

Introduction

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Between Signs and Non-Signs

Ferruccio Rossi-Landi

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Introduction*

1. The type of cultural organization required by capitalism in its present phase is intimately linked to the development of the capitalist system itself: indeed they identify with each other. From this it ensues that, firstly, it is difficult to separate ideological interests from the objective, material interests of the development of capital; not only is ideology a constituent part of production but, more than this, it produces profit. Secondly, given that culture is made of signs and that without signs ideologies cannot be conveyed, indeed cannot even be produced, this interrelation between cultural organization and capitalist system concerns both verbal and nonverbal signs, which play a determining role in the current phase of social reproduction. Today, the expression 'cultural capital' is no longer a mere metaphor, but a reality. Work operations and forms of behavior of the most disparate types produce and develop cultural capital and, as in all capital producing processes, such cultural capital is in turn augmented through surplus value and therefore through surplus work. Not only does all this come about without the subject knowing what the aims of his work are, but often he is not even aware that some of his most basic activities may be defined as work.

Immediate consequences of all this are what may be referred to as the "invisibility" of ideology determined by its functionality to the development of capital, and the "imperceptibility" of exploitation determined by its dissemination throughout most of our activities. It might well be maintained that we are now experiencing one of the most difficult times ever as far as the critique of ideology and analysis of social alienation is concerned, and it is not incidental that such issues are quickly set aside by proclaiming the "crisis," or even the "end" of ideology, and by judging expressions like "alienation," "class interest," and "social exploitation" as outdated. On the contrary, for an adequate critique of the present-day cultural system we must study the mechanisms that regulate the reproduction of cultural capital and describe the new role carried out by ideology, and therefore by the signs that form ideology and culture in general.

The increased involvement of signs and ideology in the reproduction process of capital has caused the individual to take on a new role in that process; consequently his role as a subject must now be re-examined. The notion of "alienated subject" does not fully describe the situation of unconscious integration in a process in which the goals are unknown to the individuals involved. The expression 'alienated subject' takes the very concept of subject for granted, whilst it should be questioned given its specific ideological character. The subject is overlooked not only in the case of "visible alienation," which society denounces and relegates as abnormality, pathology, or, "mental alienation," and which results in a lack of functionality to the system, but also in the case of "invisible alienation," alienation in the Marxian sense, which no longer only concerns life in the factory but extends to most if not all spaces of the social and, unlike "visible alienation," is functional to the system.¹

The Italian philosopher Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) conducted pioneering work in semiotics and the philosophy of language from the 1950s to the second half of the 1980s. One of the main aspects of his research is his critique of language and subsequently of ideology in relation to sign-production processes, considered, in turn, in relation to the overall process of social reproduction. Present-day social reality confirms Rossi-Landi's updated definition of the ruling class as the class that controls communication channels together with the rules governing the formulation and interpretation of messages, as well as his theory of the sign-mediated character of the relationship between so-called structure and so-called superstructure.

The above-mentioned years covering Rossi-Landi's intellectual production coincide with the formation of a new phase in the social reproduction process, as well as with a period in which the fundamental role of signs and of verbal and nonverbal communication programs in the production process of capital was accentuated.² It would not have been possible to study the unconscious programs underlying verbal and nonverbal behavior before the assertion of neocapitalism, just as the demystification of bourgeois economy would not have been possible, with its consequent unveiling of man's exploitation and oppression within the production process, before the full development of capitalism and, therefore, before the progressive weakening of the organic structure of capital and of the value of workers in favor of that part of capital which remains constant. As Rossi-Landi writes (1972b: 18-42):

Man acts according to programs in any socio-economic situation whatever and certainly not in the neocapitalist one alone. [But] that such program-

ming has emerged is the result or at least has been favored by the neocapitalist alteration of the organic structure of capital.³

We have now reached such a highly advanced stage in this type of social reproduction that programming processes and the role of subjects in these processes have become difficult to perceive to the very point that, as mentioned, the end of ideology has been proclaimed, and the critique of alienation and of the exploitation of man described as anachronistic. The overall impression is that this system cannot be set aside; it appears as the natural result of human history so that all theory and criticism and all forms of revolutionary praxis are considered as devoid of realism, as mere utopian fantasies.

This could be another reason for returning to such concepts as Rossi-Landi's "linguistic work," "linguistic capital," "homology between material production and linguistic production," which are of particular interest today. Such notions put Rossi-Landi in a position to interpret merchandise as messages and messages as merchandise in his project for the constitution of a general semiotics which is historical and materialistic in orientation. According to Rossi-Landi, production systems, sign systems and ideologies require and complete one another and impose unitary developments. The demystification of ideologies and of the very notion of the subject is only possible through a critique of signs that keeps account of the specific social context in which such signs are produced and circulate.

