

PART SEVEN



# First Essays



*I* want to make the following two essays available to readers because in these I developed the ideas that everything else I have written and done has been based on. Soon after their publication, in 1983, I went back to the US from Italy and began to try to ‘communicate materially’, that is to do gift giving with what I had, which was money. This was necessary because no one in that environment knew what I was talking about regarding gift giving nor did they show any interest in finding out. There were however great needs for social change and I reasoned that funding projects that addressed those needs was the way I should practice gift giving in this historical moment. After doing the funding for several years as an individual, in 1987 I also started a feminist private operating foundation, the Foundation for a Compassionate Society. This was an innovative multicultural group of some 25 women doing feminist projects for social change. In about 1988 I started trying to write about the gift economy again, presenting a few short articles at conferences and in feminist magazines. During those years I worked on my book, *For-Giving a Feminist Criticism of Exchange*, which was published in 1997. In 1998 I closed the foundation, having spent most of the money I inherited. Only two or three of the projects still continue today and I have had to reduce my funding greatly. Now my gift giving is mainly concentrated on promoting the gift paradigm as an important step in achieving social change, that is, primarily on writing and speaking about it.

I wrote the following essays in the 1970’s and they are the basis of the rest of the thinking found in this book. I wrote them before I became a feminist and they had references to ‘mankind’ in them and used the inclusive masculine pronoun, which I have now expurgated, but which may appear somewhat awkward. I beg the reader’s pardon for this doctoring.

## Communication and exchange

*Semiotica* 1980

### I

The recent current of thought, which compares communicative exchange and economic exchange, and finds the structures of the latter reflected in the former, has shown itself to be a fertile one in the works of anthropologists, psychologists, and philosophers. Lévi Strauss, Lacan, Godelier, Rossi-Landi, Goux, and others have contributed to this current, for the most part deriving their interpretations of economic exchange from Marx, and their interpretations of communicative exchange from contemporary linguistics. From a Marxist point of view, a basic problem arises in the identification of the structures of economic exchange in communicative exchange. If, as Marx and Engels wrote in the *German Ideology*, “Language is as old as consciousness” (p. 42), and if the structure of exchange is to be found in language, then the structure of exchange is also “as old as consciousness.” Marx warned repeatedly against regarding the categories of commodity production and exchange, and their all pervading principle, “the value form of the labour product as the one and only form of social production, fixed for all time by nature’s immutable laws” (*Capital*, p. 55). Viewing such categories as inherent in human nature aids the status quo by making them seem inevitable. If we want to maintain a characterization of language or communication as similar to economic communication, or even say that they are in some ways ‘the same thing’, while at the same time denying that exchange is a behavior constitutive of the human in the same sense that language is, we may approach the problem by trying to individuate some economic relations which are not those of exchange.

It would seem that to determine linguistic structures in the light of commodity production and exchange, or capitalistic production, would be historically unwarranted, since language existed from the beginning, and the present mode of production is a very late development. Some striking similarities between the two have, however, been found. Linguistic value has been compared to economic

value (Saussure); kinship systems, linguistic communication, and economic exchange have been compared (Lévi-Strauss); language has been found to have the aspects of work, capital, and money (Rossi-Landi). If these similarities are not merely imagined, they are perhaps an indication of some basic area of correspondence between the linguistic and the economic activity of men. In order to find this area without resorting to exchange, we will look at the premises of history and development of language, as described in the chapter on Feuerbach of the *German Ideology*, and at an abstraction of the “content of exchange, which lies altogether outside its economic character” as described in the *Grundrisse* (pp. 242-43). The fact that both passages are abstractions—describing, in the first case “aspects of social activity . . . which have existed simultaneously since the dawn of history and the first men, and which still assert themselves in history today” (p. 41), and in the second “the simplest economic relations, which, conceived by themselves, are pure abstractions” (*Grundrisse* p. 248) and the ideal of the bourgeoisie — does not prevent us from looking at them to find a common character as regards communication. In the first place, language, if it can be regarded as some sort of ‘economic system’, is still, in many respects, an abstract and an ideal one. Secondly, due to the division of labor between head and hand, it would not be surprising if the laborers of the head saw economic relations in the reflected light of their main instrument, language.

