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Global Communication and Otherness

Communitariness implies a form of sociality which is not globalisable, which is open to otherness and is therefore free from obsession with identity, which is extracommunitarian with respect to self, which is other, without boundaries, territories, belongings, roots, sociality grounded in incommensurable, uncontainable work where wealth is measured in terms of free time for otherness.

Paradoxically the development of capital produces the conditions for deterritorialization and for liberation from indifferent work. So it then becomes a question of imagining new forms of social relations and new employments where reduced labour time and production costs do not identify with the development of productivity, with an increase in productivity, with an increase in value associated with exchange. On the contrary, reduced labour-time will be considered as a sign of development in the wealth of the personality of the single individual, with a reduction in labour time for the whole of society to a minimal degree on the decrease, such as to render everyone's time free for personal development (cf. Marx, *Grundrisse*).

In this context production is calculated in terms of wealth for all. It is a question of orienting reduced labour time — currently converted into alienated surplus value and into unemployment — into free time for the full development of single individuals and therefore of society at large, that is, of the social individual, recognising true social wealth in the development of that individual. So that free time and not work time is the measure of wealth (*ibidem*).

Any project for the reorganisation of society cannot prescind from a semiotic grounding. Man is in fact a social animal, but even more precisely a semiotic animal.

Given that our topic concerns what we may identify as "common semiosis" which belongs to the sphere of anthroposemiotics we must clarify the distinction

between semiosis and semiotics. We use the term semiotics not only to name the science, but also behaviour specific to man. The reference here is not only to our capacity for sign activity (semiosis) but also to the possibility of reflecting on signs (semiotics as metasemiosis). In the context of a science of signs focusing on human beings, we may then distinguish between anthropobiosemiotics and anthroposociosemiotics: the former studies man as a biological species and semiotic animal like others, the second instead studies man as a semiotic animal (expression which could replace Aristotle's *zoon politicon*).

A factor cuts across the biological and historico-social dimensions, therefore, anthropobiosemiotics and anthroposociosemiotics, and this determines the specificity of human signs: we are alluding to language as distinguished from speech, language understood as a modelling procedure. From this point of view an important contribution comes from Ferruccio Rossi-Landi. He identifies language with work and theorizes the concept of linguistic work through which he has greatly contributed to evidencing the constructive, modelling and creative character of language (and subsequently of all sign phenomena embedded in social reproduction). Language, in fact, says Rossi-Landi, is not only an instrument but also material and a modelling device. Insofar as language is work, language and communication do not identify with each other, language cannot be reduced to communication, it is not exhausted in communication. Rather, language is the a priori of communication, its foundation and condition of possibility. Language is a primary modelling process with respect to speech which eventually emerges as a secondary modelling device. Rossi-Landi investigates the conditions of possibility that subtend the latter and (already in his earlier writings) he proposes the important notion of "common speech" (which he subsequently developed into the concept of "common semiosis" in his more recent books).

Anthroposociosemiotics, today, cannot avoid situating its analyses in the context of the present day complex system of communication in its dual characterisation as world communication and global communication. In the light of such an approach we shall also analyse the differences between such concepts as society, sociality, community, and communitariness.

The current phase in the development in capitalist society today may be characterised in terms of *world* communication (in the double sense of extension over the entire planet and of realistic accomodation to the world as it is) and of *globalisation* (it is omniscient in production, and not only interferences with human life but with all forms of life generally).

Consequently, an analysis of communication in the current phase in the reproduction system with a claim to adequacy calls for a perspective that is just as global. In contrast with the special sciences taken separately, the general science of signs or *semiotics* is able to provide such a view. This does not mean that semiotics as it is practised today has already been predisposed for such a task. If anything the opposite is true. It is no longer possible to practise semiotics adequately, especially when a question of the science or theory of communication, without keeping account of today's situation of worldwide, global communication. A communication model (whichever it is) proposed for semiotic analysis, which fails to take the global nature of world communication into consideration will prove to be thoroughly inadequate, i.e., short-sighted and anachronistic, with respect to this new historical event. As *global* semiotics, general semiotics today must carry out a *detotalizing* function, that is, it must carry out a critique of all (claimed) totalities, including, in the first place, the totality "world and global communication". If general semiotics fails to present itself as global semiotics or to carry out this detotalizing function, it will only appear as another among the special semiotics, a syncretic result of the special semiotics, the transversal language of the encyclopedia of unified sciences, or as an omniscient philosophical prevarication over the different disciplines and special fields of knowledge.