Of special interest for the study of the mechanisms through which subjects are constructed is an essay by Rossi-Landi,⁴ "Criteri per lo studio ideologico di un autore" (Criteria for the Ideological Study of an Author) (1976c: 5-32), in which he delineates two different approaches. On the one hand, he overcomes a fetishistic vision of the subject, in this case the author, by beginning with an analysis of the author only to end by reinstating him in the communicative situation in which he has, in fact, developed:

The expressed contents are social; the instruments used to express them are also very much so; and even expression (including also the material activity of writing) develops according to rules elaborated collectively. We are only able to use our own verbal sign system thanks to the non-verbal sign systems within which we operate. At the most, the author may be viewed as an instrument used by a social group to express itself (on this point Lucien Goldmann's research, corrected and integrated by his successors, is still useful). (Rossi-Landi 1985a: 187)

On the other hand, he takes the socio-historical context of the subject as his starting point, and examines the author's ability to free himself from his immediate context. Rossi-Landi distinguishes between factors that condition the author and an excess that characterizes him. This excess can only lie in the new values that the author exerts himself to produce and through which he perceives, makes the reader perceive and in some cases even plans a different society from his own. The ideological character of the author and his work may be evaluated by reconstructing the dialectic between the subject, the social context and excess. With the concept of excess Rossi-Landi too, like Mikhail Bakhtin though independently from him,⁵ works on the concept of *vnenakhodimost'*, now translated into English with the terms "outsideness" or "exotopy." Referring specifically to the literary text, Rossi-Landi (1985a: 191) observes that:

The text may be viewed as action that takes place on stage and, therefore, refers to a setting. All texts contain a dialectic between stage and setting, or allude to it. A substantial part of our own work lies in the reconstruction of this dialectic. If the author contains an excess with respect to his own social reproduction, it is as though the stage lights extend a little toward the background setting; if he limits himself to repeating current values, it is as though the setting comes forward, surrounding and confounding the stage almost.⁶

2. In a typewritten bio-bibliographical note of 1978 requested by the publishers of his book *Ideologia* (English transl. as *Marxism and Ideology* see Rossi-Landi 1978c and 1990), Rossi-Landi signaled the following as volumes he was in the course of preparing:

- *Dall'analisi alla dialettica* (From Analysis to Dialectic), a collection of essays originally published between 1949 and 1976, with the addition of three unpublished manuscripts;
- *Between Signs and Non-signs*, a volume collecting essays in English first published between 1952 and 1976, with the addition of various unpublished manuscripts;
- *Sistemi segnici e riproduzione sociale* (Sign Systems and Social Reproduction) which included three published papers: one from 1976 in Italian, "Criteri per lo studio ideologico di un autore"; another from 1977 in English, "Introduction to Semiosis"; and a second in English from 1978, "Sign Systems and Social Reproduction."

“Introduction to Semiosis” is an ample preview description of *Sistemi segnici e riproduzione sociale* which like the two preceding volumes, however, remained unpublished. Both this paper and “Sign Systems and Social Reproduction” have now been included in the present volume. The only book that Rossi-Landi was ever to publish after 1978 (apart from new editions of some of his earlier works), and his last, given that it appeared just a few months before his death in May 1985, was *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (Philosophical Methodics and the Science of Signs). This also includes “Criteri per uno studio ideologico di un autore” which, as mentioned above, was originally scheduled to appear in *Sistemi segnici e riproduzione sociale*.

In the bibliography of his introduction (see Rossi-Landi 1979d) to the second edition of *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (Meaning, Communication and Common Speech), Rossi-Landi only mentions the first two books of the three listed above: *Dall'analisi alla dialettica* and *Between Signs and Non-signs*. Furthermore, he explains that while plans for the first volume remained unaltered and included the essays originally envisaged, those included in the second had been extended to 1978.

The volume we are now presenting is an attempt at bringing a project that was originally Rossi-Landi's to a happy conclusion. As Rossi-Landi did not actually assemble the material himself, we have not been able to trace some of the unpublished manuscripts. On the other hand, however, the period originally planned by the author has been extended to include papers published after 1978: the most recent, “A Fragment in the History of Italian Semiotics” (Chapter 2), was presented at the Congress of the International Association for Semiotic Studies in Palermo in 1984 (published in 1988). The essays added to the present edition are closely related to the topics covered in the original plan and were also written directly in English. Organized in this way, *Between Signs and Non-signs* spans the period from 1952 to 1984 (or from 1953 to 1988 if we prefer to keep publishing dates in mind), and consequently offers an interesting if not exhaustive overview of Rossi-Landi's lifelong research. For the reader unfamiliar with Rossi-Landi, this volume is a synthesis of all the main aspects of his work, for the specialist it is a useful guide in perusing the highly problematic and labyrinthine multiplicity of his intellectual itineraries (as developed in the numerous books and essays besides this volume), with the effect of showing the thread that unites them.⁷

3. *Between Signs and Non-signs* is a collection of fourteen essays all closely interrelated not only on the level of theme, but also in research perspective. The volume is divided into four Parts with the addition, at the beginning, of a brief self-presentation by Rossi-Landi entitled "Sidelights" (written in 1984).

