrobata e la sua ombra", "Dialogo e narrazione", "Alterità e origine dell'opera", "Il dialogo fra Rousseau e Jean Jacques". The second, *Filosofia del linguaggio 2*, includes a third section specifically on Bakhtin, "Senso e valore fra identità e alterità", though the latter is present throughout the whole volume, beginning with the section "Segno e ideologia" and ending with "Architetture e metodo".

Two monographs appear on Bakhtin in 1992: *Introduzione a Bachtin* by Paolo Jachia and *Tra semiotica e letteratura. Introduzione e M. Bachtin,* by Ponzio. A noteworthy aspect of Jachia's book is the comparison–important not only for Bakhtin criticism but also for today's ideological consciousness– between Bakhtin and Marxism in which the former's originality, autonomy and innovative capacity is underlined. It is not a question of "Marxisizing Bakhtin", as says V. Strada (cf. "Introduzione" to the Italian edition of Bakhtin's *Tolstoj*, Bakhtin 1986: 45), but if anything of "Bakhtinizing" Marxism in the perspective of a new form of humanism (such as that proposed by Adam Schaff in *Umanesimo ecumenico* or of Lévinas' "humanism of otherness"). In *Tra semiohca e letteratura* Ponzio returns to his monograph of 1980 whiche he amplifies with the addition of works written in the meantime. His 1992 monograph is divided into two sections: 1) "La specificita della parola letteraria"; 2) "Soggetto, segno, ideologia". The value and specific character of Bakhtinian research is underlined in all its complexity, unlike numerous other studies which fail to do justice to Bakhtin. These in fact tend to be inadequate–despite treating important problems–simply because Bakhtin's work is often rather restrictively related to the interests of a particular discipline, therefore, to sectorial issues. On the other hand, Ponzio's viewpoint is fundamentally theoretical, turned as it is to problems around which Bakhtin's research is organically articulated. Bakhtin's work is evaluated by Ponzio both in the light of current debate on literary theory and semiotics, an area Bakhtin related to directly, as well as the other human sciences which are always present in the background. For this reason, in addition to situating Bakhtinian thought in the ideologico-

theoretical context of its real (direct or indirect) referents, Ponzio also confronts it with trends which had not been taken into consideration, at least directly, by Bakhtin such as those connected with such authors as Propp, Peirce, Lévinas, Blanchot and Chomsky. Such confrontations are fundamental in fathoming the implications of Bakhtinian thought in its various aspects and in fully evaluating its topicality, capacity for innovation and relevance to semiotic theory and literary today. Ponzio also dedicates to Bakhtin part VI of his book, *Production linguistique et ideologie sociale* , 1992b.

In 1993 a fragment from the first chapter, "L'autore e l'eroe nell'attività estetica" from Bakhtin's book *L'autore e l'eroe*, is published for the first time in the volume, *Bachtin e...* edited by Ponzio and Jachia This fragment had neither been included in the 1979 Russian edition of Bakhtin's writings, nor consequently in the corresponding Italian edition of 1988. *Bachtin e...* is divided into two parts: "Bachtin e..." and "Simbolo, valore, alterita". In addition to the "Frammento" by Bakhtin (159-185), this second part also includes "Dalle Annotazioni", notes by Bakhtin (187-196), translated for the frst time from the 1986 Russian edition of these texts published in "Literaturna-kritisheskie stat'i". The second part of *Bachtin e...* also includes a strongly Bakhtinian article by S.S. Averincev (who with S. Bocharov has edited many of Bakhtin's writings for publication) and "Il simbolo" quoted by Bakhtin in his most recent work of 1974, "Toward a Methodology for the Human Sciences" (in Bachtin 1979) Each one of these translations is preceded by a brief presentation by Ponzio.