The world-wide spread of communication is a surface phenomenon and like all other surface phenomena it can only be understood on the condition that we study its foundations. Such a task requires a communication model that does not reduce the communication process to the surface transition from an emitter to a receiver on the basis of a code as described by the postal package model. This model had already been thoroughly criticized by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi in *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, of 1961, written at a time when communication was not yet that pervasive phenomenon it is today. We are alluding to the 1950s, that is when Italy had not yet been exposed to social reorganisation as imposed by the presentday production system. Interpretation of human communication in the reductive terms of information or message transmission presupposes the emitter and receiver, the code, message, and context, the "things" to communicate as well as "communicative needs", all of which are considered as being preconstituted and identifiable outside the communicative process itself (Ponzio 1997). This model loses sight of the real

consistency of the communication phenomenon which is far broader than would appear when reduced to the intentional exchange of messages between distinct and separate individuals on the basis of a common code accepted by convention.

The phenomenon of "communication" is generally conceived in terms of exteriorisation of an interior which manifests, reveals, exhibits, exposes its content. On this account, communication is e-mission by a being, the e-mitter, the *a quo* term, and takes place between this e-mitter and another being, that is, the receiver, the *ad quem* term forming this process. Communication is what happens between the being that acts as the emitter and the being that acts as the receiver. There is a being that communicates, that *first is* and *then communicates* and, therefore, that *is before and independently of its communication*.

This conception of communication is commonly accepted by ordinary opinion, but even more than this it is supported by different theoretical trends such as innatism and empiricism, mentalism and behaviourism, which on other accounts contrast each other. It is possible to analyse the processes of exteriorisation forming communication without questioning either the exteriorising being or the being of the receiver in such processes; however, the other possibility is that we interrogate this exteriorising being, that we analyse this interior externalised in communication as well as the being of the receiver. In other words: there are two beings which enter into communication and we may either limit ourselves to analysing what these communicants do, or we may choose to interrogate their being and therefore study them, describe how they are formed. In any case, the conception of communication as the e-mission of a being which another being receives remains.

Obviously, this conception of communication is connected with a given conception of being, a given certain ontology. Just as communication in general is considered as a process beginning from a being, as its e-mission, being in general is considered as the presupposition and foundation of communication. Communication theory and ontology are in general closely connected: all communication theories have their ontologies, a part from whether they remain implied or explicated; vice versa, all ontologies refer to a theory of communication, even if it is not explicated.

Whatever theory, philosophy and ideology of communication is undersigned, a different conception of the communication/being relationship is asserting itself today and may be expressed with the statement "communication is being". This may be inverted as "being is communication". However, the statement "communication is being" regards communication theory and as such is an immediate concern in this paper, while the second statement "being is communication" regards general ontology

and as such for contingent reasons will only be mentioned here as highlighting the inevitable connection between ontology and communication theory. Considered limitedly, that is, in relation to regional ontology relative to communication theory, in other words, as a being that communicates, as a communicating being, the first statement "communication is being" may be transformed into the second, "being is communication".

As the two main spheres of knowledge and praxis teach us, the scientific and the economic, communication is being and vice versa a being that communicates is communication.

From the viewpoint of scientific investigation, all disciplines which deal with communication taken as a whole are particularly important insofar as they focus on the organic world in its multiple aspects, from the great kingdoms to micro-organisms: they are collectively identifiable under the heading of *biosemiotics*. In this sphere of scientific investigation, life and communication identify with each other. *Communication* is not only the condition of life but also the criteria of its identification: a being that is alive is a communicating being. Life = semiosis, a process characterised in terms of signs (precisely, "signs of life").