The reason for discussing these two passages together is that they each give an indication of human relations logically preceding the relation of contract. If it is true, as some of those who resist the interpretation of language in economic terms have maintained, that there is no private property in language, we must avoid taking contract as a starting point, since it implies private property. (1)

In the *German Ideology* Marx and Engels make a wide use of the term *Verkehr* ‘intercourse, traffic, association, commerce’, in both a material and a “spiritual” sense. It is a category which, while it may include exchange, is wider than exchange. It seems to encompass combined activity as collaboration and very generally the reciprocal satisfaction of needs. The human “mode of life” in which people “produce their means of subsistence,” their mode of production, “only

makes its appearance with the increase of population. In its turn this presupposes the intercourse of individuals with one another. The form of the intercourse is again determined by production” (p. 32) (2)

Four basic moments or conditions for history are described by Marx and Engels: the production of the means of life; the “production of new needs”; the reproduction of life and its corresponding social relation, the family; and finally, the appearance of a natural and social relationship, the “materialistic connection of men with one another, which is determined by their needs and their mode of production” (pp. 3941). At this point we come to the famous passage on consciousness and language.

From the start the “spirit” is afflicted with the curse of being “burdened” with matter, which here makes its appearance in the form of agitated layers of air, sounds, in short, of language. Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men and for that reason alone it really exists for me personally as well: language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse with other men. Where there exists a relationship, it exists for me: the animal does not enter into “relations” with anything, it does not enter into any relation at all. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is, therefore, from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all. (pp. 41-42)

In *Grundrisse*, abstracting from the act of exchange, in order to explain it as it were, piece by piece, in the ideal fashion in which it is viewed by bourgeois economists or by socialists like Proudhon, Marx provides an account of the extra-economic content of exchange:

The content of the exchange, which lies altogether outside its economic character, far from endangering the social equality of individuals rather makes their natural difference into the basis of their social equality.... Regarded from the standpoint of the natural difference between them, individual A exists as the owner of a use value for B, and B as owner of a use value for A. In this respect,

their natural difference again puts them reciprocally into the relation of equality. In this respect, however, they are not indifferent to one another; so that individual B, as objectified in the commodity, is a need of individual A, and vice versa; so that they stand not only in an equal, but also in a social relation to one another. This is not all. The fact that the need on the part of one can be satisfied by the product of the other, and vice versa, and that the one is capable of producing the object of the need of the other, and that each confronts the other as owner of the object of the other's need, this proves that each of them reaches beyond his own particular need etc., as a human being, and that they relate to one another as human beings; that their common species-being is acknowledged by all. It does not happen elsewhere that elephants produce for tigers, or animals for other animals." (pp, 242-43)

In both cases we have a comparison of men (sic.) with animals on the basis of relations which men have but which animals do not have. In the first passage, language "arises from the need, the necessity of intercourse with other men." In satisfying such a need, it produces or mediates relations. (And there is a deleted phrase in the text: "My relation to my surroundings is my consciousness" (*German Ideology* p. 42) which, though it did not satisfy its authors, at least shows the direction in which their thought was proceeding.) In the passage from the *Grundrisse* a social relation is instituted between the two men by their providing the object of the other's need, by the fact that each "reaches beyond his own particular need." Their relation to each other as human beings is this satisfaction of the other's need.

We may now ask if this relation always requires reciprocity. There is a significant echo in this passage of a description by Marx in the *Manuscripts* of what would happen if men "produced really as men."