In the first part of *Bachtin e...*, the Russian scholar is confronted with other significant figures populating the cultural scene of our times (as signalled in the title), with essays by A. Biancofiore, P. Calefato, P. Jachia, R. Luperini, S. Petrilli, A. Ponzio and M. Valenti. One of the contributions by Ponzio, "Scrittura, opera, alterità", focuses on the relation between Bakhtin and Lévinas, also examined by him in another paper ("Bachtin e l'umanesimo dell'alterità"), written in English for the International Conference on Bakhtin in Manchester, 1991, and read in Spanish by Iris Zavala in the author's absence. This relationship is also the topic of another book by Ponzio (*Scrittura, dialogo, alterità,* 1994). Theory of knowledge, philosophy of language, moral philosophy and literary criticism can all be transversally correlated to the notion of otherness, a central theme in the thought of both Bakhtin and Lévinas. Ponzio's volume discusses this hypothesis through his theoretical analyses and critical readings.

Fondamenti di filosofia del linguaggio by A. Ponzio, P. Calefato and S. Petrilli (1994) is rich in implicit and explicit references to Bakhtin, including the conception itself of "philosophy of language": see in particular the sections "Competenza linguistica, comunicazione e coscienza linguistica"; "Linguaggio e identità"; "Dialogo"; "Linguaggio e produzione letteraria"; "Linguaggio e corpo"; "Filosofia del linguaggio e linguaggio della filosofia".

Another recent editorial initiative is the publication by Eutopìas, in an issue entitled *Tres miradas sobre Bajtin*, of three Bakhtinian papers by Mercedes Arriaga, Petrilli and Ponzio, originally presented at a Seminar dedicated to Bakhtin held in July 1994 at the University of Madrid.

A large volume edited by Ponzio and Jachia, *Bachtin e le sue maschere*, is also published in 1994. This collects various texts in Italian translation by Bakhtin and his Circle from 1919-29, some of which are translated directly from Russian for the first time, such as the 1925 text, "Il vitalismo contemporaneo", signed by the biologist, I. I. Kanaev but in reality written by Bakhtin as explicitly declared by the latter.

For the most recent editorial initiatives concerning Bakhtin readings in Italy, we shall simply remember the following:

–by A. Ponzio, *La rivoluzione bachtiniana. Il pensiero di Bachtin e l'ideologia contemporanea* (1996), which proposes through Bakhtinian categories and in a Bakhtinian perspective, a critique of today's globalized communication connected with the plan for the development of neocapitalism;

–the first Italian translation of the 1929 edition of Bakhtin's *Dostoevsky*, confronted with the 1963 version, by M. De Michiel and with an introduction by A. Ponzio (referred to in the paper on Bakhtin by Ponzio in the present issue, see above, I.2).

–the Italian translation of an essay by Bakhtin of 1920-24, *K filosofii postupka*, published for the first time in Russian in 1986, and proposed in Italian translation under the title *Per una filofsoia dell'azione responsabile* (that is *For a Philosophy of Responsible Action*), as an independent volume, in 1998, with the addition of two essays by Ponzio and Zavala (the same volume with the addition of other texts by Bakhtin was published in Spanish in the same year). This volume in Italian inaugurates the new book series "Di-segno-in-segno", directed by A. Ponzio, S. Petrilli and C. Caputo.

–a critical edition of *Marxismo e filosofia del linguaggio*, edited by De Michiel with an introduction by Ponzio scheduled to appear in the same book series, "Di-segno-in-segno", in January 1999.

Connecting Bakhtin to Lévinas favors our understanding of Bakhtin's theoretical horizon while avoiding the misunderstandings that Augusto Ponzio has contributed to evidencing. In fact, Lévinas' critique–or at least the distance he takes–as regards such authors as Buber, Heidegger, Sartre as well as the representatives of neo-Kantism, helps toward understanding Bakhtin's critique which is very similar even if he is not necessarily direct or explicit.

The fact is that after a specifically philosophical beginning expressed specially in his early writing, *K filosofii postupka*, Bakhtin was subsequently to dedicate himself completely to the study of literature where he discovered that the relationship of otherness was developed in the terms he was mainly interested in studying. In the literary text the triadicity of the otherness relation clearly emerges, being a relation between author, hero and receiver. On the other hand, Lévinas–who is also particularly attentive toward the problem of refounding the question of otherness and saving it from reduction to the ideology of identity as well as from the categories of the subject–persevered in his philosophical study of this question to the point that–or if as though– Bakhtin's implicit philosophy finds in Lévinas its full explicitation.

