

WARSAW LESSONS, 8-13 SEPTEMBER 2017

Susan Petrilli and Augusto Ponzio

General theme: **Foundations of Semiotics and Philosophy of Language.**

Articulated into the following sub themes:

1. *Philosophy of language as the art of listening*
2. *Semiotics as semioethics*
3. *Prolegomena for linguistics as part of the science of signs, semiotics*

Introduction to the general themes of the course and its three subthemes

1. *Philosophy of language as the art of listening*

The fundamental problem of philosophy of language which is connected inseparably to semiotics, understood as the “general doctrine of signs” (John Locke), is the problem of the other, and the problem of the other is the problem of the word, of the word as voice, recognized as a request for listening. *Philosophy of language, therefore, as the art of listening.* Listening is not external to the word, an addition, a supplement, a concession, an initiative taken by the person who receives that word, a choice, an act of respect towards it. Instead, listening is a *constitutive element of the word*, it derives from the nature of the word, which always calls for listening. In fact, the word wants to be listened to, it wants to be understood, it wants to receive a response and it wants to respond in turn to the response. The word is always in dialogue, it is always a dialogical relation.

2. *Semiotics as semioethics*

Philosophy of language also keeps account of semiotics understood as a human species-specific capacity, as *metasemiosis* and, as such, connected to responsibility: the human being, the only semiotic animal to exist, is the only animal capable of answering for signs and for its sign behaviour. Consequently, the semiotic animal, the human animal is subject *to* and *of* responsibility. Under this aspect, the critical instance of the philosophy of language towards the science of signs – which in its current configuration as “global semiotics” (Thomas A. Sebeok) posits that semiosis and life converge and consequently concerns all of life over the planet – consists concretely in not limiting its attention to the cognitive aspect of semiosis, but of focusing on the pragmatic dimension as well, on the well-being of semiosis, therefore of life, on caring for life, for the health of semiosis (which is something altogether different from having somebody or being oneself in therapy, from the violence of therapy exercised upon somebody who is to be “cured”).

From this point of view semiotics recovers its relationship with ancient *medical semeiotics*, which not only concerns historical knowledge of its own origins, but also its orientation, its approach, towards today’s historical reality, where globalization renders the destiny of each one of us inseparable from that of all of life over the planet. We have called this orientation, this special bend in the study of signs, “semioethics”.

In this case too it is a question of listening, but, differently from that which concerns its specifically theoretical aspect, non in the musical sense, but in the sense of *medical semeiotics*, precisely. The point is to listen to the symptoms of today’s globalized world and identify the various aspects of *malaise* (in social relations, international relations, in the life of single

individuals, in the spread and recourse to different aggressive and pervasive forms of technoscience functional to profit with negative consequences for the entire ecosystem, in life generally over the entire planet).

All this for the future of globalization and in contrast to globalization headed towards its own destruction. Our future is the “future anterior of semiotics”. We decide today for the future of semiotics, not only as a *science*, but also as a *human species-specific capacity to use signs to reflect on signs and decide as a consequence*. The problem is not only of a theoretical order, for this is an issue that semiotics also understood as *semeiotics*, as symptomatology.

It is today – never has a present been so charged, like ours, with responsibility towards the future, and so capable of putting the possibility itself of a future at risk – that we decide on the life of signs and on the signs of life, on the continuity of semiosis on the planet Earth. The human being, as a semiotic animal, is the only animal responsible for semiosis, for life. And the person involved in the study of signs by profession is even more responsible than any other. Paraphrasing Terence: “I deal with signs, and nothing in the life of signs is indifferent to me”.

3. *Prolegomena for linguistics as part of the science of signs, semiotics*

In Ferdinand de Saussure the theory of linguistic value presents analogies, which are certainly not incidental, with the theory of economic value as formulated by the marginalistic school of Lausanne (Leon Walras and Vilfredo Pareto). Indeed, given his incapacity to get free of a fetishistic vision of economic value, Saussure believes that a formal theory of value, such as that perspected by “pure economics” of the school of Lausanne” can find its full application above all in the case of language (*langue*) which in fact he describes as “a system of pure values, determined by nothing else but the momentary state of its terms”. Recourse to the model of value as formulated by “pure economics” of the School of Lausanne 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, medium”. The social relation that constitutes the *langue* consists, in Saussure (1857-1913), in the *langue* being 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 – the latter with his pseudo-biological theory of “innate universal grammar” which does not succeed in explaining “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) takes a position against 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 fetishism does not deal with the problem of linguistic social production.

