Lesson 5

Meaning, Significance and Values I

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1. Introduction; 2. Significs and "The Meaning of Meaning"; 3. Meaning and interpretation; 4. Meaning, referent, and linguistic production; 5. The homological method applied to linguistic and material production

1. Introduction

The question of meaning and of the "meaning of meaning" is strictly connected with the notion of semiosis. Semiosis is the process, or relation, or situation in which something carries out the role of sign, indeed the sign is inseparable from semiosis. In fact, for something to be a sign the presence (whether real or potential) of something else is necessary in order to interpret the former sign's meaning. This second element is an interpretant in turn a sign, thereby connected to another interpretant in an open chain of interpretants. To put this in terminology today associated with Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914)[1], though it would appear never actually used by him, we are describing here the movement of "unlimited" or "infinite" semiosis.

Among the interpreters of the "meaning of meaning" presented as points of reference

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[1] Charles Sanders Peirce (Cambridge, Mass. 1839 - Milford, Mass. 1914), an American scientist, historian of science, logician, mathematician and philosopher of international fame, is commonly acclaimed as the father of modern semiotics. He proposed a general theory of sign, which he equated with logic and theory of inference, especially abduction, and later with pragmatism, or as he preferred, 'pragmaticism'. Peirce graduated from Harvard College in 1859 and received his MS from Harvard University's newly founded Lawrence Scientific School in 1863. He worked for thirty-one-years as a research scientist in the U.S. Coast and Geodetic Survey, retiring in 1891. Apart from short-term lectureships in logic and philosophy of science at the Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore (1879-1884), at the Lowell Institute in Boston (1866), and at Harvard (1865, 1869-1870, 1903, 1907), as well as at private homes in Cambridge (1898 and in other years), he mostly worked in isolation and outside academe. He had difficulty publishing during his lifetime. A selection of his published and previously unpublished writings was presented in the *Collected Papers*, the first volume of which appeared in 1931. *Chance, Love and Logic*, an anthology of his writings edited by M. R. Cohen, was punblished antecedently in 1923. His works have now been organized chronologically into a thirty volume critical edition under the general title, *Writings of Charles S. Peirce: A Chronological Edition* (Indianapolis: Peirce Edition Project), the first volume of which appeared in 1982.

in this lesson, in addition to Peirce we shall also evoke the work of Victoria Welby (1837-1912)[2], the ideator of significs, Charles K. Ogden[3], Mikhail Bakhtin, Adam Schaff[4],

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[2] Victoria Lady Welby made an important contribution to the theory of sign and meaning and may be considered a key figure in semiotics (see Petrilli 2009, 2015; Petrilli and Ponzio 2005). The originality of her work was generally known, yet she did not receive the public recognition she longed for until 1911, when the entry 'Significs' was at last published in the *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. In 1897, shortly after publishing her two keystone essays, 'Meaning and Metaphor' (1893) and 'Sense, Meaning and Interpretation' (1896), the journal *Mind* established the Welby Prize for the best essay on significs. In 1898 it was awarded to the German sociologist Ferdinand Tönnies for his essay 'Philosophical Terminology' (1899-1900). Another important moment of official recognition for significs is represented by publication of the entries 'Translation' (Welby 1902), 'Significs' (co-authored with J. M. Baldwin and G. F. Stout, 1902), and 'Sensal' (with G. F. Stout, 1902) in the *Dictionary of Philosophy and Psychology in Three Volumes* (Baldwin 1901-1905). The Signific Movement in the Netherlands, which developed in two phases (1917-1926 and 1937-1956), was based on Welby's significs through the mediation of the Dutch psychiatrist, poet and social reformer Frederik van Eeden (1860-1932). For a relatively recent collection of Welby's published and unpublished writings, see Petrilli 2009.

[3] Charles Kay Ogden (1889-1957) was unquestionably a polymath, known above all for his book *The Meaning of Meaning* (1923) coauthored with Ivor A. Richards. As a student at Cambridge University, Ogden was one of the founders of the Heretic Society for the discussion of problems relating to philosophy, art, science as well as religion. He served as editor of *Cambridge Magazine* and later of *Psyche* (1923-52), a journal of general and linguistic psychology. Among his various undertakings, Ogden founded the Orthological Institute and invented Basic English, an international language comprising 850 words for people with no knowledge of English.

His research was strongly influenced by his relationship with Victoria Lady Welby (see Petrilli and Ponzio 2005: Part One, II) and with Richards. The unpublished correspondence between Ogden and Welby (which lasted roughly two years, from 1910 to 1911) is noteworthy from the perspective of the links between Welby's Significs and the conception of meaning proposed in *The Meaning of Meaning* (cf. Gordon 1990a; Petrilli 1995a, 1998b: 173, 218; 2015: 177-200; Caputo *et alii* 1998). As a young university student, Ogden strongly promoted Significs, and in 1911 he gave a paper for the Heretic Society on 'The Progress of Significs' (in Gordon 1994).