The essays included in Part One entitled "Signs and Masters in Semiotic History," deal with some contemporary figures – in particular Giovanni Vailati,⁸ Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Charles Morris⁹ – and with given periods in the history of the philosophy of language and the science of signs. Specific references are also made to certain phases in the history of Italian semiotics as well as to more recent developments on the semiotic scene in general after Morris. As Rossi-Landi specifies in the first paper in this section, he was concerned with such thinkers as well as others (such as Eugenio Colomi,¹⁰ Francis Herbert Bradley, Hugo Dingler, Edmund Husserl,¹¹ Gilbert Ryle, etc.) not as a professional historian of ideas, but as a theoretician interested in discussing problems. Such is the approach adopted in the monograph *Charles Morris* (see Rossi-Landi 1953a and 1975d).

Rossi-Landi's intellectual formation was heavily influenced by his critical confrontation with Morris (among other things he translated Morris's important 1938 book, *Foundations of the Theory of Signs*, see Rossi-Landi 1954d), with American pragmatism, operationalism, English analytical philosophy and especially the studies of Ryle (Rossi-Landi 1955a is a free translation of Ryle's *The Concept of Mind*), and with Wittgenstein. Furthermore, Rossi-Landi also revived the minor Italian tradition, which boasts such significant figures as Giuseppe Peano, Giovanni Vailati, Mario Calderoni, Federigo Enriques, and the same Eugenio Colomi, with respect to dominating idealism, symbolized at the time by Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile.

Rossi-Landi was soon dissatisfied with the notion of *ordinary language* as it had been elaborated by the English analytical philosophers (the object of his studies while at Oxford between 1951 and 1953). In particular, he questioned the notion of *linguistic use* which, all things considered, was no more than the study of the characteristics of a given historical language, in this case English, mistakenly thought to represent ordinary language in general (an error involving such a renowned linguist as Chomsky even¹²). On his part, Rossi-Landi was intent upon identifying the general conditions of language-thought at the basis of linguistic use and which as such are valid beyond the scope of a given historical language. This project led Rossi-Landi to his 1961 book, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, in which he developed

his theory of *common speech* with the aim of *constructing a general model for the explanation of linguistic use, a model of speaking* as Rossi-Landi called it, by identifying those elements that are common to and constant in the different single languages. The notion of *common speech* refers to the fundamental techniques underlying speech, operative in all languages; it refers to the whole set of general conditions which make such operations as signifying and communication *possible*. In this context “possible” is intended in the Kantian sense, so that Rossi-Landi’s research unfolds as the study of the *a priori* in language in his effort to identify the operations inevitably accomplished when we speak (see Ponzio 1986a).¹³

The notion of common speech was subsequently developed in terms of Rossi-Landi’s notion of *linguistic work* (the original result of his studies on G.W.F. Hegel, Karl Marx, and Classical Political Economy). Indeed, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, which intends to *explain* rather than just simply describe linguistic use, marks the beginning of a research itinerary that Rossi-Landi was to continue in his fundamental book of 1968, *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (English transl. 1983b), in which the Wittgensteinian notion of linguistic use is overtly criticized. This critique is put forward in Marxian terms with the consequence that Rossi-Landi maintains that the limit of Wittgenstein’s theory of linguistic use is the absence of the notion of labor-value:

that is, of the value of a given object, in this case a linguistic object, as the product of a given linguistic piece of work. From the linguistic object, he [Wittgenstein] moves only forward and never backwards. (Rossi-Landi 1968h; English transl. 1983b: 31)

Wittgenstein too was often at the center of Rossi-Landi’s attention, playing a fundamental role in his intellectual formation. Rossi-Landi himself drew our attention to this when, for example, he shifted the chapter on Wittgenstein (significantly entitled “Towards a Marxian Use of Wittgenstein”) in his 1968 book to the beginning of the volume in the new Italian edition of 1973. To use the words of the title of one of the books listed above, *Dall’analisi alla dialettica*, this change may be interpreted as a sign of the determining influence exerted by Wittgenstein on Rossi-Landi in his transition “from analysis to dialectic.” The paper included in the present volume, “Wittgenstein, Old and New” (1981a), is a development of this earlier study by Rossi-Landi in the light of his subsequent theoretical production and of the current debate on the problem of signs.

Part Two in the present volume entitled, "Signs as Cognitive and Evaluative Instruments," includes three papers the first of which (written in 1952), "Toward an Analysis of Appraisive Signs in Esthetics," appeared in the journal *Methodos* in 1953.