Instead, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985), beginning from his book of 1968 (*Il linguaggio come lavoro e come mercato*) through to his book of 1985 (*Metodica filosofica e scienza dei segni*) considers this as a problem that must by all means be dealt with. 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 basis, its foundation. Etymologically, “method” means *meta-hodòs*, “beyond the pathway” and all sciences as a development of human meta-semiosis move in this sense, in this direction. This means to get

free of the limits of “semiology” within which Ferdinand De Saussure circumscribed linguistics, and to enter the perspective of “global semiotics” with its inevitable “semioethic turn”.

Lesson I

Friday 8 September 2017

Lesson by Susan Petrilli

Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”

For Semiotic Society of Poland, University of Warsaw

From Semiotics to Semioethics. On Signs, Values and the Semiotic Animal

Abstract

Human beings are invested biosemiosically and phylogenetically with a unique capacity for responsibility towards life, for care of life in its joyous and dialogical multiplicity, for listening and accountability, which ensues from the global condition of intercorporeity, dialogical interrelatedness, creative awareness of the other. The capacity for making decisions, taking a stand, intervening upon the course of semiosis over the entire planet implies nothing less. In this sense the “semiotic animal” that is the human being, thus denominated to the extent that we are endowed with a capacity for semiotics understood as metasemiosis, is also a “semioethic animal”. The semiotic (i.e. metasemiotic) capacity implies a third human species-specific modality of being-in-the-world beyond the *biosemiotic* and the *semiotic*, which is the *semioethic*. Viewed together these different perspectives on sign activity in the global communication network afford a fuller understanding of the extent to which human beings are responsible for the health of semiosis generally in all its forms, for the *quality of life*, human and nonhuman, over the planet.

From semiotics to semioethics in a global semiotic framework describes a research itinerary that develops the conjunction between signs and values in the human world. Though a constant focus in sign studies across the twentieth century with such figure as Victoria Welby, Charles Morris, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi and on the background others still like Mikhail Bakhtin and Charles Peirce, it has not been a mainstream interest. But today, in a globalized world, the focus on signs and values is ever more urgent. Semioethics is not intended as a discipline in its own right, but as an orientation in the study of signs.

The expression “semioethics” indicates a propensity in semiotics to recover its ancient vocation as “semeiotics” (or symptomatology) with its interest in symptoms. A major issue for semioethics is “care for life” in global perspective according to which semiosis and life converge, as postulated by Thomas A. Sebeok. A global perspective is ever more necessary in the present day and age in the face of growing interference in planetary communication between the historical-social sphere and biological sphere, the cultural sphere and natural sphere, between the semiosphere and the biosphere.

Lesson II

Friday 8 September 2017

Lesson by Augusto Ponzio

Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”

For Semiotic Society of Poland, University of Warsaw

Meaning as Interpretive Route

Abstract

In this lesson a fundamental role is carried out by the proposal of understanding the meaning of a sign, verbal or nonverbal, as an *interpretive route* inside an intricate *sign network*. This approach places the sign within the context of *dialogic relations*. This is an aspect of our interpretation which is in line with both the Charles S. Peirce's (1839-1914) as well as the Mikhail Bakhtin's (1895-1975) conception of sign.

Beginning from this concept, we deal with fundamental questions concerning the philosophical-semiotic debate on the sign: these include the question of multi-voicedness and ambiguity; the relation between meaning and referent; the inter-semiotic relation among signs by contrast with the conception of sign systems as separate and autonomous codes; finally, the problem of the relation between *signifier* (or *sign vehicle*, or *signans*) and *signified* (or *designatum*, *significatum*, *signification*, *signatum*), with special attention to *the surplus* of the signifier with respect to meaning as it is determined in the *process of interpretation*.

We consider meaning in terms of indeterminacy, aperture and proneness to transformation. In fact it is described as a possible *interpretive route* within an intricate *sign network* which, in turn, though already largely delineated is at once susceptible of continuous amplification and to development according to a great variety of alternative interpretive routes. Such an approach places the sign within the context of *dialogic relations*, which is in line with both the Peircean and Bakhtinians conception of the sign. The dialogic relation regards

1) the relation between the *sign* and its *interpretant* (Peirce), which in *argumentive discourse* is
2) the relation between the premises and the conclusion – this relation is characterized by a greater or lesser degree of *dialogism* as it ranges from *induction* and *deduction* through to *abduction* (Peirce) – ;

3) the relation among the multiple interpretants which find their place upon the *open* trajectory of an interpretive route and which are verbal as well as nonverbal; and

4) the relation among *interpretants* of different *interpretive routes*.