This is why we believe confrontation between Bakhtin and Lévinas–both of whom may be counted among the major and most original thinkers of our times–is fundamental, especially if we wish to avoid misunderstaning the Bakhtinian conception of dialogue and otherness. It is not an exaggeration to state, as does Ponzio in *La rivoluzione bachtiniana*, 1997, for Bakhtin, on one hand, and in *Sujet et alterité*, 1996, for Lévinas, on the other, that the work of these two authors constitutes an important space for the critical interrogation of the whole of Western ideology grounded in the category of identity. Dialectic from Hegel to Sartre did not succeed in conducting an adequate critique of identity or of Western reason to any satisfactory answers. Together Lévinas and Bakhtin represent an alternative which should be taken into serious consideration for a critique of reason inspired by alterity: a critique, that is, founded in otherness, answerability, dia-logic reason.

3. From Linguistic Production to Global Communication: Directions in philosophy of language.

Practising philosophy of language

The expression "philosophy of language" conveys the scope and orientation of Augusto Ponzio's research for two main reasons. Firstly, as a research method it promotes philosophical investigation into the sciences of verbal and nonverbal languages in terms of heteroglossia, polylogism, reciprocal otherness and dialogism, by contrast with the tendency toward prevarication, unquestioning authority, and monologism. "Philosophy of (verbal) language" because, as a meta-science, the interpretant of philosophical investigation is ultimately verbal: investigation takes place within verbal reality, its materials and instruments are verbal, its specific object is necessarily mediated by verbal signs, and it is pronounced verbally in a specific field of discourse. The pervasiveness of sign reality for man is evidenced by Ponzio with his theory of meaning as a network, a system of "interpretive routes", outside of which meanings cannot subsist: signs correspond to the nodes and intersections in this network and like the nodes in a network, once the pieces or the interpretive routes joining these signs disappear, signs themselves also disappear (cf. Ponzio 1985a, 1990b, 1995b).

The second reason why the expression "philosophy of language" is a good qualification of Ponzio's work is that philosophy as a science presupposes philosophy immanent in language. In other words, philosophy of language presupposes the orientation inherent in language toward "dialogic plurilingualism", "multi-voicedness", "heteroglossia" and otherness interrelating different languages, cultures and ideologies: the expression "philosophy of language" implies philosophizing by language and not just about language (cf. Ponzio 1985c). Even when research conducted in the sciences of language, linguistics, and institutionalized philosophy of language (commonly understood as philosophical studies on language) is oriented monologically and regulated by the centripetal and unifying forces of linguistic life, the original philosophizing immanent in language, its constitutional dialogic heteroglossia, is often betrayed. Were this not so, the very objectification of language and consequent flourishing of numerous philosophical and linguistic disciplines would have never been possible.

Therefore, from the viewpoint of philosophy, dialogic heteroglossia has a methodological function in the study of language as well as in delimiting philosophy of language as a discipline. Philosophy in general (and not just that immediately concerned with language) works within the framework of the dialogic heteroglossia inherent in language, which acts as a sort of a priori and transcendental condition in philosophical reflexion as in all forms of critical consciousness.

Ideology and linguistic production

In his 1973 book *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (amplified in a French edition of 1992), Ponzio promptly takes a clear stance against Noam Chomsky's approach to language analysis. Some aspects of this study are subsequently developed in a volume of 1991, *Filosofia del linguaggio 2*. In 1973 Ponzio's attitude meant criticizing dominant trends in the linguistic sciences given Chomsky's widespread influence over the intellectual globe. Ponzio's main contention is that Chomsky mistakes linguistic use in a specific language–English (his sentence examples are often untranslatable)–for the essential or universal in language-in general. Furthermore, according to Ponzio, Chomsky confuses levels of analysis, mistaking the description of the objects of analysis for the construction of the models of analysis. Ponzio's critique is in line with Sebastian K. Shaumjan, who proposes a bigradual theory of generative grammar articulated at two levels (the

genotypical and the phenotypical), as against what he describes as Chomsky's unigradual linguistic theory.

