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On Communication

I wish to start by denouncing *a fallacy* concerning the communication process.

When we consider the concept of ‘communication,’ we generally think of a process of exteriorisation through which an interior content is made manifest. On this account, communication is an e-mission that starts from a being, the e-mitter, and takes place between the e-mitter considered as a *terminus a quo* and another being (the receiver) considered as a *terminus ad quem*. Communication is what happens *between one being* in the role of emitter and another being in the role of receiver. According to this model we have a being that communicates, that *first is* and *then communicates*, a being that *exists prior to and independently of its acts of communication*.

This conception of communication is not only widespread at the level of ordinary opinion, but is also shared by different theoretical positions which contrast with each other on other aspects, such as innatism and empiricism, mentalism and behaviourism. In any case, the conception of communication as the e-mission from a being which another being receives remains unquestioned.

This conception of communication is obviously connected to a given conception of being, to a given ontology. Just as communication in general is considered as a process beginning from a being, as an e-mission of being, 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, whether explicit or implicit; conversely, all ontologies have a theory of communication, even if it is not explicated.

Against this fallacy, a different conception of the communication/being relationship is now emerging: it may be summarised with the statement that ‘communication is being.’ This statement can also be inverted as ‘being is communication.’ But the first statement,

‘communication is being,’ concerns communication theory – the object of analysis of this presentation. The second statement, ‘being is communication,’ concerns general ontology. In relation to the latter, ‘being is communication,’ here we can only state that it concerns the inevitable connection between communication theory and ontology.

That communication is being is evident in two main sectors of knowledge and praxis, the scientific and the economic.

In scientific investigation, particularly important under this regard is the complex of disciplines concerning communication which focus on the organic world in its multiple aspects, from the great kingdoms to micro-organisms, collectively identifiable under the name of *biosemiotics*. In this sphere of scientific investigation, life and communication converge. *Communication* is not only the condition of life but also the criterion for its identification: a live being is a communicating being. Life = semiosis, that is, a process in which there are signs (to be precise “signs of life”).

Obviously, communication is not the 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. Communication is the living being itself. In the organic world, to communicate is to be, and vice versa. To communicate is to persist in being, to maintain being, to confirm oneself as being, *conatus essendi*.

In the current phase of capitalist production, economy confirms identification between being and communication. This phase is characterised by the industrial revolution of automation, globalisation of communication and universalisation of the market. Such universalisation is not only a quantitative fact of expansion, but above all a qualitative transformation represented by the fact that anything can be translated into goods and by the continuous production of new goods-things. In the present day and age communication is no longer just an intermediate phase in the reproduction cycle (production, exchange, consumption). Far more radically, communication now represents the constitutive modality of production and consumption processes themselves. Not only does the *exchange* phase involve communication, but *production* and *consumption* too are communication. So the whole reproductive cycle is communication. This phase in capitalist reproduction can be characterised as the ‘*communication-production*’ phase.

Communication-production means persevering in being, insisting on being, persisting, *conatus essendi*.

But *conatus essendi* of today’s communication-production contrasts with *conatus essendi* of communication-life.

Persistence of communication-reproduction is *persistence of the same social form*, the capitalist. Capitalist society with its continual adjustments and metamorphoses functional to

reproduction of this same type of society contrasts with *social reproduction* and with reproduction of life on the planet.

Reproduction of the same production cycle destroys:
machines which it replaces with new machines because of competitive needs;
jobs, to make space for automation with a consequent increase in unemployment;
products on the market, stimulating consumerism;
existing products, realising new similar products which immediately make the former obsolete;
goods and markets, which cannot resist the competitiveness of global communication-production.

In spite of identification in ideological terms between the *conatus essendi* of communication-production and the *conatus essendi* of social reproduction, the *conatus essendi* of communication-production destroys those productive forces that cannot be contained within the boundaries of the current production system. Human intelligence, inventiveness, creativity are humiliated as such qualities in the human person are subjected to market trends, "to market logic".

The destructive character of the today's production system is also evidenced by the fact that it produces ever greater areas of underdevelopment as a condition of development, areas of human exploitation and misery to the point of nonsurvival.

Communication-production is destructive because it is the communication-production of war.

Moreover global communication-production is destructive not only with regard to social reproduction, human life, but life over the entire planet.

Another fallacy must now be mentioned. I am alluding to the fact that communication is mostly separated from modelling and dialogism. The terms 'model' and 'modelling' are used here as understood by Sebeok and his global semiotics. Sebeok developed the concept of modeling from the so-called Moscow-Tartu school, though he further elaborated it by relating it to the concept of *Umwelt* as formulated by Jakob von Uexküll. Modelling is the foundation of communication in all living beings. Communication necessarily occurs within the limits of a world and its characteristics as modelled by a given species, a world that is species-specific.

Jakob von Uexküll speaks of invisible worlds to indicate the domain which englobes all animals according to the species they belong to. What an animal perceives, craves, fears and predated is relative to its own world.

Human communication is the most complex and varied form of communication in the sphere of biosemiosis – the human animal is capable of modeling a potentially infinite number of possible worlds.

In light of Sebeok's biosemiotics, the concept of dialogism may be extended beyond the sphere of anthroposemiosis and applied to all communication processes.

But all communication processes are based not only on *modeling* (Sebeok), but also on *dialogism* (Bakhtin). We believe that modeling and dialogism are at the basis of all communication processes. The theory of autopoietic systems is incompatible with dialogism only if dialogism is understood reductively, that is, in terms of a communication model that describes the communication process in terms of a linear, causal process. Here dialogue is conceived as based on the conversation model governed by the turning around together rule. However, as suggested by Maturana (1978: 54-55), another form of dialogic exchange is possible which is different from communication conceived as a linear process from source to destination, or as a circular process in which participants take turns in playing the part of sender and receiver. From this point of view, the dialogic model conceived by Maturana can be described in terms of 'pre- or anticomunicative interaction.

Modeling and dialogism are pivotal concepts in the study of semiosis. Communication is only one kind of semiosis and together with *semiosis of information* and *semiosis of symptomization*, *semiosis of communication* presupposes the semiosis of modeling and dialogism. This emerges very clearly if in accordance with Peirce and his reformulation of the classic notion of *substitution* in terms of *interpretation*, the sign is considered firstly as an interpretant, that is, as a dialogic response foreseen by a specific type of modeling. Moreover, let us remember that Bakhtin's concept of dialogue also contributes considerably to extending this concept beyond the human world connecting dialogism with semiosis from Sebeok's biosemiotic perspective, namely according to the point of view of *global* semiotics