But let us suppose instead that we have produced really as men: each of us, in his production, would have doubly affirmed himself and the other. I would have: 1) objectified in my production my individuality with its particularities and thus I would have enjoyed as much of an individual expression of life during the activity as, in looking at the object, [I would have enjoyed] of the individual joy of

knowing my personality to be an objectual, socially evident power, above any eminent doubt; 2) in your enjoyment or in your use of my product I would have immediately enjoyed both the consciousness of having satisfied in my work a human need, and of having objectified the human being, for having procured its object corresponding to the need of another human being; 3) I would have enjoyed having been for you the intermediary between you and the species, of being therefore known and felt by you yourself as completion of your own being and as a necessary part of yourself, and therefore of knowing myself confirmed both in your thought and in your love; 4) I would have enjoyed having produced immediately in the manifestation of my individual life the manifestation of your life, and therefore in my individual activity I would have immediately realized and sanctioned my real being, my human being, my collective being. (“Excerpts from James Mill,” p. 26)

Here, as in the *Grundrisse*, we find that it is the production for the satisfaction of another’s need that confirms the “species being” of the individuals involved. One important difference between the two passages is that in the one, the production for another’s need can stand alone (“each of us, in his production, would have doubly affirmed himself and the other”), while it is necessarily reciprocal in the other. This would thus allow us to consider the satisfaction of one’s need by the production of another as the more fundamental human relation, and exchange, or satisfaction of the need contingent upon reciprocity, as a complication, a doubling, of this relation.

Taken by itself, the satisfaction of the need of another may seem simple and, so to say, uninformative. However, if we locate it in a social context, (3) in which new needs have been produced, we can already see that the satisfaction of anyone’s socially determined need requires both a knowledge of that need in its specificity, and participation in the mode of production corresponding to that need, as well as access to the processes, means, and materials of production. Moreover, the use of the product by the receiver is also determined by h/er appurtenance to the specific mode of production, when h/er need has been specified by previous consumption. The producer, if s/he is to perform a completed act, is dependent on the capacity of



the other to use the product, which has been given to h/er. (4) We can thus see that the production by one person, for the satisfaction of another's socially determined need, would not only confirm h/er as a species being in contrast to the animals who do not "produce ... for other animals," but would also confirm h/er as a species being belonging to a particular mode of production.

It is particularly interesting that one person's satisfaction of another's socially determined need would have these results independently of a consequent reciprocity. If the need is determined and specific, there would be no way of satisfying it except at the level of development of means and processes of production in which the individual consumer and producer participate. In order for the relation to be established as a human relation, it would not be necessary that the individual receiver 'pay back' the individual who has produced for h/er. On the other hand, however, it is necessary that both belong to the same mode of production. For the education and specification of their needs some others belonging to that mode of production must have produced for them in the past. And, since one learns to produce by producing, and one's first product may not be a complete one, the producer must have already produced the object in the past, either for h/erself or for others. The human infant, due to h/er helpless condition, is incapable either of independence or of production for others. S/he is dependent on the satisfaction of h/er needs by others, and these needs become specified to the objects or products by which they are satisfied. At the beginning s/he is incapable of reciprocity, and so is necessarily the receiver in a one-sided relation of the satisfaction of h/er needs by others. H/er life depends on the capacity of others to produce for h/er without reciprocity on h/er part. Later, as s/he gains independence, s/he learns to consume actively, to produce for h/erself and for others, within the mode of production in which h/er needs have become specific. If h/er relation to others remained similar to the one-sided relation by which h/er early needs were satisfied, at least in some zones of h/er later life, it would not require a necessary reciprocity either. This is not to deny that reciprocity occurs often in all zones of life and is the overriding norm in some. Isolated as a basic social relation, however, the satisfaction of another's

need does not have as its prerequisite an immediate or consequent reciprocity between the individuals involved in the relation at the moment. (5)

In addition to these considerations, we must add that the relation between persons established in this way is not 'pure', not only between them. It is also a relation to the object by which the need is satisfied. This is the same material object for both persons, although for the one it has the character of being a product, which s/he does not use, and for the other the object of h/er need, which s/he has not produced. The producer sees it also as an object of a specific need, though not at the moment of h/er own need. The receiver sees it as being produced by, or at least as coming from, the other, and thus as related to the other as its provenience. For both, the object is a specifically social object, due to their previous acquaintance with similar objects and to their immediate social behavior with regard to it at the moment. Such a relation can be seen as one of mutual inclusion with regard to and by means of the object.