In the *Meaning of Meaning* Ogden and Richards propose a triadic schema of the sign where interpretation and meaning are described in terms of relational processes ensuing from the dynamic interaction among sign, interpretant, and object – or in the authors' terminology, between *symbol*, *reference*, and *referent*. In this book the importance of Charles S. Peirce to semiotics is acknowledged with the insertion of a section devoted to him in the Appendix. As a result of this, Peirce's ideas were introduced and circulated in England for the first time alongside the name of other important figures. Welby is also mentioned, but the significance of her research is underestimated.

[4] The Polish philosopher Adam Schaff (1913, Lwów–2006, Warsaw) may be counted among the fundamental figures on the contemporary scene of European culture. His interests range from philosophy of language and semiotics, to philosophy of knowledge and political economy, to moral and political philosophy. He focused on problems of semantics, theory of ideology, the relation between language and reality, formal logic, and dialectics. But he also showed a great interest in ethics. He thematized the problem of the human individual and the relation between humanism and Marxism. Concerning this aspect of his work, he evidenced the connection between the interpretation of Marxism and translation of Marxian terminology, showing the influence of ideology in the practice of translation.

As a polish philosopher, Schaff oriented his analysis in a semiotic sense, examining in particular the symptomatology of today's social politics. During the 1980s, he promoted a series of meetings in different countries throughout Eastern and Western Europe to analyze and compare the different versions in different languages of the Helsinki Final Act of 1975 from a semiotic perspective.

A series of issues of central importance in Schaff's research include the conception of the human individual, the relation between language and knowledge, language and dialectics, the influence of ideology in translation, linguistic fetishism and stereotypes, critique of Chomskyian theory of language, and of hypostatization of such concepts as "structure" and "structuralism" (see Petrilli and Ponzio 2012; Ponzio 2002a).

Ferruccio Rossi-Landi[5], and Augusto Ponzio. In Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913) the theory of lingusitic value presents analogies, which are not incidental, with the theory of economic value as formulated by the marginalistic school of Lausanne (Leon Walras and Vilfredo Pareto). Saussure in fact applies the value theory of "pure economics" as elaborated by of the School of Lausanne to language (*langue*) which he describes as a system of pure values, determined by naught else but the momentary state of its terms. "Pure economics" is connected to a fetishistic vision of economic value. Applied to language, it causes the Saussurean perspective to lose sight of the social system of linguistic production, that is, of the social relations in which exchange between signifier and signified, between one sign and another is produced. Like the marginalists, for Saussure of the *Cours de linguistique générale* (1916), the social (*langue*) is the result of individual actions, a sort of average, a medium. The social relation that constitutes the *langue* consists, in Saussure, in the *langue* as the sum of verbal images stored in all individuals in a given community. The social is reduced to the status of a purely external unit. "Official" linguistics from Saussure to Noam Chomsky (and the pseudo-biological theory of "innate universal grammar" which does not explain "Babel", the multiplicity of languages) is incapable of elaborating a general linguistics that can effectively be part of the general science of signs, or semiotics.

In his *Introduction to semantics* (*Wstęp do semantyki*, 1960), Adam Schaff (1913-2006) critiques sign fetishism which he believes characterizes those interpretations of language that reduce the sign-situation to a relation among signs, or to a relation between sign and object, between sign and thought, on the one hand, and object, on the other, etc. Schaff refers to Marx's analysis of commodities, identifying analogies between the critique of exchange value in economics and the critique of linguistic value. All the same, Schaff's critique of sign fetishim does not deal sufficiently with the problem of linguistic social production.

On the contrary, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) in Italy recognized that the

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[5] The Italian philosopher and semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921, Milan – 1985, Trieste) carried out pioneering work in the fields of semiotics and philosophy of language, contributing to their development across the twentieth century. Rossi-Landi was particularly interested in connecting the continental tradition with the English (analytical philosophy) and the American (with such authors as Peirce and Morris). A central focus in his research is his critique of language and ideology in relation to sign production processes and the process of social reproduction. He also made major contributions to our understanding of the work of such scholars as Charles Morris, Ludwig Wittgentein, Gilbert Ryle, Giovanni Vailait, Karl Marx, among others. In an unpublished bio-bibliogrpahical note, dated March 1984, Rossi-Landi said the following about himself: "If I were now to choose myself some sort of general formula for describing the bulk of my production, I would say that in the main it is a synthesis of historical materialism, on the one hand, and analytical philosophy and semiotics on the other: the framework is historico-materialistic, the mentality and the techniques are, at least, partially, analytical and semiotical. A synthesis, I said; and quite a few critics would agree. But perhaps it is only a mixture. Paraphrasing a famous saying by Wittgenstein, this is for the public to decide" (now in Rossi-Landi 1992: 4).

problem of *linguistic production* was centrally important for an adequate understanding of language and communication. All his publications are developed in this direction beginning from his book of 1968 (*Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* / *Language as Work and Trade*) to his book of 1985 (*Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* / Philosophical methodics and the science of signs).