In Ponzio's opinion, what Chomsky calls "linguistic creativity" refers, in reality, to a situation characterized by the use of rules, codes, and programs which the speaker does not control. Moreover, this is true not only at the phonologic, syntactic and semantic levels of language, as believes Chomsky, but also at the ideological level. Chomsky dedicates a great part of his attention to questions of ideology both on a theoretical level , as well as on a pragmatic level without hesitating to commit himself publicly (think of his critique of the Bush administration in relation to the Gulf war, or of official U.S.A. politics concerning Cuba). Nonetheless, his theoretical work on linguistics is kept completely separate from his critique of ideology and political commitment. In Ponzio's view, what Chomsky describes in his linguistic theory is not a speaker exercising "linguistic creativity", but an alienated subject, that is, a subject who passively accepts rules, codes, and programs as given and natural while, in fact, they are determined socially and historically, though described by the linguist as "extra-historical" and universal. The Chomskyian speaking subject is an uncritical, passive, alienated subject unable to intervene actively on the codes it is subjected to, and transform them.

A central category used by Ponzio in his critique of Chomsky is "linguistic work" which he adapts from Rossi-Landi's important book entitled *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (1992 [1968]; English trans. 1983). The latter ideates the concept of "linguistic work" by relating different human sciences (political economy and linguistics), in other words, by identifying a homological relationship between sign production and the production of artifacts. As against the Chomskyian categories of competence and performance which repropose traditional problems, terminologies and mechanistic oppositions (e.g., consciousness vs. experience, behaviorism vs. mentalism, physical vs. psychic, internal vs. external, empiricism vs. rationalism), Ponzio, following Rossi-Landi and the lesson of dialectic materialism, calls attention to the dialectic relation between the subject and the social and natural environment, to language conceived as work and to the different languages viewed as the product of work, as the result of linguistic production processes, to the principle of the "methodics of common speech" or of "common semiosis" (cf. Rossi-Landi 1980 [1961]).

Chomsky explains linguistic competence, intended as the speaker's ability to produce and understand an infinite number of sentences on the basis of a finite number of elements, in terms of innate, universal generative grammar whose structures are biologically inscribed in the human mind and activated by experience understood as a totally passive condition.

However, as remembered by Ponzio, experience in modern conceptions after Kant is described as a series of interpretive operations, including inferential processes of the abductive type (Charles S. Peirce) through which the subject completes, organizes, and associates data which is always more or less fragmentary, partial, and discrete. Experience is these operations and as such is innovative and qualitatively superior by comparison with the limited nature of eventual input. In Ponzio's view, experience coincides with competence which conceived in such terms does not need to be integrated with an innate supplement, a piece of natural equipment supposedly inherent in the human infant.

In a more recent essay on Chomsky, now included in *Filosofia del linguaggio 2* , Ponzio returns to the question of the development of linguistic competence and knowledge generally, to what Chomsky in 1985 baptized "Plato's problem", that is, how a finite number of entities generates knowledge extending beyond such entities both qualitatively and quantitatively. According to Ponzio, that we recognize, know how to use, and understand a previously unexperienced linguistic expression (constructed, however, according to the rules of the language the speaker is familiar

with) is no more surprising than the fact that we recognize and consequently use something as a hammer, though never having seen this object before (but which is constructed according to the rules and functions that model a hammer).