In this perspective it becomes clear that communication is not simply an externalisation of the living being, from bacteria or prokaryotes to cells with a membrane and nucleus or eukaryotes, from micro-organisms to organisms belonging to the three (or four) great kingdoms; on the contrary, communication *is* the living being itself. In the organic world, communicating is being and vice versa. To communicate is to persist in being, to maintain being, to confirm self as being, *conatus essendi*.

In the sphere of economy as well communication is identified as being and persistence in being. We are now passing from the very vast sphere of *biosemiosis* and the more restricted but still general sphere of *zoosemiosis* (to both of which man belongs) to the more specific sphere of *anthroposemiosis* where being is not only a living being, but is further understood as a human being, that is, a *historical-social* being.

This is where *language* comes into play (and *speech*, verbal language, is only one of its many expressions). Language implies that the human being is not only a *semiotic* being like all living beings insofar as they communicate, but is also a *semiotic* animal, that is, capable of *semiotics*, in other words, of meta-semiosis, reflection and consciousness. Language is the characteristic prerogative of hominids

and as such has determined our evolutionary development, the evolution of the semiotic animal — not just biological evolution, but also historical-social evolution.

From the viewpoint of economy in the current phase of capitalistic production, identification between being and communication is confirmed. This phase is characterised by the industrial revolution of automation, by the processes of globalization of communication and universalisation of the market (which is not only the quantitative fact of expansion, but also and above all a fact of quality, represented both by the translatability of anything into goods and by the production of new goods-things). In such a context communication is no longer just an intermediate phase in the production cycle (production, exchange, consumption), but has now become a constitutive modality in production and consumption processes as well. Not only is exchange communication, but production and consumption are also communication. So the whole productive cycle is communication. This phase in capitalistic production may be characterised as the "communication-production" phase.

Communication-production is communication of the world as it is today. It is *global* communication not only in the sense that it has expanded over the whole planet, but also in the sense that it accepts the world as it is, relates to it positively, accomodates the world. In other words, global communication is communication of this world as it is. Communication and reality, communication and being coincide. Realistic politics (but if it is not realistic, it is not politics) is politics appropriate to global communication, to the being of communication-production. The relationship between politics and ontology (politics proper which as such is pre-disposed for war, the crudest and most brutally realistic face of being) is nowadays specified as the relation with the ontology of being communication, which is world communication, communication-production.

For an adequate and comprehensive understanding of the current phase in world-wide communication, we must understand the risks it involves, including the risk of the end of communication itself. Reference here is not merely refer to that relatively simple or banal phenomenon described as "incommunicability": a subjective-individualistic malady caused by the transition to communication in its current phase of development (which can no longer be separated from production), theorized and represented with this term in filmic discourse and literature.

On the contrary, when we speak of the "risk of the end of communication", we are referring to the end of life on the planet Earth. In this statement communication is not considered in the restricted terms described above but is equated to life, it identifies with life. Communication (+modelling = *semiosis*) and life (as Sebeok's

biosemiotics in particular has revealed to us) coincide so that the end of communication would involve the end of life. And, in fact, by contrast with all other preceding phases in social development, production in today's society is endowed with an enormous potential for destruction.

For an adequate understanding of communication today in its historico-social specification as a world-wide phenomenon as well as in its relationship with life over the whole planet (remembering that life and communication coincide), semiotics must adopt a perspective that is "planetary" in both the spatial sense as well as the temporal. Such an approach will consent the necessary distance for an interpretation of contemporaneity that does not remain limited within the boundaries of contemporaneity itself, that is not exhausted in it.

With the spread of "bio-power" (Foucault) and the controlled insertion of bodies into the production apparatus, world communication is accompanied by assertion of the concept of the individual as a separate and self-sufficient entity. The body is understood and experienced as an isolated biological entity, as belonging to the individual, the individual's sphere of belonging. This has involved the almost total extinction of cultural practices and worldviews based on intercorporeity, interdependency, exposition and opening of the body (what remains — an expression of generalized museumification — are mummified residues studied by folklore analysts, archeological residues preserved in ethnological museums and in the histories of national literatures).