While, as we said above, reciprocity is not necessary in this relation between persons, there is a sense in which it carries with it its own reciprocal. For the relation of the producer to the receiver is at the same time a relation of the receiver to the producer. In so far as h/er need is satisfied by the other, the receiver is dependent on the producer for that satisfaction, and this can be said to be a personal relation when s/he recognizes the other as the source of the production. This s/he can do especially when s/he can h/erself produce for others, since the relation is the same as h/er own to others at other times. When both individuals have the two aspects of producer and consumer, we can see that this internal opposition becomes externalized by one's satisfaction of another's socially determined need. For the producer, the other takes the place of h/erself as consumer of h/er product; for the consumer the other takes the place of h/erself as producer of the product. (If the consumer cannot recognize the source of the satisfaction of h/er need, the relation to the other becomes similar to h/er relation of dependence on others in general for the satisfaction of h/er needs.)

## II

Let us now return to language as discussed in the German Ideology, considering it as an instrument for the satisfaction of needs. "Language, like consciousness, only arises from the need, the necessity, of intercourse (*Verkehr*) with other men." In the first place we may say that whatever is socially or objectively a necessity appears on an individual level as a need when the necessity touches the individual in some way. (6)

Interchange (*Verkehr*) with others is a general necessity for all, but it is not a specific need for all with regard to everything at the same time. Rather, because individual needs can be satisfied and therefore 'disappear' as immediate needs for a time; because needs are different at different times in a person's life due to h/er physical make-up and growth; because needs vary with changes in the environment; and with regard to social position and division of labor, one does not need interchange with other people all the time, and the kinds of interchange one does need vary with the needs and the objects. If one's individual needs have been satisfied in the past by means of interchange, and thus have begun to require it and its products, we may say that any individual need may arise also as a need for interchange with other people, and that this has a specific character with regard to the kind of need which is satisfied by it. (This occurs when interchange with other people is seen as a means to the satisfaction of individual needs.) However, it is not necessarily limited as a means to the satisfaction of one's own individual need, but involves also the needs of individuals other than oneself, for otherwise there would be no interchange at all. Also, if an objective or social necessity for interchange can be recognized as a need individually, we can say that if something occurs which affects the community, or which objectively requires interchange-as, for example, when moving something heavy requires collaboration, and thus interaction is the means for obtaining some result-this can be seen as a need for interchange which is not in a sense anyone's individual need, but is rather a requisite of the task being performed. We can call such a need an 'objective' need (the social necessity is this kind of objective need generally).

If language arises from the individual need (whether our own or that of others, whether material or instrumental) and the social or objective necessity for interchange with other people, it can be seen as a means to facilitating this interchange.

The question is: how does this means work? how is interchange facilitated? If interchange with other people is taken as a means to the satisfaction of the group of needs existing in a society, then language can be taken as a means to a means, an instrumental need.

We said above that the satisfaction of another's socially determined need institutes a relation between the producer and the receiver. There seems to be no reason why the same should not hold for the satisfaction of an instrumental need as it does for direct material need. The production of an instrument by one for another, who then uses it, would establish the same sort of relation as production for direct consumption by the other. If one gives another an axe with which to cut down trees with which to make a house, the need for the axe is even more fully socially determined than the need for something which is consumed directly. If the satisfaction of another's socially determined need by the production of a socially determined product establishes a human species relation between people with regard to and by means of something, it can be used also for that purpose. That is, one can satisfy another's need, not only in view of that need, but also in order to form a species relation with h/er, a common relation with h/er to the object of h/er need. (7) This takes place on a material level. In language, the material objects, which are produced by the speaker, are sounds, "agitated layers of air." The needs which they satisfy are on the one hand needs for interchange with other people and, on the other, needs for relations which will facilitate this interchange and thus for the means for establishing the relations. Certainly the needs which language satisfies are in a sense ideal needs, so that the relations established in their satisfaction would not have the all-round importance that material production 'as men' to satisfy material needs had in Marx's description of it. Narrowed down to its abstract and ideal character, however, the linguistic satisfaction of another's socially determined need for a means to facilitating interchange