In the same essay, the connection between language acquisition and performance of inferential-abductive operations is also analyzed by Ponzio in the following terms:

The relation between abduction and language learning (which is never finished and complete) is a relation of reciprocal support: language learning makes use of abductive processes, while abductive processes in their turn benefit from language learning because they are necessarily grounded in linguistic interpretive work as accomplished by the generations that have preceded us historically leaving us the linguistic materials and instruments which go to form the language we experience. (Ponzio 1991a: 97)

For a linguistic theory that goes beyond the dualism of competence and experience and of deep structures and surface structures, Ponzio draws on suggestions from Peirce and his particular sign theory. In this framework, and taking his distances from the Chomskyian concept of deep structures, Ponzio proposes what he calls an "interpretive linguistic theory" in the light of which the theory of different levels, of antecedents and derivations, no longer holds. The "interpretive linguistic theory" (ideated for application to both verbal and nonverbal signs) explains one's ability to comprehend the utterance or verbal sign in general in terms of its relation to another utterance that interprets it, an utterance acting as interpretant. All utterances are produced, characterized, identified, and developed by their interpretants. According to this approach, the interpretant of a sentence (or, rather, utterance) is not a deep structure grounded in underlying elementary sequences, but another verbal sign. In Ponzio's words, "an interpretant identifying an utterance or any verbal sign whatever is simply 'unexpressed', until the conditions are realized for its expression, explicitation" (199la: 102).

In Ponzio's terminology, an interpretant is either an "identifying interpretant" with the function of recognizing the sign at the level of its phonemic or graphic configuration, semantic content, morphological syntactic structure, or an "answering comprehension interpretant" focusing on the pragmatic dimension of signs. Viewed in such terms, and this is a particularly significant aspect of Ponzio's approach, the relationship between "interpretant signs" and "interpreted signs" is marked by dialogism, active participation, and otherness (Ponzio 1985a: 65-76). This level of sign interpretation is closely related to the ideological level of discourse, and while it is ignored by Chomsky, Ponzio argues that it should in fact be the starting point for any approach whatoever to the problem of ideology (cf. Ponzio 1977, 1990c, 1993).

For a linguistic theory to be functional, it must be explicative and critical, it must go beyond the limits of a simply descriptive and taxonomic approach to language analysis, and to achieve this it must reckon with the social processes of linguistic production in relation to a critical theory of ideology. As stated above, a weak point in Chomsky's research is represented by his failure to theorize the relation between language and ideology, which leads him to ignore the problem of the ideological structures that determine linguistic production processes. In Ponzio's words: "This separation stops his theory from becoming a critique of language and his critique of ideology from being grounded, on a theoretical level, in the study of language" (Ponzio 1991a: 7). Using categories adapted from Bakhtin, Voloshinov, Marx, Schaff, Rossi-Landi and Prieto–such categories as language as work, language as historico-socio-ideological reality–Ponzio criticizes the reduction of linguistic use to mere behavior or activity, and works on the human's potential for truly creative (abductive) and critical intervention on language and on one's surroundings at large (cf. Ponzio 1991a: 92).

Ponzio's evaluation of Chomsky's approach to language analysis, which is still representative today of main trends in linguistics, underlines the influence of the Marxian critique of political economy on his particular approach to philosophy of language. Ponzio never abandons his readings of Marx which, in fact, induce him to work on the problem of the critical grounding of scientific knowledge. His focus is on the production processes of knowledge, which, following Marx, coincide with the problem of the reproduction process of the social system that produces knowledge (cf., for example, Ponzio 1974a, 1974b, 1975, 1977).

Meaning as interpretive route

Working in such a theoretical perspective, Ponzio was only too glad to welcome the transition from decodification to interpretation semiotics as it began taking place in Italy in the early 1970s (cf. Ponzio 1988a).

The Peircean-Morrisian sign model at the basis of interpretation semiotics is a dynamic sign model, rooted in the concept of infinite semiosis in an open chain of deferrals from one interpretant sign to another. The supporting logic is not the logic of equal exchange, but rather of non correspondence, excess and otherness in the relation among interpretants forming the sign network. The interpretant sign says something more with respect to the interpreted sign, which in turn has its own semiotic consistency by virtue of which the latter resists any single interpretation, or "interpretive route", to use Ponzio's terminology (cf. 1985a and 1995b). In the framework of interpretation semiotics the sign is always part of a sign situation in which all the components of semiosis–the sign vehicle (*signifiant*), meaning (*signifié*), referent, interpreter, interpretant and codes regulating sign systems– are considered as different aspects of complex and articulate semiosic processes, and not separately from one another (cf. Ponzio 1988a: 24).