In the search for its semiotic foundations, linguistics must demand such an orientation from the science of signs. This orientation must be part of the *method of semiotics* and consequently of its theory and of its theory of verbal language which linguistics assumes as its foundation. Etymologically, "method" means *meta-hodòs*, "beyond the pathway". All sciences move in this direction as a development of human meta-semiosis. This means to get free of the limits of "semiology" to which linguistics with Saussure, or interpretations thereof, has been circumscribed, and to enter the perspective of "global semiotics" with its inevitable "semioethic turn".

2. Significs and "The Meaning of Meaning"

When in 1923 Charles K. Ogden and Ivor A. Richards published their groundbreaking book titled *The Meaning of Meaning*, one can wonder whether they did so fully realizing that their work laid down a marker for the entire 20th century discussion of signs, a discourse which would bring about the decisive transition beyond modernity to a global postmodern era of scientific and philosophical development.

Having said this, Victoria Welby's contribution to sign and language studies is undervalued in this book, in spite of the fact that Ogden had been one of her privileged interlocutors during his student days. In addition to section 6 in Appendix D in *The Meaning of Meaning*, where her name simply recurs in relation to Peirce, Welby is only remembered in a footnote, the first to chapter 8, "The Meaning of Philosophers," where she is listed with Russell and Schiller as one of the few scholars to have realized the need of dealing with the largely neglected but all-pervasive problem of meaning. She is also mentioned in another footnote, in chapter 11, "The Meaning of Meaning," albeit with comments that reveal a scarce understanding of her overall approach to the question of meaning (Ogden and Richards 1923). With references to her 1896 article "Sense, meaning and interpretation" and her books *What Is Meaning?* (1983 [1903]) and *Significs and Language* (1985a [1911]), Welby is accused of "contenting herself with a vague insistence on meaning as human intention," of an insufficiently analytical description of the concept of meaning, and,

furthermore, of "echoes of the phraseology of an earlier religious phase." The following passage from *Significs and Language* is quoted in support of this (hardly convincing) thesis:

> The one crucial question in all Expression is its special property, first of Sense, that in which it is used, then of Meaning as the intention of the user, and, most far-reaching and momentous of all, of implication, of ultimate Significance. (Ogden and Richards 1923, cited from the 1989 edition: 192)

Here I will simply observe that Welby's quest for significs takes the problem of meaning far beyond its strictly logical-linguistic and intentional aspects (which it embodies) to focus on meaning in relation to the concept of "value." The allusion is not only to linguistic value but also to value understood in an axiological sense (beyond the religious), in an ethical-social and pragmatic sense. This relation of signs to values associates her research, for example, with Charles Morris (1901-1979), that is to say, with Morris author of such books as *The Open Self* (1948), *Varieties of Human Value* (1956), and *Signification and Significance: A Study of the Relations of Signs and Values* (1964) and of numerous other articles centering on this issue[6]. Transcending the limits of a merely descriptive approach to linguistics grounded in the dogma of codes, conventions, and intention, Welby develops her theory of meaning and significance in an ethical framework. Consequently, it is a question not just of stopping at her religious, moral, or visionary overtones (of which she has been accused from various parts) but of viewing her research in the broader context of her "significal" quest for humanism, for the significal appreciation of the single individual, conducted with a focus on verbal language and meaning as a significant expression of the properly human. Welby specifically chose the term "significs" to capture this particular orientation in her studies on meaning, given that unlike other readily available terms such as "semantics," "semiotics," and "semasiology," "significs" was free from strictly technical associations.

Whatever our conclusions concerning the extent and permanence of Welby's influence over Ogden as author of *The Meaning of Meaning*, the fact remains that this book, from its very title, lends itself to being interpreted as a possible response to a basic question in significs: namely, "What is meaning?" Apart from this, there is affinity in the problems privileged by the authors in question and in their way of handling them: the problem of meaning, interpretation, the conditions of meaning, the production of signs, etc.

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[6] Charles W. Morris (Denver, Colorado 1901-Gainesville, Florida 1979) studied engineering, biology, psychology and philosophy. After finishing his science degree in 1922, he completed a PhD. in philosophy at the University of Chicago in 1925, where he taught from 1931 to 1958. Morris continued Charles S. Peirce's work under certain aspects, but differently from Peirce published most of his writings during his lifetime, see References.

Furthermore, as emerges from their correspondence, Ogden and Welby share a common interest in questions of terminology, the problem of conceptual-expressive confusion, ambiguity, the function of definition, the fixed meaning fallacy, the concept of linguistic conscience, the critique of language, and translation theory – where translation is understood not only in the common sense of interlingual communication or only as substitution or reiteration (intralingual or endolingual communication), but also in the broad sense of interpretation, and, therefore, as discovery, renewal of meaning, acquisition of new knowledge (see "Ogden, the Translator," in Gordon 1991: 125-130; Schmitz 1985: lxxxviii-xciii). Moreover, being convinced of the need to deal with the role played by tradition in determining the relation between language, thought, and reality, both Welby and Ogden privilege studies in anthropological history and the history of religion. Lastly, they both believe in the necessity of developing the practical consequences of their theoretical concerns, and in their different ways they work for linguistic, educational, and social reform. On his side, Ogden scholar Terrence W. Gordon (1990a, 1990b, 1991, 1994) not only considers the remarkable affinities between *The Meaning of Meaning* and significs but also, with an observation that Welby would have perhaps appreciated as recognition of the effective "progress of significs," highlights this book as a possible development of her particular approach to the study of meaning, in a new dimension:

> The most important aspect of the connection between their work [Ogden and Richards] and hers is not simply a matter of the affinities noted here; rather, it is the way in which they carried her vision of Significs forward into a new dimension.
> Ogden and Richards rise to the challenge of Lady Welby's call for a new departure in psychology and philosophy. They develop an approach which involves both these disciplines in Chapter Three of *The Meaning of Meaning*, "sign situations," where the most basic of premises in behavioral psychology is developed and linked to sign-theory, leading to the elaboration of a technical definition of context which underpins the entire book. (Gordon 1991: 122)

3. Meaning and interpretation

Peirce viewed significs as that part of "semiotic" (as he spelled it) which focuses upon the relation between sign and interpretant, so that, as a theory of meaning, significs was part of logic. In his 1867 text "On a New List of Categories," Peirce defined logic as the general science of reference of the symbol to the object (*CP* 1.545-1.559). Subsequently, however, on recognizing that science is an investigation in progress and not a set doctrine and that if there are limits on science these are not inherent but simply the effect produced by scientists, he concluded that stopping at the relation between sign (symbol) and object was too

restrictive. Peirce extended his approach to include the relation between sign (symbol, index, and icon) and interpretant. This involved setting the analysis of the relation between symbol and object within the broader context of the general theory of signs.

In a letter to Welby of 14 March 1909 (the same published by Ogden and Richards in *The Meaning of Meaning*), Peirce himself established correspondences between Welby's three levels of meaning and his own triadic division of the sign – precisely between her "sense," "meaning," and "significance" and his "immediate interpretant," "dynamical interpretant," and "final interpretant," respectively. Peirce's immediate interpretant regards the meaning ordinarily and habitually used by the interpreter, and, therefore, as Welby says concerning sense, it regards the interpreter's immediate response to signs. The dynamical interpretant concerns the sign's signification in a specific context, and, therefore, as Welby claims for meaning, it is used according to a specific intention. That Peirce should have matched his final interpretant with Welby's significance is of particular interest in the context of our current discussion. In fact, Peirce's final interpretant concerns the sign as it appears at the extreme limits of its interpretative possibilities, that is, it concerns all those possible responses that signs may provoke in the unlimited chain of interpretants. In other words, similarly to Welby's significance, Peirce's dynamical interpretant designates the creative potentialities of signs:

> I now find that my division nearly coincides with yours, as it ought to do exactly, if both are correct. …The greatest discrepancy appears to lie in my Dynamical Interpretant as compared with your "Meaning". If I understand the latter it consists in the effect upon the mind of the Interpreter that the utterer (whether vocally or by writing) of the sign intends to produce. My Dynamical Interpretant consists in direct effect actually produced by a Sign upon an Interpreter of it. They agree in being effects of the Sign upon an individual mind, I think, or upon a number of actual individual minds by independent action upon each. My Final Interpretant is, I believe, exactly the same as your Significance; namely the effect the Sign would produce upon any mind upon which circumstances should permit it to work out its full effect. My Immediate Interpretant is, I think, very nearly, if not quite, the same as your "sense"; for I understand the former to be the total analyzed effect that the sign is calculated to produce, or naturally might be expected to produce; and I have been accustomed to identify this with the effect the sign first produces or may produce upon a mind, without any reflection upon it. I am not aware that you have ever attempted to define your term "sense"; but I gather from reading over what you say that it is the first effect that a sign would have upon a mind well-qualified to comprehend it. Since you say it is Sensal and has no Volitional element, I suppose it is of the nature of an "impression". It is thus, as far as I can see, exactly my Immediate Interpretant. (Hardwick 1977: 109-110)

Welby's approach can clearly be related to those trends in semiotics that overcome the limits of the logic of biunivocal correspondences between the *signifiant* and *signifié* and that better account for the dialogical nature of the sign, its vocation for otherness. "Code

semiotics" or "equal exchange semiotics" establishes a relation of perfect correspondence between the two faces of the sign, according to the rules of a predetermined code, thereby describing meaning as something fixed, preestablished, and frozen within the sign system. Instead, Welby, in line with "interpretation semiotics" today and with a special focus on language, emphasized such qualities as the capacity for semantic flexibility, plurivocality, and dialogism. For Welby, meaning develops in translative-interpretative processes from one sign to the next and is forever in becoming.

The maximum expression value of a sign lies in its "significance." The sign's signifying capacity is enhanced with the increase in translation processes in the semiotic network.