would still have the capacity of establishing a species relation between persons, if only an ideal one.

While it is possible to establish human relations when satisfying another's socially determined material need (following this line of reasoning), it must also be said that there are many kinds of human interaction which preclude the immediate consumption of the object by another. Language allows us to establish a human relation to each other in regard to the object by satisfying a specific communicative need, which arises from the object as an object of potential human interchange. While the object may be something in regard to which human relations may later be established directly—for instance, cooked food, which is prepared for another to satisfy h/er socially determined need for it—it may also be something in regard to which no direct consumption can take place: a heavy rock which must be moved by the collaboration of many (the satisfaction of an 'objective need'), or something which no direct human activity can alter, for example, the sun (with regard to which, however, a great deal of ritual interaction takes place among so called "primitive" peoples). Language supplies a verbal object which satisfies a socially determined need for a means to interchange, thus instituting human relations in regard to the verbal object. In a sense, the verbal object substitutes the nonverbal object as something with regard to which human relations are established, something, that is, produced by the one and used by the other. However, the need, which arises with regard to the material object is not usually direct need for the consumption of the object, but a need for interchange with other people in which the object is to be an element. If species relations with other people, formed by language, facilitate the interchange with regard to the material object, then the verbal object is no longer simply a substitute, but is itself a means. That is: if it is seen as contributing to the interchange, and the interchange is seen as contributing to the modification of the object, the verbal object and the relations established by its production and use have had an instrumental value, or use value, with regard to the final product or result. As Marx says, with regard to the bee and the architect, that the latter constructs his palaces in his head before he constructs

them materially (*Capital*, p. 170), we can say the same regarding many of the various kinds of human interchange or praxis, as human products. They are relations between people, and between people and the environment, which are constructed ideally as human relations by means of language before they are put into effect. The fact that linguistic mediation of human relations has entered into all the details of the social world, and into most of the kinds of human interchange, has allowed also the formation of new kinds of interchange which are primarily linguistic. While these can continue to be considered as praxis, we will try here to keep to the level of direct material praxis or interchange as mediated by language, in order to maintain the basic distinctions.

### III

*I*n any society there are many kinds of interchange, or interaction, which can take place with regard to almost any kind of object present in the social and physical environment. In this regard the kind of object would appear as a constant, while the kinds of interaction or interchange (also depending on what other kinds of objects were involved in the interchange) would appear as variables. The need for interchange with other people as a way of dealing with the object becomes a need which is specific with regard to the object. A means to instituting relations and facilitating this interchange thus arises to satisfy a need, which is specific with regard to the object. Such a need would arise socially insofar as the object in question is dealt with repeatedly by different persons in many different socially determined ways (when these require interchange with regard to the object). It also would arise individually whenever one's own dealings with the object require interchange with others. Socially a linguistic means has been devised (by others, from the individual's point of view) for the satisfaction of this general and repeated social need. It is available to the individual for the satisfaction of the individual socially determined need.