Methodos, subtitled *A Quarterly Review of Methodology and Language Analysis*, was founded in Italy (Milan) in 1949. The main languages for publication were Italian and English though other languages were not excluded. This was rather exceptional at the time in Italy, a real effort to eliminate residues of cultural provincialism. In addition to his collaboration with *Methodos*, Rossi-Landi was constantly involved in editorial work for various other journals, which he often directed. He belonged to the editorial committees of the journals *Occidente* (1955-1956), *Nuova corrente* (1966-1968), and *Dialectical Anthropology* (1975-1985); he founded the two journals *Ideologie* (1967-1974) and *Scienze umane* (1979-1981);¹⁴ he also founded and directed the small publishing house "Edizioni di ideologie" (Rome); and together with Tomás Maldonado, Luis Prieto, and Adam Schaff, he directed the book series "Semiotica e pratica sociale" (Feltrinelli-Bocca).

In addition to Rossi-Landi's own contribution, the same issue of *Methodos* (vol. 5, no. 18, 1953) includes Morris's important paper of 1952, "Significance, Signification and Painting" in the English original. Rossi-Landi's paper is substantially a study of Morris's esthetic theory, the subject of yet another study of 1967 entitled, "Sul modo in cui è stata fraintesa la semiotica estetica di Charles Morris" (On how Charles Morris's Esthetic Semiotics Has Been Misunderstood). This was subsequently included in his 1972 book *Semiotica e ideologia* (Semiotics and Ideology) though it originally appeared as the introduction to the Italian edition of three papers by Morris published in *Nuova corrente* (42-43, 1967): "Esthetics and the Theory of Signs" (1939); "Aesthetics, Signs and Icons," written in collaboration with D.J. Hamilton (1965); and a "Foreword" presented by Morris especially for the occasion. As in the case of Wittgenstein, then, Rossi-Landi often returned to Morris throughout his lifelong studies thus continuing the work begun with his monograph of 1953; in fact, though their research itineraries were different, they frequently intersected.

Morris and Rossi-Landi both dealt with the problem of values: Morris was particularly interested in esthetic and ethical value, Rossi-Landi in linguistic and economic value. Their regular correspondence, which lasted for more than twenty-five years – from approximately 1950 to 1976 – testifies to the influence exercised by Rossi-Landi over Morris in the latter's studies on

the relation between signs and values and, therefore, between semiotics and axiology, which were to find maximum theoretical expression in his 1964 book, *Significance and Signification*.¹⁵

“On Absurdity,” the second essay in Part Two of the present volume, also belongs to the initial phase of Rossi-Landi’s research: this phase, which he described as the analytical, spans the years from the early 1950s to 1961 when his book, *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* was published. “On Absurdity” (the slightly modified English version of Chapter Five of his 1961 book) was published in English in the journal *Semiotica*, in 1976, with the addition of a Head Note written in 1975 (this text appeared directly in English and has no Italian equivalent). In the Head Note Rossi-Landi explains the differences between his position in 1975 and that at the time of writing this particular paper, in 1963.

Here we only wish to underline the essential continuity linking these two phases, the analytical and the dialectical, of which perhaps not even Rossi-Landi was fully aware. Not only does such continuity concern the fact that many of the ideas marking the subsequent period, and formulated in books like *Language as Work and Trade* (1968), *Semiotica e ideologia* (1972), *Linguistics and Economics* (1975 [1974]), *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (1985) “were already present, if only in an embryonic form,” as Rossi-Landi says, “in the 1961 book” (1968h; English transl. 1983b: xi), but even more significantly, it concerns his *research method*. As observed by Augusto Ponzio (1988a: 51) in his monograph on Rossi-Landi, it is not incidental that the latter should have proposed a “*methodics of common speaking*” in 1961 and that the title of his 1985 book (the last to have appeared before his death) includes the expression “*philosophical methodics*.” In truth, Rossi-Landi’s whole theoretical itinerary, as it developed from the early 1950s to 1985, may be viewed in terms of a transition from the *methodics of common speaking* to the *methodics of common semiosis* (Ponzio 1988a: 92-98; see also Biancofiore and Ponzio 1987: 25-46).

Rossi-Landi called the method he was concerned with the “*homological method*,” which he theorized in “*Omologia della riproduzione sociale*” (Homology of Social Reproduction). (This paper was originally published in 1972 in the journal *Ideologie* and subsequently developed in both *Linguistics and Economics* and *Metodica filosofica*). The homological method pushes beyond the mere identification of analogies or similarities by integrating structural and dynamic analyses. As such it was already operative in Rossi-Landi’s 1961 book; *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*, in which he con-

structured his common speech model on the basis of the identification of homologies between different languages. Beginning with the research flowing into *Language as Work and Trade*, Rossi-Landi investigated homological relations connecting the production, exchange and consumption of material goods with the production, exchange and consumption of signs: in this framework he examined both verbal and nonverbal language in terms of work. Such an approach amounted to the search for a homology between *homo faber* and *homo loquens*, which led Rossi-Landi to formulating his theory of the homology of production in general, that is, of both sign and non-sign production.