4. Meaning, referent, and linguistic production

The citation below is from the introductory chapter of *The Meaning of Meaning*, entitled "Thoughts, Words and Things." It delineates the main features of the Ogden and Richards sign-interpretation approach to the theory of meaning. Like many other passages in the same volume, it clearly recalls the contents of Ogden's correspondence with Welby (in this particular case, his letter of 15 November 1910, where, using Welby's terminology, he speaks of the need of developing a "linguistic conscience" to the end of reducing confusion in the weekly discussions held by the Heretic Society at Cambridge):

> In yet another respect all these specialists fail to realize the deficiencies of current linguistic theory. Preoccupied as they are – ethnologists with recording the details of fast vanishing languages; philologists with an elaborate technique of phonetic law and principles of derivation; philosophers with "philosophy" – all have overlooked the pressing need for a better understanding of what actually occurs in discussion. The analysis of the process of communication is partly psychological, and psychology has now reached a stage at which this part may be successfully undertaken. Until this had happened the science of Symbolism necessarily remained in abeyance, but there is no longer any excuse for vague talk about Meaning, and ignorance of the ways in which words deceive us. (Ogden and Richards 1923, now 1989: 8)

The problem of meaning is examined at the pragmatic-operative level, in the live processes of communication, and at the metalevel of discourse, as the object of linguistic theory. Ogden and Richards are critical of linguistics as traditionally practiced by the linguists, as well as of certain philosophical approaches that are either implicitly or explicitly connected with linguistics. In both cases, the general failure to analyze actual linguistic usage and underlying theoretical implications is evidenced. Here, too, there are affinities with Welby, who also transcended linguistics as it was officially practiced in her time. For

example, we know that she critiqued semantics as represented by Michel Bréal and his 1897 book *Essai de semantique: Science des significations*.

In an earlier passage of *The Meaning of Meaning*, Ogden and Richards refer to Saussure. While granting him the merit of having shifted the perspective of linguistic studies from the diachronic to the synchronic level, they criticize his abstract conception of the *langue*, his exclusion of the referent (which, instead, Ogden and Richards consider an integral part of interpretative processes), and finally his overevaluation of convention and fixed meaning: "As a philologist with an inordinate respect for linguistic convention, de Saussure could not bear to tamper with what he imagined to be a fixed meaning, a part of *la langue*. This scrupulous regard for fictitious 'accepted' uses of words is a frequent trait in philologists" (Ogden and Richards 1923, now 1989: 6).

Ogden and Richards propose a triadic theory of sign in which interpretation and meaning emerge as relational processes, ensuing from ongoing dynamical interaction between sign, interpretant, and object, or, in their specific terminology, between "symbol," "reference," and "referent." From this perspective, interpretation is not channeled according to the biunivocal logic of the code (the *langue*), a binary system of relations established by convention between the elements of language, between the *signifiant* and the *signifié*, or between the syntagmatic and paradigmatic axes of language. This approach to language and meaning is largely of Saussurean derivation and has been tagged "code and message semiotics," "decodification semiotics," or simply "code semiotics"; it involves the reduction of linguistic life to the relation between the abstract linguistic system and individual use of that system (*langue* and *parole*), to an exchange relation between *signifiant* and *signifié* and among signs in the system of language. On the contrary, in the general framework of so-called "interpretation semiotics," interpretation is no longer restricted to the dyadism of signality and decodification. Here, the meaning of a sign is not *in* the sign or in the system of language but rather in the relation between a sign and its interpretant – where the latter develops at various degrees of dialogic otherness, as a responsive understanding interpretant and not just as an identification interpretant.

Ogden and Welby worked on the problem of linguistic ambiguity along similar lines. Like Welby, Ogden and Richards also indicated ambiguity, understood as plurivocality, as a necessary general condition for the ongoing development of signifying processes and communicative interaction. Apart from technical languages, where meaning is established univocally according to codes and conventions, these authors substantially agree that human communication depends on such properties as ambiguity and vagueness, which are

considered to be structurally constitutive, inherent to language, and, therefore, necessary in the successful realization of certain forms of communicative interaction (as is particularly evident, for example, in literary discourse). In his introduction to the 1989 edition of *The Meaning of Meaning*, Umberto Eco also evidences the importance of linguistic ambiguity for expression and communication:

> It is true that a good linguistic theory can make us more aware of the functioning of the language we use and of the traps it sets for us: one who knows a language well can express himself with greater precision or can even lie more convincingly. … It is also true that, in the course of an everyday conversation, it can be useful to ask one's interlocutor what he really wanted to say and what meaning he was giving to a certain word he used. But it is equally true that ordinary language lives on ambiguity, nuance, and allusion; and people use it nonchalantly, often managing to understand one another despite imprecisions, ellipses, and misreadings. No linguistic therapy can abolish these defects of ordinary language, since they represent also its richness and its strength. (Eco 1989: vii–viii)

The Meaning of Meaning adopts an interdisciplinary approach to the problem of meaning, developed in a semiotic framework, in terms of a causal theory of reference, where determining factors are context and usage. This book stresses the need to develop a theory of meaning in the light of communication theory and of addressing theoretical issues with reference to practical bearings. Thus understood, on one side *The Meaning of Meaning* anticipates developments in structural linguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, psycholinguistics, and artificial intelligence; on the other, it can be traced back to Ogden's interest in significs and the influence of language on thought at a time of general neglect regarding this subject. And still today, this book, thanks to its focus on interpretation, continues to be relevant to current debate on meaning and signifying processes:

> Throughout almost all our life we are treating things as signs. All experience, using the word in the widest possible sense, is either enjoyed or interpreted (i.e. treated as a sign) or both, and very little of it escapes some degree of interpretation. An account of the process of Interpretation is thus the key to the understanding of the Sign-situation. (Ogden and Richards 1923, now 1989: 50)

A fundamental problem addressed by Ogden and Richards regards the distinction between "meaning" and "referent" (in Peirce's terminology, between "interpretant" and "object"). Another interrelated issue just as significant is their conceptualization of the *mediated* character of the relation of so-called "symbols" to reality, whether internal or external, or, if we prefer, of "signs" to "referents." Sign mediation is described as a necessary condition for cognition and is achieved through the processes of so-called "representation" or "reference." The verbal sign stands for something in relation to a given "representation," "under some respect," as Peirce would say, or through a given reference in

the terminology of Ogden and Richards. Contrary to biunivocal approaches to the problem of meaning, where meaning is reduced to the status of a code, the *langue* in Saussure's terminology, therefore contrary to the fixed meaning fallacy, according to which meanings are plain and simple, fixed once and for all, Ogden and Richards adopt a triadic approach to meaning which enables them to account for its relational and dynamical nature. As such, signs and meaning are ever ready to adapt to new signifying situations thereby favoring the acquisition of new knowledge and experience. Like Welby, Ogden and Richards take their place in the tradition of thought designated as "interpretation semiotics," which provides a suitable framework for the critique of reifying and hypostatizing conceptions of meaning. As Morris clearly stated in 1938, meanings are not things, and to say that there are meanings is not the same as to say that there are such things as trees and rocks, for meanings cannot be separated from semiosic processes, that is, from the processes in which they are produced, the processes of linguistic production and of social reproduction generally (see Rossi-Landi 1968; Ponzio 1973, 1993).

Ogden and Richards are forerunners as critics of psychoanalysis. They critiqued the introspective method on the basis of their sign-interpretant referential approach to signifying phenomena at a time when psychoanalysis was enjoying great popularity. Interpretation of oneself and of others requires inquiry into the right side of the triangle, that is, the relationship between words and the external world, and not just into the left side, that is, the relationship between words and ideas:

> A sign has been interpreted rightly or wrongly, i.e., something has been not only experienced or enjoyed, but understood as referring to something else. Anything which can be experienced can also be thus understood, i.e., can also be a sign; and it is important to remember that interpretation, or what happens to (or in the mind of) an Interpreter is distinct both from the sign and from that for which the sign stands or to which it refers. If then we speak of the meaning of a sign we must not, as philosophers, psychologists and logicians are wont to do, confuse the (imputed) relation between a sign and that to which it refers, either with the referent (what is referred to) or with the process of interpretation (the "goings on" in the mind of the interpreter). (Ogden and Richards 1923, cited from the 1989 edition: 21–22, note)

Characteristically regarding their interdisciplinary perspective, Ogden and Richards aimed to apply their semiotic triangle just as usefully to other fields as to that of psychoanalysis. For example, they took the following position regarding the linguistic problem of definition, which needed to be grounded in a theory of knowledge or reference: "It is not always new words that are needed, but a means of controlling them as symbols, a means of readily discovering to what in the world on any occasion they are used to refer, and

this is what an adequate theory of definition should provide" (Ogden and Richards 1923, cited from the 1989 edition: 19).

Ogden and Richards critique hypostatizing theories of the referent at the basis of contemporary nonreferential semantics. The latter, "nonreferential semantics," indicates trends that tend to exclude the referent from the semiosic process, that reify the referent, theorizing a relation of reciprocal autonomy between referent and meaning. But the referent is a structural part of signifying processes, of semiosis, indeed can only be decided in such processes. Identification of the referent with the physical object often leads to the mistaken conclusion that since there are signs that do not refer to things, to physical objects, the referent is not essential to semiosis. But the reality of referents is multiform and includes such things as thoughts, ideas, sentiments, desires, or even imaginary or fictitious objects. Moreover, the referent can be an individual object, as in the expression "this is a computer," or an object in its generalized aspect, a class, as in the expression "a computer needs software."

In 1938, Morris divided the referent into the *denotatum* and the *designatum*. In other words, Morris distinguished between the sign's (always) referring to something existent in the sense foreseen by the sign (*designatum*) and the sign's (not always) doing so (*denotatum*). Such a distinction had already been made by Peter of Spain in his thirteenth-century book *Tractatus; or, Summule logicales* (1972 [1230?]) with the terms *suppositio* (to stand for something) and *appellatio* (to stand for something existent), both of which were distinguished from *significatio* (to have meaning). After supporting an "anti-referential" approach to semiotics, Umberto Eco also proceeds through "non-referential" semiotics and "not immediately referential semiotics" (Eco 1968, 1976, 1984) to the full recovery of "referential semiotics." Eco ends up distinguishing between "referent" (*denotatum*) and "*rinviato*" (*designatum*), which he in turn distinguished from meaning (for a critical reading of all these issues, see Ponzio 1990: 33–36; 1993: 27–33).