The sign model proposed by interpretation semiotics is the heterogeneous product of dialogically related results achieved in different contexts. These include: theory of knowledge (Peirce), of literature (Bakhtin), of *signifiance* (Barthes) and of axiology (Morris). Furthermore, research on the relation between semiotics and ideology (Rossi-Landi, Schaff) also led to greater attention during the 1980s on the relation between signs and (socio-ethical) values. In this connection, an important contribution is represented by Charles Morris who explicitly theorized the necesssary relation between signs and values in his book of 1964, *Signification and Significance*. By contrast with a view of semiotics as a solely cognitive, descriptive and ideologically neutral science, a major trend in semiotics today is intent on recovering the orientation toward problems of an axiological order and on achieving, therefore, a global reconnaissance of man and his signs. Ponzio proposes we call such an approach to the study of signifying practices "ethosemiotics", given its focus on the interrelation between signs and values beyond that between meaning, sense and significance (cf. Ponzio 1985c). An important contribution in this sense comes to us today from the English scholar Victoria Welby and her original approach to language analysis and meaning theory tagged "significs" (cf. Welby 1983, 1985; Petrilli 1988, 1998).

Through this critical groundwork of the 1970s covered in such books as *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (1973), *Filosofia del linguaggio e prassi sociale* (1974), *Dialettica e verità. Scienza e materialismo storico dialettico* (1975), and *Marxismo, scienza e problema dell'uomo* (1977), Ponzio demonstrates the inadequacy of trends which reduce the (verbal and nonverbal) sign and the human subject to exchange value, viewed separately from the historico-social relations of production processes. With reference to the various human sciences–philosophy, semiotics, linguistics, philosophy of language, political economy, anthropology, esthetic creation, and especially literature –, Ponzio conducts a series of studies which might be defined as explorations

and exercises along the boundaries of such sciences where they interact and contaminate each other and, therefore, along the boundaries of discourse.

Displacements

Another complex of interests in Ponzio's research finds expression in such books as *Michail Bachtin (*1980), *Segni e contraddizioni Fra Marx e Bachtin,* 1981, *Spostamenti. Percorsi e discorsi sul segno,* 1982, *Lo spreco dei significanti L'eros, la morte, la scrittura*, 1983,*Tra linguaggio e letteratura,* 1983, *Per parlare dei segni,* 1985, *Filosofia del linguaggio,* 1985, *Interpretazione e scrittura,* 1986, *Dialogo sui dialoghi* (in collab. with Massimo A. Bonfantini), 1986, *Il filosofo e la tartaruga,* 1990, *Man as a Sign,* 1990, *Filosofia del linguaggio 2* , 199l, and *Tra semiotica e letteratura,* 1992. At the philosophical level Ponzio's interlocutors include: Lévinas, Blanchot, Bakhtin, Kierkegaard, Peirce, Marx, Schaff, Rossi-Landi, Vailati, Peter of Spain, and Plato; at the literary level, Leopardi, Manzoni, Foscolo, Sterne, Orwell, Poe, and Proust. Ponzio's discourses on the sign and shifts in viewpoint as he confronts various approaches and research itineraries, suggest the image of the researcher working in the laboratory intent on sounding out the potential of the word and of human signifying practices generally.

In 1990 Ponzio founded the journal *Athanor*–this Arabic word evokes the alchemist in the laboratory mixing and transforming the elements. To the elements, in the double sense of the natural elements and the elements of the alphabet (two meanings which had already been connected by the ancient Greek philosophers), is also dedicated a collective volume of 1988 edited by Ponzio entitled *La scrittura degli elementi*. This includes essays by Omar Calabrese and Claude Gandelman with paintings by Angela Biancofiore.