“On the Overlapping of Categories in the Social Sciences” (published in 1978 though written in 1972) contains numerous references to *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune*. In this essay, Rossi-Landi studies some pairs of categories which can only function and be explained in relation to each other: communication and behavior, language and thought, production and consumption. The terms forming these pairs are not identical and in any case they cannot be reduced to each other. In addition to these, another fundamental pair of categories in Rossi-Landi’s research is work and activity.

Rossi-Landi deals explicitly with these two concepts in Chapter One of *Metodica filosofica*. With respect to his 1968 book, Rossi-Landi now goes a step further by developing the concept of language in terms of work rather than activity. Activity is not programmed and is an end in itself; on the contrary, work mediates the relation between needs and the satisfaction of those needs, and to this end employs the specific instruments and materials of given models and programs with their specific goals. Moreover, the distinction between work and activity also concerns that between signs and non-signs. The footprints impressed upon the sand as the result of the activity of walking are not signs and persist in their non-sign status until they become the object of interpretive work.

But if the distinction between work and activity lies in the fact that work is planned, intentional and part of a program while activity is not, at the same time, however, work is not necessarily conscious of its objectives and programs. In fact, work can be “alienated” work as demonstrated by the Marxian analysis of capitalist society; or like Freud we may speak of “oneiric work,” which implies that even the production of dreams is work. The unconscious is a social product and dreams are the result of work just as their translation into the discourse that narrates and analyzes them is the result of work, of interpretive work. That work may be realized without conscious programs provides

“a special contact zone,” says Rossi-Landi, “for the Marxian use of Freud or the Freudian use of Marx” (1985a: 7).

Part Three in this volume, “Signs, Linguistic Alienation and Social Reproduction,” includes papers from one of Rossi-Landi’s most innovative periods: he proposes a global approach to the study of signs by examining not only the rules that govern message exchange, but also those that regulate their production. In other words, Rossi-Landi reconstitutes the sign values underlying exchange to the social relations of sign production.

The 1960s mark a break in Rossi-Landi’s career, especially in relation to the Italian academic world. In 1962 he abandoned his Chair of Philosophy at the University of Padua owing to the incompatibility between the novelty of his ideas and an academic world that was intolerant of him. Consequently, Rossi-Landi left for the United States. He acted as visiting professor at Ann Arbor University in Michigan between 1962 and 1963 and at the University of Texas at Austin in 1963. He also taught at various European and American Universities between 1964 and 1965 and, furthermore, held courses in philosophy and semiotics at the Universities of Havana and Santiago (Cuba).

Publications by Rossi-Landi from this period include: *Ideologies of Linguistic Relativity* of 1973 (the English re-edition of the Italian original published in the journal *Ideologie* in 1968); his 1974 essay “Linguistics and Economics” (published in book form in 1975); “Signs about a Master of Signs,” an essay first published in English in 1975 in the American journal *Semiotica* and subsequently in Italian in the second enlarged 1975 edition of his monograph on Morris, *Charles Morris e la semiotica novecentesca* (1st edition 1953).

Rossi-Landi returned to Italy in the mid 1970s initially as Full Professor of Philosophy of History at the University of Lecce, and subsequently as Full Professor of Theoretical Philosophy at the University of Trieste. At the time he was concentrating particularly on the issue of linguistic alienation and on the link between language and ideology. His important 1978 book, *Ideologia*, which he subsequently developed into a second enlarged edition of 1980, also belongs to the same period.

As the papers in the present volume show, Rossi-Landi founded the notions of ideology and linguistic alienation on the homology between linguistic production on the one hand, and material production on the other. His studies on the plural articulations of linguistic and nonlinguistic artefacts

(Rossi-Landi 1968h includes a critique of Martinet's theory of double articulation), and on the notion of linguistic money (which may be traced back to his early book of 1961) work in the same direction.

However, as will soon become obvious on perusing this third section, the concept dominating Rossi-Landi's research of the 1970s is *social reproduction*. Rather playfully echoing an expression from the origins of ancient Greek philosophy, Rossi-Landi maintained that social reproduction is the principle of all things. It is to social reproduction that the communicative process, verbal and nonverbal, must be attributed. Following Marx, Rossi-Landi divided social reproduction into three closely interrelated phases:

1. *non-sign material production* in which bodies are produced and not signs, but in which signs too come into play;
2. *exchange* which simultaneously covers sign and non-sign material exchange or communication. Sign exchange includes:
 - a) sign production;
 - b) sign exchange;
 - c) sign consumption;
3. *non-sign material consumption* in which bodies are consumed and not signs, and in which signs do not come into play.