In *Introduction to Semantics*, the polish philosopher Adam Schaff acknowledges the critique of "sign fetishism" inherent in Ogden and Richards's triangle, and the merit of introducing ultimate reference to external reality as a necessary condition for the realization of sign situations or semiosis. All the same, working in a materialistic, historical-dialectic framework, Schaff goes a step further and focuses on the role of the human person in signifying processes, objecting that Ogden and Richards "remain silent when it comes to *men* who communicate with one another" (1960, Eng. trans.: 222). He makes a critique of sign fetishism, of the relocation and hypostatization of meaning, and, therefore, of those

interpretations of language that limit their focus to the sign situation reductively analyzed in terms of the relation between signs, that is, between signs and objects (referents) on the one hand or signs and interpretants (thought, reference) on the other, while losing sight of the human sources of such relations. Schaff underlines the intersubjective social nature of live communication and the fact that signs endowed with meaning subsist as such for someone—human expressive and communicative processes only develop in the intersubjective relation among human beings:

> "Meaning" is a typical term used as abbreviation, which refers not only to any entity (whether material or ideal) called meaning, but to men who communicate with one another by using certain objects or events to transmit to one another what they think about the world around them. (Schaff 1960, Eng. trans.: 217)

And, continuing along the same lines, he comments further as follows:

> I have often repeated the thesis that all effective analysis of signs and meaning should start from an analysis of the social process of communication or, in other words, of the sign-situation. ...
> The problem of meaning appears wherever we have to do with signs in the process of human communication. In this sense, meaning is a definite relation between men who communicate with one another. (*Ibid*.: 264-265)

In *Produzione linguistica e ideologia sociale* (1973), Augusto Ponzio observes that an adequate critique of sign fetishism must address the question of *social linguistic production*, that is to say, the social structures that make the production and circulation of language possible. Ponzio claims that it will not suffice to simply state that meaning is a social process or that meaning is determined in a given system of social relations. Schaff limits his attention to the level of communicative exchange, to the act of communication. Sign fetishism is described as consisting in analyzing the sign situation as a relation among signs instead of as a relation among people who use signs for communication and produce them for that purpose. But to stop at this level, as Ponzio says, means to shift the focus of the problem from the level of the *langue* to the level of the *parole* instead of proceeding to the level of social linguistic production. On the contrary, a radical critique of sign fetishism requires that we address the problem of the social system in which communication takes place, focusing on the linguistic production system where signs are produced and used rather than on communicative exchange, which is just one aspect of the signifying process viewed in its globality. Ponzio reasons as follows:

A totally different affair is to ask oneself why in a certain speech act given meanings are produced and used, what models the speaker uses in the production of messages, whom does he work for linguistically, to what kind of linguistic production belongs what he says, the way he says it, the subject he is talking about, the reason he is talking and because of which he turns to the person he is talking to. From this point of view, meaning is the expression of a social process, of a system of social relations in the sense that it reflects a precise system of linguistic production. (Ponzio 1973: 191; Fr. trans. 1992: 215)

To work in this direction means to proceed along lines inaugurated by Rossi-Landi in his book of 1968, *Linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato* (*Language as Work and Trade*, 1983). As explicated in the title itself, the two conditions that generally qualify the human being as such, that is, *homo faber* and *homo loquens*, are at last united. The aim is to deal with the problem of language from the perspective of the social relations of production and the potential for transformation and dynamical interaction with the world. This means to address language so as to free it from all those forms of fetishism and false consciousness that stop speakers from reaching full awareness of the meaning implications of their words. Rossi-Landi introduces the concept of "linguistic alienation" to describe an approach that reduces speakers to the condition of passivity when they submit to the tyranny of language (see Rossi-Landi's 1970 essay "Linguistic Alienation," now available in Petrilli 1992 and in Rossi-Landi 1992b).

5. The homological method applied to linguistic and material production

Rossi-Landi critiques separatism and barriers among the sciences and identifies a theoretical perspective in semiotics, understood as the general science of signs, capable of overcoming them. In this framework he worked specifically on the relations between verbal production and exchange, on the one hand, and material production and exchange, on the other:

My attempt aimed at bringing together two totalities, that of linguistic production and that of material production in a greater totality, so as to disclose come of the structures of this greater totality. (Rossi-Landi 1972: 288)

This orientation characterizes the whole course of Rossi-Landi's research from *Language as Work and Trade* (1968, Eng. trans. 1983) to *Linguistics and Economics* (1975, It. edition 2016), to the last book published just a few months before his death in 1985, *Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni* (Philosophical Methodics and the sign sciences) and his posthumous volume *Between Signs and Non-signs*, 1992.