On the contrary, think of how the body has been perceived by popular culture, discussed by Mikhail Bakhtin (cf. 1963, 1965), the forms of "grotesque realism", where the body and corporeal life are not at all conceived individualistically or separately from the rest of life over the planet, from the rest of the world. Signs of the grotesque body, of which only very weak traces have survived in the present day, include ritual masks, the masks used during popular festivities, carnival masks. "Grotesque realism" (Bakhtin 1965) in Medieval popular culture (which preexists with respect to the development of individualism as connected with the rise of the bourgeoisie) presents the body as something that is not defined, that is not confined to itself, but as flourishing in a relation of symbiosis with other bodies, in relations of transformation and renewal which surpass the limits of individual life. The current phase in the development of world communication today does not weaken the individualistic, private and static conception of the body, but, on the contrary, reinforces it.

As Michel Foucault in particular has contributed to revealing, division and separatism among the sciences (but see also Rossi-Landi's acute perception of the situation as he had already developed it in his books of the 1970s) are functional to the ideologico-social necessities of the "new canon of the individualized body" (Bakhtin), which in turn is functional to the controlled insertion of bodies into the reproduction cycle of today's production system.

A global and detotalizing approach in semiotics requires a high level of availability for listening, a great capacity for opening towards the other, opening that is not only of a quantitative order (the omnicomprehensive character of global semiotics), but also of the qualitative. All semiotic interpretations by the scholar of signs cannot prescind from a dialogic relationship with the other. Dialogicality, in fact, is a fundamental condition for an approach in semiotics which though oriented globally, privileges the movement towards opening rather than the tendency to englobe and to enclose: in other words, what we are describing is an approach that privileges the movement towards detotalization rather than totalization.

As Emmanuel Lévinas above all has contributed to evidencing, otherness obliges the totality to reorganize itself ever anew in a process related to what he calls "infinity" and which, with Charles S. Peirce, we could also relate to the concept of "infinite semiosis". This relationship with infinity is not only of a cognitive order, but much more: beyond the established order, beyond the symbolic order, beyond conventions and habits it is a relationship of involvement and responsibility. This relationship with infinity is a relationship with what is most refractory to the totality and, therefore, to the otherness of others, of the other person, not in the sense of another self like ourselves, another *alter ego*, an I belonging to the *same community*, but in the sense of the other in its extraneousness, strangeness, diversity, difference towards which we cannot be indifferent despite all the efforts and guarantees offered by the I's identity.

Such considerations orient semiotics according to a plan which does not belong to this or to this other ideology. On the contrary, semiotics thus described concerns behaviour as it ensues from awareness of the human being's responsibility as a "semiotic animal" — an animal, that is, capable of *signs of signs*, of mediation, reflection, awareness — which concerns semiosis over the whole planet. In this sense global semiotics must be adequately founded in cognitive semiotics, but it must also be open to a third dimension beyond the quantitative and the theoretical, that is, the ethical or what we have called the "telosemiotic" dimension (cf. Petrilli 1998).

We believe that this trichotomy in semiotics is important, indeed decisive, in helping it meet its commitment to the "health of semiosis" and in reaching an understanding of the entire semiosical universe, an understanding which goes together with the capacity for listening and criticism: 1) cognitive semiotics; 2) global semiotics; 3) telosemiotics.

The category of "identity" and the related category of "subject", whether the identity of the individual subject or of the collective subject (the "Western world", the European Community, the nation, the ethnic group, the social class, etc.), carry out a decisive role in world-wide and global communication.

The concept of individual identity must be reconsidered from a semiotic point of view similarly to the relation between identity and community, where the latter too is understood in terms of identity.

Peirce's reflections have greatly contributed to a redefinition of the subject. The human being, the I, is a sign, it is made of verbal and nonverbal language. We may describe the subject as a semiosical process, indeed, thanks to its interpretive-propositional commitment, the subject considered as a sign is made of a potentially infinite number of signifying paths. As says Peirce, "men and words educate each other reciprocally; every increase in a man's information involves and is involved by a corresponding increase in word information" (CP 5.313). And still more explicitly:

there is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word; [...]. It is that the word or sign which man uses *is* the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an *external* sign, proves that man is an external sign. That it is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words *homo* and *man* are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought (CP 5.314).