The meaning of the title, *Between Signs and Non-signs* (established by Rossi-Landi himself), should now be clear. The reference is not only to the epistemological question of the relation between signs and things, though of course Rossi-Landi did not ignore this problem; indeed it is central to the essays collected in Part Four. Beyond this, however, the expression 'between signs and non-signs' recalls the fundamental fact that the relation between signs and things cannot be viewed separately from the global process of social reproduction. For Rossi-Landi, the relation between signs and non-signs is the relation that constitutes social reality. All the social develops between signs and non-signs.

The relation between signs and non-signs throws light upon yet another major issue concerning the social system and its transformations; the relation, that is, between so-called structure and so-called superstructure, or between socio-economic reality and ideology. This is possible thanks to the introduction of a mediating element between modes of production and ideology (productive forces and relations of production); our reference is to sign systems, to sign systems in their entirety, verbal and nonverbal, and, therefore, to that

important phase in social reproduction listed above as phase 2 – the combination of sign production, sign exchange, and sign consumption.

The importance attributed to the notion of social reproduction by Rossi-Landi is confirmed by the two successive plans (dated, respectively, May 1981 and August 1984) of a book entitled *Introduction to the Study of Signs*. He sent both plans to Augusto Ponzio whom he wished to involve at the time as co-author though he subsequently decided to proceed alone; as he explained in a letter to Ponzio of January 28, 1985, he was motivated by an invitation to hold a course of twelve lessons in São Paulo (Brazil) in September 1985 (which never took place because of his sudden death in May of that same year). The first chapter in both planned versions of this book (which was never published) is dedicated to *social reproduction* and covers the following topics: social reproduction as the principle of all things; a catalogue of social reproduction; models of social reproduction; material reproduction and symbolic reproduction; structures, sign systems and superstructures. After dealing with such issues as the transmission of sign systems, the verbal and nonverbal, the homology of production, the sign totality and its residues, the second plan closes on a section dedicated to sign alienation, which in turn concludes with a chapter on language and ideology.

Rossi-Landi continued his research on the same topics during the 1980s working along the same lines as in the 1970s. His main concern was to perfect and clarify his intuitions regarding the homology of production and the mechanism of social reproduction.¹⁶

As briefly mentioned above, the three essays forming Part Four of the present volume, “Signs and Material Reality,” concentrate on the materiality of signs and on “the bodily residue of nonverbal messages” (see Petrilli 1986 and 1988b): notions that were fundamental in Rossi-Landi’s work as early as the 1960s (and already systematically treated in his 1968 book). In addition to the concepts mentioned so far, Part Four presents still others including the concept of *material* (and therefore of *materiality*), which is related to the concept of *residue* (sign and non-sign residue or bodily residue), and both are inevitably reconducted to the principle of social reproduction.

Rossi-Landi proposes the following five propositions (first presented in this form in 1974; see his 1979 paper “Signs and Bodies,” now in this volume):

- (A) All signs are bodies
- (B) Not all bodies are signs

- (C) All bodies can be signs
- (D) Signs are not bodies
- (E) All bodies are signs

A, B, and C characterize the materialistic model of semiotics; D and E the idealistic model.

Rossi-Landi isolated the sign totality or “cell,” as he called it, described as a unit consisting of a *signans* and a *signatum* (he introduced this Augustinian terminology with the intention, apart from anything else, of avoiding the mentalistic ambiguity of the Saussurian *signifié*), and on this basis he elaborated the concept of sign *residue*. Irreducible residues of a bodily and of a social material order are present both on the side of the *signans* and of the *signatum*. On the side of the *signans*, bodies, either natural bodies or artefacts – but in any case social – act as sign vehicles. On the side of the *signatum*, *social residues* are classifiable as interpretants in Peirce’s sense intended both as intension, sense, *lekton*, and as extension, referent or *designatum*. In other words, the sign is characterized by a double materiality, physical and socio-historical, which determines the specificity of semiotic materiality.

Though Rossi-Landi distinguished between signs and non-signs, it was not his intention to establish two different modes of existence: things that are signs and things that are not signs, as though signs are signs of their own accord, by nature and independently of communication and interpretation processes, of socio-historical relations among human beings. It is common knowledge that not all things are signs, which does not exclude the fact that there is nothing that cannot become a sign once it has been caught up within the web of semiotic processes. The point for Rossi-Landi was not to distinguish *tout court* between signs and non-signs, but rather to study the ongoing transformation processes from the status of sign to the status of non-sign and vice versa, and of explaining the conditions that make such operations possible – something which further clarifies his choice of the word ‘between’ in the title of the present volume. Against trends colored by a sort of semiotic panlogism and according to which the world is uniquely populated by signs, against sign fetishism, and against arbitrary separations imposed by recourse to abstract categories, Rossi-Landi worked on notions that not only provided common ground for an adequate analysis of signs and non-signs, but were also able to account for the mechanisms underlying the very production – and reproduction – of signs and their multiple diversity.