Ponzio's books of the 1980s, especially the sections dedicated to literary writing, are written essentially from the viewpoint of literature. Here the expression "of literature" is not only intended in the restricted sense of applying given models and categories to the study of literary texts, but more broadly in the sense that literature, the "excess" and "otherness" of literary writing, the dialogic, digressive, and indirect word of literature provide the perspective according to which the sign is described. As averred by Lévinas and Bakhtin, literary writing is the place par excellence for the full realization of "extralocality", whose guiding value is not "egocentric identity", but "absolute otherness", where time and space do not belong to the order of productive accumulation, but of dispersion, digression, expenditure, and dialogic heteroglossia.

A book of 1990, *ll filosofo e la tartaruga* (collecting essays written between 1983 and 1988) assembles the general results of the "experiments" conducted by Ponzio during the 1980s. The main values theorized are represented by such terms as "ephemeral", "otherness", "discontinuity", "discretion", "passion", "expenditure", "waste", "transience", "drift", "shift":

As the expression of the logic of expenditure, dispersion and waste, the word "passion" serves to indicate that which escapes the logic of equal exchange and constitutes a critique of bourgeois economy, of the logic of accumulation, functionality, efficiency and productivity. The subject affected by passion is a "passive subject"; as such, it is considered negatively in relation to those conceptions of man that exalt such values as the Subject's authority, initiative, activity and consciousness. But the properly human subject, "subiectum", is constitutively passive, subject to..., dependent on..., interested in..., oriented toward.... Such a subject is characterized by its being open to the other, by the capacity of listening to the other, of tuning in with the other. In this perspective, alongside the "passive subject" understood as the subject which fails in its intention of being a controlling subject, in a position to answer for itself and reach its own personal aims, another modality of being "subject to..." is delineated. The latter is measured in terms of volition and

capacity for planning, but, on the contrary, concerns the subject's availability with respect to dialogism, otherness, listening. Thus intended, passivity is not alienation, the condition of the unquestioning subject passively experiencing external constriction. On the contrary, in Ponzio's description passivity denotes the possibility of surpassing the limits of identity, private individual interest, and is connected with a concept of the subject as a totality open to unlimited interrogation and criticism.

The frenetic production-exchange-consumption cycle is dominant today in our consumer society. Paradoxically, a condition for continuity of such production cycles is production of the ephemeral, that is, the discontinuous, the superfluous, the private–the "addomesticated" ephemeral, says Ponzio (1990e: 21). On his part, Ponzio proposes a different kind of "ephemeral" from that programmed by the logic of accumulation and equal exchange, intending it as a value that disrupts the latter, is refractory to it, and is therefore the place of the nonalienated self, the properly human, creativity, difference, freedom. Thus conceived, the ephemeral denotes the body's resistance–with its pulsional economy, exigencies, experiences, maladies, and even death–to programming, productivity, efficiency and functionality as established by a plan regulated by a specific aim. Viewed in relation to the human person, the ephemeral represents otherness, the right to be other with respect to identity as it is fixed by roles, contracts and commitments connected with officialdom. With respect to the bourgeois system of values in current capitalistic society, the ephemeral represents excess and loss; with respect to the time of (Hi)story, accumulation, edification, it is the place of irreducible discontinuity, disgregation, digression, discretion (cf. *ibidem*:)

In this perspective, Ponzio also re-evaluates the concept of automatism in relation to man, commonly considered in the negative sense of mechanicalness. The metaphor of automatism embraces what would seem to be contradictory concepts such as necessity, on one hand, and spontaneity, chance, and automony with respect to external constriction, on the other. On developing such contradictions in dialectical terms, Ponzio proposes what would seem to be another paradox: automatism as the process by which human action is rendered autonomous.