Principal thesis:

a) Meaning only subsists in an interpretive route; Meaning subsists in its relation with sign and extrasign materiality;

b) Meaning is irreducible to one type or system of signs;

c) Like meaning, the referent only subsists in an interpretive route;

d) We have two types of meaning as “interpretant”: meaning as “interpretant of identification” and meaning as “interpretant of answering comprehension” (or “responsive understanding”);

e) Utterance meaning can be differentiated as “enuntiatum” and “sentence”. Utterance meaning subsists in a play of verbal and nonverbal interpretants, whereby it is elicited as an interpretant and in turn elicits interpretants;

f) The concept of “text” recalls the image of a network used from the very beginning to explain what we mean by “interpretive route”;

g) A text is a portion in the network;

h) A text does not necessarily find its interpretants and interpreteds exclusively in the immediate vicinities. Instead, it may receive meaning from a distant part of the sign network with which, therefore, there is no relation of the indexical type, or at least, not in any immediately visible manner. In such cases we will speak of *intertextuality*. Speaking and writing – specially when a question of the writer, the author of a literary text – are aware of their sources, but not of their *intertextuality*!

Lesson III

Tuesday 12 September 2017

Lesson by Susan Petrilli

Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”

Lesson held at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw 2017
12 September 2017

Language and Listening

Abstract

Listening to the other is the presupposition, the condition of possibility for the constitution of subjectivity and communication. It is in listening to the other, to the word of the other that subjectivity flourishes and develops. One's body is in the sign, in the word, in language, in the relation to the other.

According to Peircean pragmatism, knowledge understood in terms of innovation and inventiveness is not a purely epistemic process. Knowledge presupposes the ethical dimension of knowledge and human relations, responsiveness to the other, both the other from self and the other of self, which the self should welcome and listen to: for there to be an interpreted sign, the object of interpretation, there must be an interpretant, even when a question of cognitive signs in a strict sense.

Insofar as it is a sign the sign is other; in other words, a sign may be characterized as a sign because of its structural opening to the other and, therefore, because it is dialogue with the other. This implies that the sign's identity is grounded in the logic of alterity, otherness.

Consequently, such phenomena as learning, knowledge, wisdom, understanding, and sagacity in their various forms emerge in a sign situation that, in the last analysis, is perfused with otherness, is opening to the other, listening to the other; in other words, these phenomena proceed from otherness, opening and listening. Cognitive identity is subject to the other and as such is continually put into crisis by the restlessness of signs as inexorably provoked by the attraction, the appeal exerted upon that subject by the other. Insofar as it is part of the semiotic network, by virtue of which alone does it earn its status as sign, the cognitive sign is situated and modeled in a context that is irreducibly of the ethical order as well.

Lesson IV

Tuesday 12 September 2017

Lesson by Augusto Ponzio

Università degli Studi di Bari "Aldo Moro"

Lesson held at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw 2017

12 September 2017

Dialogic gradation in the logic of interpretation: deduction, induction, abduction

Abstract

In this lesson we start from the catalogue of elements postulated for semiosis listed by Martin Krampen (1928-2015) in the article entitled "Model of semiosis" (in *Semiotik/Semiotics*, vol. 1, eds. Roland Posner, Klaus Robering, Thomas A. Sebeok, pp. 247-287, Berlin/New York: Walter de Gruyter). Krampen maintains that dialogue commences with signaling behavior from a sender intending to communicate something about an object. What is not taken into account by Krampen is that the "if...then" inference, hypothesis formation, and a "chain of thought" are dialogic forms in themselves. In inference, in the hypothetical argument, and in the chain of interpreted and interpretant thought signs generally, dialogue is implied in the relation itself between the interpreted and the interpretant.

The degree of dialogism is minimal in deduction where the relation between the premises and the conclusion is *indexical*: here, once the premises are accepted the conclusion is obligatory.

In induction, it too is characterized by a unilinear inferential procedure, the conclusion is

determined by habit and is of the *symbolic* order: identity and repetition dominate, though the relation between the premises and the conclusion is no longer obligatory.