At this point we would like to introduce 'communicative need' as a terminological simplification and alternative. Communicative

need arises from the need for interchange with other people with regard to some part of the environment, both on a social and an individual level, and it is at the same time the need for a means to this interchange. It thus has two constant aspects: the first that it is always a need regarding other people, and interchange with them; the second that it is, as a specific, socially determined communicative need, a need which regards a specific object or kind of object. Between these two constant poles lie the variables of the different kinds of actions and interactions, which may be performed with regard to the object, complicated by all the different kinds of objects which these actions and interactions may include as their elements. In fact, it is the weight, so to speak, of these variables—the number and differentiation of the kinds of behavior which can take place with regard to any given object—which determines the constancy, the repetition, of the need for interchange with other people in its regard. More simply, it is the differentiation of the behavior with regard to the object that determines the need for communication in its regard as a constant and repeated social common need, and thus a need for the production of a specific means to its satisfaction with regard to that object, or kind of object. Social differentiation of behavior concerning the object provides a group of variables with regard to which the object becomes a constant. Since interchange with other men is necessary, both for the differentiation of the behavior (development of new types of use, production, interaction) and for the execution of different kinds of combined behavior, the need which regards the object, and at the same time other people, becomes a need which is also constant, a need for the means for establishing relations which will facilitate the interchange. With regard to this need and means, the different kinds of actions and interactions are variables. If we consider language as a kind of behavior we can see that, of all the different kinds of behavior that are possible with regard to any thing, there is always one kind which is possible, linguistic behavior. There is one thing we can do to almost anything, and that is communicate about it, establish relations with other people in its regard. A particular kind of linguistic behavior can thus be seen as constant with regard to the group of

non-linguistic behaviors, which can take place with any non-linguistic thing.

Thus communicative need—as a bi-polar need, arising on the one hand from the necessity of acting and interacting in socially determined ways with regard to an object (or kind of object), and on the other hand from the need for an instrument for facilitating this interaction—would provide one link between the object of the action and the means to the facilitation of the interchange with regard to that specific object. This means we may identify in the word.

When a communicative need arises for us, it arises as a need for a relation with another person in regard to something (which is at the same time the need for some socially determined interchange with h/er). We can see this as a need of the other person for a relation to us and to the thing. We know that, as a member of our linguistic community, h/er communicative needs have been educated to the same linguistic means of satisfying them that our own have been. We are conscious of h/er need for a relation with us before s/he is, since this is first our need for a relation with h/er. We satisfy h/er need by personally supplying h/er with a group of social linguistic products (which in turn have various relations to each other within the sentence) by which h/er communicative needs have become specified in the past, and to which they have become specific. These allow h/er to identify the object or situation, which was the cause of our communicative need, as that with regard to which some kind of interchange is to take place. (This may also be further discourse.) What has happened is that a relation has been established between the speaker and hearer on the basis of the production and use of the linguistic product; a relation of the hearer to the thing, which was the source of the present communicative need of the speaker has been established, which insofar as it is mediated by the same verbal product may be said to be the same relation. The speaker's communicative need has been satisfied, since it was a need for the relation of the other to the thing in question. Thus, h/er own relation to the thing is duplicated by a relation of the other to the thing, a relation, which s/he, the speaker, has helped to form. S/he has made h/er own relation to the thing as a relation, which has an equivalent at the moment in the relation of



another. (For both speaker and listener the relation is already for others in several ways, especially since for the speaker it is a need for the relation of the other to the thing, and for the listener it is already the speaker's relation.)

#### IV

*T*he reader may at the moment be perplexed by our insistence on the satisfaction of the need of the other, for despite the fact that we do satisfy the communicative needs of others in giving them information which they do not have, or in teaching language to children, there are many cases in which it seems to be one's own communicative need which s/he is satisfying. There are two possible lines of reply. If language does, in fact, establish a relation between people with regard to something, such a relation, by definition, necessarily involves more than one person. One cannot have such a relation unless the other also has it. Thus one's own need for the relation to another is necessarily h/er need for the other to have such a relation. S/he must be able to see that the other could establish such a relation, if s/he were given the means to it. Thus the lack of the other's relation to the object at the moment is seen as the other's lack of a means to establishing the relation, an instrumental need, as we said above. We can express this also by saying that the speaker sees that the object has some socially determined relevance or importance to the listener, which the speaker recognizes in view of some further interchange with h/er, but the listener at the moment does not. This is possible with regard to any part of the socio-physical environment, including the part which is 'internal' to the speaker, and the listener can be seen by the speaker as having an instrumental (communicative) need in its regard.