I wish to thank Iris Zavala for having read this introduction and given advice for its improvement. I also thank her and Myriam Díaz-Diocaretz for having accepted my proposal to publish this collection of essays by Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (made in the Summer of 1989 during the seminars held annually at the Centro Internazionale di Linguistica e Semiotica, Urbino), and for having welcomed it into their book series. A special thanks must also go to Professor Augusto Ponzio. He has made this volume possible thanks to the information so generously supplied and to his advice in the far from simple reconstruction of the theoretical itinerary it proposes. Such assistance was also fundamental in writing the present introduction.

Susan Petrilli
Bari, January 1991

For bibliographical references relative to the writings of Rossi-Landi, see the general bibliography at the end of this volume:

- PART I contains: R.-L. 1988; R.-L. 1975c; R.-L. 1978e; R.-L. 1981a.
 PART II contains: R.-L. 1953b; R.-L. 1976a; R.-L. 1978d.
 PART III contains: R.-L. 1977; R.-L. 1974e; R.-L. 1978b; R.-L. 1979i.
 PART IV contains: R.-L. 1979b; R.-L. 1979g; R.-L. 1979c.

Notes

- * All information in square brackets throughout this volume has been inserted by myself. References to the writings of Ferruccio Rossi-Landi have all been included in an updated and revised bibliography at the end of the volume.
- Notes and reference sections have been placed at the end of each respective paper. This criterion has been used so as to enable the reader to ascertain information as originally given by the author relative to the time of writing.
- Chapters Two and Three are both dedicated to the work of Charles Morris; as such both refer to the general bibliography of his writings, edited by Rossi-Landi (and revised by myself), in the final section of Chapter Two, where it was originally placed by the author.
- In conformity with editorial requirements as established by the publishers, the spelling has been systematically Americanized; and words formed with prefixes have been written without a hyphen wherever possible. – S.P.

1. On the relation between social alienation, language and madness with particular reference to literature, see Iris M. Zavala *et al.* eds., 1987.
2. The development of a theoretical-ideological movement at an international level, and perhaps especially in France (M. Foucault, L. Althusser, P. Bourdieu, etc), during the 1960s and 1970s was not incidental. This movement was described by Raymond Boudon with critical overtones in terms of “neo-Marxism” (see Boudon 1986). It would seem that the accusation of “superficial functionalism” characterizing this movement with respect to the problematic character of Marxian analysis (which led to its description as “neo-Marxism”), is especially suitable in the case of Bourdieu (cf. the pages dedicated to him by Boudon 1986, Chapter 8). However that may be, Bourdieu has the merit of having turned his attention to the social-ideological function of certain institutions (e.g. the education system) as well as to language and culture in general (cf. Bourdieu 1979, 1982; Bourdieu and Passeron 1964, 1970). A degree of hyperbolic functionalism is evident in the identification of a direct relation between culture, education, and language on the one hand, and reproduction of the ruling class – through unconscious, invisible *habitus* mechanisms – on the other. Furthermore, this operation is carried out on the basis of a definition that falls into the vicious circle of explaining the function of cultural institutions in terms of the ruling class. Rossi-Landi’s study of the mediating function of signs, and therefore his dialectic conception of the social programming of behavior, offers a possible alternative to such a mechanistic orientation. For further details see the following note. Another important volume from the same period (mid 1970s) is the monographic issue of *Langages* entitled *Analyse du discours: Langue et idéologie*, see Pêcheux *et al.*, 1975.
3. As mentioned in the note above, Bourdieu defines the *habitus* as the mechanism through which social behavior and cultural institutions are unconsciously and invisibly rendered functional to the reproduction of the ruling class (cf. Bourdieu 1974: 16-17). The notion of *habitus* may be developed dialectically with Rossi-Landi’s concepts of “program” and “programming.” Indeed, the same Bourdieu defined “*habitus*” in terms of “types of programs (in the sense of informatics)” (see Bourdieu 1985: 110). For the notion of social program, see Rossi-Landi 1968i: 304-319, now in Rossi-Landi 1972i; see also Part III, this volume.
4. As observed in a footnote to the second edition (in Rossi-Landi 1985a), this essay is part of Rossi-Landi’s general research on social reproduction. See also Rossi-Landi 1977 (written in 1974), and Rossi-Landi 1978b (written in 1976). Both essays are now included in the present volume.
5. See, for example, the essays collected in Bakhtin 1984.
6. Rossi-Landi returns to the concept of excess in a paper entitled, “The Author between Social Reproduction and Discontinuity,” held at a seminar at the Institute of Philosophy of Language, Bari University, April 19, 1985 (see Rossi-Landi 1985b). The problematic of the ideological interpretation of the author in Rossi-Landi is further examined in an essay by Biancofiore and Ponzio entitled “Autore e ideologia” (in Ponzio 1988a:189-223).
7. For an exhaustive and critical study of Rossi-Landi’s research, see Ponzio 1988a. Some of Ponzio’s work on specific aspects of Rossi-Landi’s theoretical production is also