As a sign, that is, a developing sign, the subject emerges as a dialogical and relational entity, as an open subject, something in becoming in the intrapersonal and interpersonal interrelationship with other signs and other subjects. The boundaries of the subject-sign are not defined once and for all, they cannot be defined if not in the dialogic encounter with other signs, with other subjects.

The *appearance of the individual*, with his identity, his separation from other individuals, is closely connected to the appearance of different forms of useful labour, that is, with the *division of labour*. When the division of labour gives rise to the production of goods, sociality among these individuals is given by the character of equality, interchangeability of the same type of labour, comparability of all different types of labour which are presented as specifications of simple labour, of labour without qualities, of labour in general, of generically human labour. Sociality is determined by the fact that the labour of separate individuals presents itself in the abstract form of *generality* and that the product of their labour takes on the form of a general equivalent. The work of the individual viewed separately, in isolation, *takes on a social character in the abstraction of value*, it becomes social on taking on the form of its direct opposite, the form of abstract generality (cf. Marx 1959: 16).

This type of sociality may be called *community*. *Community is communication among separate individuals, communication which reproduces being, generic, indifferent difference, through the relation among undifferentiated individuals in their differences and in their mutual indifference to each other*. When labour itself in the form of capitalist production becomes merchandise, the community identifies the measure of its wealth in labour-time.

In Nazi Germany, “*Gemeinschaft*”, community, which replaces “*Gesellschaft*”, society, is the identity community, which excludes all differences and all alterities. It implies a condition of total belonging on the part of its members, absolute identification with it, without the excesses of alterity, full solidarity, complete alignment. Community thus understood marks the end of all ideological differences; class difference is erased. Whoever is part of it must have *Gemeinschaftssin* (community sense), *Gemeinschaftwille* (community will) and respect *Gemeinschaftordnung* (community order).

We cannot understand the process of total identification with the Community — “*Gemeinschaft*” — , served by the whole lexicon of Nazi Germany, if we do not begin from work in general, indifferent work. This produces value as exchange value and is a structural, constitutive element of our social form. In the lexicon of Nazi Germany not only does the term “Arbeit” signify “abstract labour”, “undifferentiated labour” which is quantified and paid by the hour, but also undifferentiated labour in the interclassist sense, that is, labour freed from any association with “class”, “alienation”, “exploitation”.

On the contrary, what we understand by *communitariness* implies a form of sociality that cannot be globalized, that is, sociality open to otherness and therefore

free from obsession with identity. Thus intended sociality is extracommunitarian with respect to self, it is other, without boundaries, territories, belongings, roots, it is sociality grounded in incommensurable, uncontainable work where wealth is measured in terms of free time for otherness.

Paradoxically the development of capital produces the conditions for deterritorialization and for liberation from indifferent work. So it then becomes a question of imagining new forms of social relations and new employments where reduced labour time and production costs do not identify with the development of productivity, with an increase in productivity, with an increase in value associated with exchange. On the contrary, reduced labour-time will be considered as a sign of development in the wealth of the personality of the single individual, with a reduction in labour time for the whole of society to a minimal degree on the decrease, such as to render everyone's time free for personal development (cf. Marx 1857-58).

In this context production is calculated in terms of wealth for all. It is a question of orienting reduced labour time — currently converted into alienated surplus value and into unemployment — into free time for the full development of single individuals and therefore of society at large, that is, of the social individual, recognising true social wealth in the development of that individual. So that free time and not work time is the measure of wealth (*ibidem*).

This new form of humanism cannot be anything else but the humanism of alterity, as Lévinas has significantly demonstrated throughout his writings, especially in *Humanisme de l'autre homme*, 1972. The revendication of human rights centred on identity, being the form of revendication that has dominated so far, has left out from "human rights" the rights of the other, and must now be quickly counteracted by the humanism of alterity where the rights of the other are the first to be recognized. The allusion here is not just to the rights of the other *beyond self*, but also to the self's very own other, to the other *of self*. Indeed, the self most often removes, suffocates, segregates otherness sacrificing it to the cause of identity which thus achieved is only fictitious and destined to breakdown and shatter.