Secondly, if linguistic investigation has been to some extent modeled on exchange—because of the similarity of the exchange relation and the communicative relation in that both are concerned with the satisfaction of needs—we must beware of the distortions of our point of view which derive from the fact that we live in a society in which the exchange relation predominates. It is easy for us to

make the mistake of projecting upon language the type of human relations which exchange comports. For exchange, reciprocity is essential, and the producer enters in to it only in order to receive the product of the other. Modeling the communicative relation on this forces us to look too much at the linguistic producer and to say that s/he is only satisfying h/er own need, just as the material producer only produces in order to satisfy h/er own need in exchange. In fact, in exchange the needs that are satisfied are exclusive of each other, as are the products that satisfy them. In linguistic production, on the other hand, there is 'alienation' of the product without its loss, for it is made in order to establish a reciprocal relation. The listener may of course become a speaker in h/er turn, but though this enriches the relation which has been established, by determining it in different ways, it is not a prerequisite for the functioning of the linguistic process, since the reciprocal of the relation already exists in the use by the other of the linguistic product. The listener's reply may in fact be seen as one way of confirming to the speaker that the reciprocal of the relation is in fact in effect. The listener shows that s/he recognizes the other as the source of the satisfaction of h/er communicative need by repeating the process, becoming h/erself a producer. S/he thus satisfies the ex-speaker's need for a relation to the product s/he (the ex-speaker) has just produced, a need to know that the relation has indeed been established. In order to satisfy this need the listener only has to show h/erself as a producer, thus even the hint of a product will be enough, even an inarticulate vocalization may often suffice as a reply. (8)

## V

*T*he constitution of parallel relations through linguistic production for others can now be seen in contrast to the relations of contract, and the exchange relation as described by Marx in the *Grundrisse* (continuing under the rubric of the "simplest economic relations, which, conceived by themselves, are pure abstraction," p. 248):

Each divests himself of his property voluntarily. But this is not all: individual A serves the need of individual B by means of the commodity a only in so far as and because individual B serves the need of individual A by means of the commodity b, and vice versa. Each serves the other in order to serve himself; each makes use of the other, reciprocally, as his means. Now both things are contained in the consciousness of the two individuals: (1) that each arrives at his end only in so far as he serves the other as means; (2) that each becomes means for the other (being for another) [Sein fur andres] only as end in himself (being for self) [Sein fur sich]: (3) that the reciprocity in which each is at the same time means and end, and attain his end only in so far as he becomes a means, and becomes a means only in so far as he posits himself as end, that each thus posits himself as being for another, in so far as he is being for self, and the other as being for him, in so far as he is being for himself—that this reciprocity is a necessary fact, presupposed as a natural precondition of exchange, but that, as such, it is irrelevant to each of the two subjects in exchange, and that this reciprocity interests him only in so far as it satisfies his interest to the exclusion of, without reference to, that of the other. That is, the common interest which appears as the motive of the act as a whole is recognized as a fact by both sides; but, as such, it is not the motive, but rather proceeds, as it were, behind the back of these self-reflected particular interests, behind the back of one individual's interest in opposition to the other. (pp. 243-44)