available in English, see Ponzio 1986a and 1986b, now in Ponzio 1990b. The latter also includes an essay by myself, "On the Materiality of Signs" (see also Petrilli 1986). To the thought of Rossi-Landi has also been devoted a monographic issue of the journal *Il Protagora* (see Petrilli 1987a) with contributions from Umberto Eco, Paolo Facchi, János Kelemen, Romano Luperini, Roland Posner, Thomas A. Sebeok, Giuseppe Semerari, Tatiana Slama-Cazacu, Tullio Tentori, and an unpublished paper by Rossi-Landi, "La 'non-filosofia'" (pp. 191-195).

8. Giovanni Vailati (1863-1909) was one of the first Italians to have understood the importance not only of Charles S. Peirce's (1839-1914) semiotics, but also of his *pragmatism*. Vailati was also in contact with the English scholar Victoria Lady Welby (1837-1912) at a time when her theory of meaning, or *Significs*, was generally ignored. Welby's work is only just now claiming attention in its own right (despite her intellectual exchanges with Peirce and her influence upon such authors as C.K. Ogden and I.A. Richards); thanks also to the recent re-editions of her works, see Welby 1983 and 1985a. A collection of her writings has also appeared in Italian translation, see Welby 1985b. For studies on Welby, see Schmitz 1990 and Heijerman-Schmitz 1991.
As to the relation between Vailati and Welby, and Vailati and Rossi-Landi, see Ponzio 1988b, 1989, and 1990a; see also Petrilli 1989.
9. On the relation between Rossi-Landi and Morris, see Petrilli 1987b and 1992.
10. Rossi-Landi edited a collection of published and unpublished papers by Eugenio Colorni with an introduction by Norberto Bobbio (see Rossi-Landi 1975a). As pointed out by Rossi-Landi himself, though this material was published in 1975 he actually worked on it as early as the years between 1964 and 1966.
11. The first edition of *Significato, comunicazione e parlare comune* (Rossi-Landi 1961d) includes a long analytical appendix on Edmund Husserl. This was eliminated from the second (1980) edition of the same book given that it was scheduled to appear in the volume, *Dall'analisi alla dialettica*. On this aspect of Rossi-Landi's work, see Ponzio 1988c.
12. For a critical appreciation of Noam Chomsky's linguistic theory in the light of considerations made by Rossi-Landi as well, see Ponzio 1973 and 1991.
13. For a discussion of this particular phase in Rossi-Landi's work, see Eco 1987 (now in Ponzio 1988a: 291-308) which also takes into consideration Rossi-Landi's introduction to the second (1973) edition of his 1968 book *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*; see also Caputo 1988; Mininni 1988 and 1990.
14. On the important theoretical work carried out by Rossi-Landi in relation to *Ideologie* (his essays and editorial notes have all been collected in Rossi-Landi 1972d) and, between 1979 and 1981, to *Scienze umane*, see Ponzio 1991: 203-291.
15. The correspondence between Rossi-Landi and Morris in English is now available as a monographic issue of the journal *Semiotica*. Morris's 1964 book has recently been published in Italian with a collection of some of his other papers, see Morris 1988. A discussion of the relation between Morris and Rossi-Landi is available in the introductions to both volumes.

16. Literature on Rossi-Landi's work has been appearing since the end of the 1960s. The following is a version, updated by Ponzio and myself, of a list of references which had originally been prepared by Rossi-Landi and sent to Ponzio (other writings on Rossi-Landi have already been mentioned throughout this introduction): Bernard 1991: 17-39; Bernard, Hanl, and Withalm 1985: 94-127; Bernard and Withalm 1985: 3-9; 1986a: 329-366; 1986b: 173-202; 1986c: 1-200; 1991: 367-390; Calabrese and Mucci 1975, *passim*; Casetti 1977, *passim*; Chatterjee 1991; Gak 1975; Kelemen 1975: 592-598; Miceli 1982; Mininni 1977; Miscevič 1981; Mondadori 1968-1969, vol. 3, 48-58; Petrilli forthcoming; Ponzio 1972: 378-389; 1973, *passim*; 1974, *passim*; 1976, *passim*; 1986a: 136-166; 1986b: 207-221; 1988a; 1988c: 107-120; 1989; 1990b, *passim*; 1991 *passim*; Senofonte 1982, cf. para. 3.4 and *passim*; Steinbacher 1972; Williams 1969: 97-115.

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