Rossi-Landi developed Marx's approach to commodities which he described as fact of communication and not as the expression of relations among things. He considered political economy as a part of semiotics. Moreover Rossi-Landi studied linguistic phenomena with the categories of the economic sciences according to the tradition that unites Adam Smith to Ricardo and Marx. Unlike marginalist economy and its fetishistic vision of value, the approach elected by Rossi-Landi to political economy provides adequate instruments to supercede the mere level of linguistic exchange (the linguistic market) and focus on the level of production, on the social relations of linguistic work.

In the "Preface to the American edition" of *Language as Work and Trade*, Rossi-Landi clarifies that many of his ideas "were already present, if only in an embryonic form, in the 1961 book", *Significato, comunicazione e parlare commune* (Meaning, communication and common speech). This work in fact is an important contribution to studies in philosophy of language and semiotics independently of subsequent developments. In any case what he identifies as "common speech" in his 1961 book evolves into the concept of "linguistic work" in his 1968 book on the basis of his homological method with which he applied categories relative to material production to linguistic production. As he wrote to Charles Morris in a letter dated 20 march 1965:

> I am working on language, for a change – this time trying to take seriously what linguists and economists say about it. Linguistics, for the obvious reason that most "linguistic philosophers" take so little account of linguistics as it is; economists, for the non obvious reason that I found an intriguing correspondence between certain analyses in the two fields (economics and linguistics). (in Petrilli, ed., 1992: 99-100)

Rossi-Landi continued his research across such volumes as *Semiotica e ideologia* (1972), *Ideologies of Linguistic Relativity* (1973), *Linguistics and Economics* (1975), and *Ideologia* (1978, Eng. trans. Marx*ism and Ideology*, 1980), developing his *common speech* hypothesis into a theory of *common semiosis*.

Rossi-Landi's "homological method" consisted in identifying relations of similarity of the structural and genetic order among objects from different fields and spheres of knowledge which were not normally associated to each other, indeed were thought to be separate, as in the case of the relation he established between material artifacts and linguistic artifacts in the sphere of anthroposemiosis. The homological method searches for homologies and not analogies which by contrast to the former refer to relations of resemblance of the immediate and superficial order. In spite of what would seem to be

unsurmountable differences, material and linguistic artifacts can be considered as belonging to the same totality insofar as they are the result of human work.

Guided by his homological method, Rossi-Landi contributed to the critique of hypostatization, that is, the tendency to reify the parts that constitute the totality, belong to it, but that instead are considered separately from the totality. Following this orientation, Rossi-Landi also took a stand against separatism among the sciences which too he contributed to overcoming:

> The homological method breaks specializations: it obliges one to keep account of different things simultaneously, it disrupts the independent play of separate sub-totalities, and calls for a vaster totality, whose laws are not those of its parts. In other words, the homological method is an antiseparatistic and reconstructive method, as such unwelcome by the specialists (Rossi-Landi 1967-72, 16-17, now in Rossi-Landi 1985: 53, translation my own).

The homological relation identified between material and linguistic production is confirmed by global communication today and the world economic system it is based on. Communication is not limited to the exchange phase, but invests the production and consumption phases as well. We produce and consume communication: not only are commodities messages, but messages are commodities. In a seminar which took place at the University of Bari just a month before his death, Rossi-Landi explains how in the homological scheme of things linguistic work and material work had at last come together in the last few decades, merging into each other. Computer hardware, the material body, combines with software, the program giving rise to a system of logically expressible linguistic relations: "the nonlinguistic, the objectual, and linguistic at high levels of elaboration have merged into each other almost under our very eyes (Rossi-Landi 1985: 171). What Rossi-Landi denominated "linguistic work" is now identified as an "immaterial resource", "immaterial capital", "immaterial investment", and presents itself as a central factor in development, competition and occupation in today's knowledge society. The fusion between work and material artifacts, on the one hand, and work and linguistic artifacts, on the other, as described by Rossi-Landi has materialized before our very eyes in the union between computer hardware and software, which prioritizes "linguistic work".

As Rossi-Landi clearly states in his writings (e.g., in his introduction to the 2016 Italian edition of *Linguistics and Economics*), though it would seem that economics and linguistics are two separate disciplines, in reality the relation between them is complex and subtle and calls for an explanation. Neither economics nor linguistics are accepted by Rossi-Landi *tout court*, as they are presented in specialized texts. His focus is on the objects of

these two disciplines: namely, human language as the main object of the linguistic sciences, and economic exchange as the main object of the economic sciences, which he is interested to investigate insofar as they may be analysed in unitary terms. Rossi-Landi examines the two social processes in question from a semiotical perspective. He identifies them provisionally in terms of the production and circulation of goods (in the form of commodities) and the production and circulation of utterances (in the form of verbal messages), the two fundamental modalities of human social development. Though they are usually the object of attention of separate disciplines, Rossi-Landi advances the hypothesis that they are the same thing, at least in the same sense in which the two branches of a tree can be recognized as "the same thing". In other words, Rossi-Landi formulates the belief that when goods circulate in the form of commodities they are messages, and when utterances circulate in the form of verbal messages they are commodities.

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