By contrast, in abduction the relation between the premises and the conclusion is *iconic* and dialogic in a substantial sense, in other words, it is characterized by high degrees of dialogism and inventiveness as well as by a high risk margin for error.

To claim that abductive argumentative procedures are risky is to say that they are mostly tentative and hypothetical with only a minimal margin for convention (*symbolicity*) and mechanical necessity (*indexicality*). Therefore, abductive inferential processes engender sign processes at the highest levels of otherness and dialogism.

Dialogue does not commence with signaling behavior from a sender intending to communicate something about an object. The whole semiotic process is dialogic. “Dialogic” may be understood as dia-logic. The logic of semiosis as a whole and consequently of Krampen’s semiotic matrix is dia-logic. The interpretant as such is ‘a disposition to respond’, an expression used by Krampen (1997: 259) to describe the dialogic interaction between a sender and receiver.

Lesson V

Wednesday 13 September 2017

Susan Petrilli

Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”

Lesson held at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw 2017

13 September 2017

On the Problem of the Meaning of Meaning and Its Interpretations

Abstract

When Ogden and Richards in 1923 published their 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.

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. 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 to interpret the former’s meaning. This second thing is an interpretant, in turn normally (but not always) a sign, and therefore connected to another interpretant in an open chain of interpretants. To put this in a terminology today associated with Charles S. Peirce (1839–1914), though never actually used by him, it seems, we confront here the movement of “unlimited” or “infinite” semiosis.

We stated that the sign is inseparable from semiosis, in other words it is inseparable from the relation, process, or situation in which it relates triadically to other signs. Of course, there are different conceptions of the sign. A sign is a factor in a process conceived either dyadically (signifier/signified), following Ferdinand de Saussure (1857–1913), or triadically (representamen/object/interpretant) following Charles Sanders Peirce, who (in this crucial particular) restores the triadic character of semiosis, “the mode of being of a sign” as he also put it (1904: CP 8.332).

Among the interpreters of the meaning of meaning show-cased in this lesson, in addition to Peirce and Ogden, Victoria Welby, inventor of signifiens, Mikhail Bakhtin, Adam Schaff, Ferruccio Rossi-Landi, Augusto Ponzio

Lesson VI
Wednesday 13 September 2017

Augusto Ponzio
Università degli Studi di Bari “Aldo Moro”
Lesson held at the Institute of Philosophy, University of Warsaw 2017
13 September 2017

The Dialogic Nature of Signs

Abstract

Dialogism is not a prerogative of discourse. Not only verbal signs, but any situation or *semiosis* is a relational process which presents different degrees of dialogism. The relationship between *sign* and *interpretant* is dialogic and is so at varying degrees. The sign is a factor in a process that can either be dyadic (*signifiant/signifié*; signifier/signified) according to Saussure and his followers; or triadic (*sign* or *representamen/object/interpretant*) according to Peirce. From the perspective of Peircean semiotics, by contrast to Saussure’s *semiology*, anything may become a sign if it is interpreted by an interpretant as something which stands for another something under some respect, its object, by which that sign is mediately determined given that it is capable of determining an interpretant. “A Sign, or *Representamen*, is a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its Object, as to be capable of determining a Third, called Interpretant, to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object” (Peirce, *CP* 2.274).

Therefore, a sign stands for something, its object, by which it is “mediately determined” (Peirce, *CP* 8.343), “not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea” (Peirce, *CP* 2.228).

However, a sign can only do this if it determines the interpretant that is “mediately determined by that object” (Peirce, *CP* 8.343). “A sign mediates between the *interpretant* sign and its object” insofar as the first is determined by its object under a certain respect or idea, or ground, and determines the interpretant “in such a way as to bring the interpretant into a relation to the object, corresponding to its own relation to the object” (Peirce, *CP* 8.332).

The interpretant of a sign is another sign, which the previous sign creates in the interpreter. The interpretant sign is “an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign” (Peirce, *CP* 2.228). Therefore, the interpretant sign *cannot be identical* to the interpreted sign, it cannot be a repetition, exactly because it is *mediated*, interpretive and as such it is always new.

As to the previous sign, the interpretant is a *response* and as such it inaugurates a new sign process, a new *semiosis*. In this sense it is a more *developed sign*. By being a sign the interpretant determines *another* sign that acts, in turn, as an interpretant: therefore, the interpretant opens to a new *semiosis*, it develops the sign process, it is a new sign occurrence.