Semiotics may contribute to an understanding of humanism thus described evidencing the breadth and consistency of the sign network which connects man to every other man. This is true both on a synchronic level (the world-wide spread of communication actually pushes this kind of connection to an extreme on a planetary level) and on a diachronic level, given that the human species is involved in all events, behaviours, individual decisions, in the overall destiny of the individual, from its most remote to its most recent and closest manifestations, in its past and in its

evolutionary future, both on a biological and historico-social level. This network concerns the semiosphere constructed by mankind, that of culture, of its signs, symbols, artifacts, etc. However, global semiotics teaches us that this semiosphere is part of a broader semiosphere, the biosemiosphere, being a network which man has never left and which as a living being never will.

Telosemiotics does not have a programme to propose with intended aims and practices, it does not have a decalogue to propose, a formula to see through more or less sincerely, more or less hypocritically. From this point of view, it is alien to *stereotypes* as much as to *norms* and *ideology*. Telosemiotics may be described, if at all, as a *critique* of stereotypes, norms and ideology and, consequently, of the different types of value as characterized, for example, by Morris in *Signification and Significance*, 1964. Telosemiotics tells of the human capacity for critique, its special vocation is to evidence sign networks where it seemed there were none, therefore to evidence connections and implications from which we cannot escape where it seemed, instead, that there were only net separations, precise boundaries and distances with their relative alibis. These serve to safeguard responsibility understood in a limited sense, and therefore consciousness presenting itself in the form of good consciousness, a clean conscience.

The component "*telos*" in the expression "telosemiotics" does not indicate some value or some preestablished end, an ultimate end, a *summum bonum*, but rather in the present context it is the *telos* of semiosis as such: a movement outside and beyond the totality, outside the enclosure of totality, transcendence with respect to a given being, unlimited semiosis, a movement towards the infinite, desire of the other. The special task of telosemiotics is to evidence the delusory character of the claim to the status of indifferent differences.

The critical work of *telosemiotics* is intent upon showing how the condition of mutually indifferent differences delusory and how, on the contrary, the whole planet's destiny in the last analysis is implied in all our choices. As such telosemiotics must necessarily begin by analysing and questioning without prejudice the social form in which it is currently proposed. Telosemiotics must begin from where we are today in historico-social terms, in other words, if it is to analyse today's communication-production relationships with rigor and precision, it must start from a lucid reflection on contemporaneity.

The fact that globalisation of communication-production has already proceeded to high degrees of homologation in modelling the social forms of production is an advantage for telosemiotics. The entire planet is dominated by a single market, a

single form of production and consumption leading to homologation not only in behaviours, habits, fashions (also in the sense of dress fashions), but also in the life of the imaginary. We could claim that in today's dominant production system difference understood in terms of *otherness* is being replaced ever more by difference understood in terms of *alternatives*.

The advantage for telosemiotics consists in the fact that its object of analysis is unitary. Consequently, it will not be necessary to consider a great multiplicity of different aspects with the added advantage that there is no risk of uselessly spreading out one's energies. However, the word "advantage" as we are using it in this context is also full of ironical implications for what we have before us is nothing less than reality viewed as a single monolithic block: this is the so-called advantage of *monologism* which fires back on itself and translates into difficulty of critique, that is, of conducting a critical analysis. Instead, interpretation and critical questioning is favoured by plurivocality and polylogism. It ensues that the possibility of critique for telosemiotics is made extremely difficult by the fact that it must look for conceptual instruments which are not readily available, that is must construct categories which are not the dominant ones, that it must make use of hypotheses which cannot be taken for granted, which are not founded in common sense.

We believe that telosemiotics is the broadest gaze possible of which that semiotic animal called man is capable. Perhaps today more than ever, not only must we account for this capacity, but we must also evidence the need for it, its inexorability.

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