The automaton as a combination of the programmed and the spontaneous, of necessity and chance, of the natural and the artifact tells about man more than about the machine. [...] As autonomous determinism automatism implies and claims freedom from external agents or conditions. Automatism opens to the unconscious: automatism of thoughtlessness, forgetfulness, lapsus, automatism of dreams, desires, passions. (199Oe: 124)

What would seem separate and independent programs and automatisms are, in fact, related dialectically. This emerges even more clearly when we break down or "detotalize" the larger categories commonly used in analyzing man and his behavior: individual subject, society, culture, class, *parole*, and *langue*. On closer examination, we soon realize that each of these categories is built on a series of automatons in a system of ever-changing relations, so that what may seem programmed from a given viewpoint will result self-propelled and spontaneous, from another (cf. Barthes 1978; Rossi-Landi 1994). The problem to be dealt with is that of sounding out the possibility of constructing open automatons capable of responding to the other, to outside solicitation, and capable of modification as a result of such response, an automaton that is heterogenous and multiple with respect to the pseudo totality-automaton. Such a positive conception of human automatism is connected by Ponzio to another positive conception of automatism theorized by Antonio Gramsci:

Do freedom and what is commonly known as "automatism" clash with each other? Automatism clashes with the arbitrary, not with freedom. Automatism is freedom of the group, which contrasts with individualistic arbitrary will [...] For if the arbitrary is generalized, it is no longer the arbitrary but a shift in the basis of "automatism", new rationality. Automatism is no less than rationality, but the word automatism is an attempt at proposing a concept stripped of any kind of speculative aura. (Gramsci 1975 [1932-1935]: *Quaderno* 10)

For a critique of globalized communication

In his book of 1991 *Filosofia del linguaggio 2*, Ponzio continues his research on various problems mentioned in the present paper with a special focus on the interrelation between signs, values and ideologies. The mediating role carried out by signs in the current system of social reproduction is undeniable, as amply demonstrated by the extensive influence of mass media. Consequently, in an era in which the "crisis" or "end of ideology" has been proclaimed–in truth, a strongly ideological position and product of a combination of false consciousness, false thought and false praxis which as such is difficult to demystify–, Ponzio belongs to a community of researchers who insist on the interconnection between critique of ideology, critique of economy and science of signs. A critical dialectic approach to the human person and its signs leads to awareness of the continual "sacrifice" of otherness on the "altar of identity" (cf. Ponzio 1995d), and aims therefore to recover sense in the direction of otherness and extralocality. In a dialectical framework Ponzio proposes a "detotalizing method", freedom from the limits of identity, fragmentation of false but concrete totalities (Ontology, Politics, Equal Exchange, Individual, Society, State, Nation, Language, Truth, Knowledge, Equality, Justice, Freedom, limited Responsibility, Need), and awareness of the reality of extended totalities, of the general network of signs to which the smaller totalities belong as dialogically interacting and interconnecting parts:

[...] the present social reproduction system based on the logic of identity, which asserts itself by segregating or eliminating otherness, makes possible concrete abstractions on which such a system is constructed. Such concrete abstractions include the Individual forced to sacrifice its otherness to itself. A critique of such a system presupposes *the viewpoint of another*, which in turn presupposes recognition of the other, or better still: recognition of the inevitabile imposition and compulsoriness of recognition of the other. (Ponzio 1991a: 17)

In the present phase of his research, Ponzio is mainly concerned with developing a critique of the logic of identity and of communication-reproduction through categories connected with the logic of otherness. Leaving a presentation of his ongoing publications to a future article, I shall now simply limit myself to naming the following: the volumes *Dialogo e narrazione*, 199l, *Signs, Dialogue and Ideology*, 1993, *Responsabilita e alterità in Emmanuel Lévinas*, 1995, *I segni dell'altro*, 1995, and (in collaboration with other authors) *Fondamenti di filosofia del linguaggio*, 1994. A critique of productivity ideology and global communication is the main concern of a work in various volumes, *I segni del capitale,* of which the first and second volumes have so far appeared entitled respectively, *La differenza non indifferente. Comunicazione, migrazione, guerra*, 1995, and *Elogio dell'infunzionale. Critica dell'ideologia della produttività,* 1997. In this same perspective another book by Ponzio is his *Metodologia della formazione linguistica*, 1997, which through the sciences of language proposes a critique of social programs aiming at subjecting science, education and socio-cultural experience generally to market logic and consequently to the logic of profit.