Taking the satisfaction of the socially determined need of another as the basic action which establishes a human species relation, we can see how, in exchange, the constraint of reciprocity and the satisfaction of the need of the other by the individual only in order to satisfy h/er own need, and thus the treatment of the other only as means, contorts the original relation but does not entirely obliterate it. In fact, the most contradictory thing which the exchangers do, as described in this passage, is to use the action by which they can demonstrate themselves to be species beings, and form a human relation, only as a means to their individual (as opposed to species) being. The neatly aligned chain of relations of

self-interest, which reflect each other in exchange, is longer than the chain of relations which are formed through linguistic communication, for the latter stops with a simple, common relation to the object. However, the common relations which are formed in linguistic communication can vary qualitatively with the communicative needs which are satisfied and the objects (linguistic products) by which they are satisfied. In exchange, “the self seeking interest ... brings nothing of a higher order to realization” (p. 241). The “general interest is precisely the generality of self seeking interests” and there is an “all-sided equality of its subjects.” The individual exchange and reflection of relations takes place on the basis of the quantity of a single quality. The single quality which is found in all commodities, and with regard to which the exchangers form their reciprocal self interested equal relations, is abstract labor. They form their specific relations to each other in regard to the quantity of this quality, which is contained in the products they exchange.

There is an interesting correspondence between a part of this passage from the *Grundrisse* and the one quoted above from the *German Ideology*. Here “each becomes means for the other (being for another) [*Sein für andres*] only as an end in himself (being for self) [*Sein für sich*],” while in the *German Ideology*, “language is practical consciousness that exists also for other men [*für andere Menschen*] and for that reason alone it really exists personally for me as well.” The dialectical movement here seems to begin with others, and only afterwards does it begin to be also for the subject. In the passage from *Grundrisse*, “being for another” is a parenthetical explanation of one’s becoming “means for the other.” However, due to the necessary reciprocity of the exchange, the process starts from the interest of the individual alone, and by using the “being for another” as means, returns to the individual. That is, the contradiction lies in the fact that a process which begins with others (being for others) is used as a means so to say embedded in, a process which begins with and returns to the self of the isolated individual.

With regard to language, there are several ways in which(1) the dialectical process begins with others and then arrives at the individual. First, language is the product of previous generations and is

thus available to the individual in all its determinations. Second, language is something we acquire from others, and our communicative needs are at the beginning satisfied and thus educated by others as similar to their own. Third, Vygotsky (1956, 1960) has shown in his discussion of the interiorization of speech (formation of linguistic thought), that language, which has first been for others, directed to others, becomes a monologue (for oneself) and then internalized (altogether for oneself as a tool to thought). Lastly, our speech satisfies the communicative needs of others and therefore our own as well. Altogether, this can be regarded as a process of socialization in which the individual becomes adequate to a pre-existing group. This group is both linguistically (thus ideally) and materially constituted, and continues to exist on the basis of the satisfaction of the needs of others by its members. The satisfaction of one's needs by others prepares one to satisfy in turn the needs of others at a given level of development of production. This process does not stop with the maturity of the individual; s/he rather continues to form relations with others, and they with him, by satisfying each others' needs, both materially and linguistically. If we can say that the satisfaction of another's need is the confirmation of h/er species being and our own, both in the material and in the linguistic zone—and, we may add, the more complex the system of socially determined needs becomes, the surer this confirmation becomes—we can also see how exchange, which uses the satisfaction of another's need only as a means for the satisfaction of the isolated individual's need, takes a step backwards from the species relation, or relation of socialization. It allows the formation of a "new species," so to speak, (9) of isolated individuals whose main common social relation is the relation of mutual exclusion. Due to the division of labor and the diversification of needs, the members of this 'species' are dependent on each other for the satisfaction of their socially determined needs, but the only way they can mutually include each other (satisfy the other's need) is by at the same time reasserting their mutual exclusion. And this they can do only by exchanging equal items.

Thus, if we compare language to commodity production and exchange as seen from a Marxist point of view' we can see language

as a sort of ideal interchange by which humans continue to socialize themselves, satisfying each other's communicative needs, constituting themselves as species beings in an ideal way. Common human relations to each other in regard to things are made possible by language. On the other hand, in their material interchange humans have not entirely followed the path of language; rather, they use their species relation only in order to constitute and maintain themselves as isolated individuals, building a "new species" on top of the other one, in which the only common relation that exists among its members is that of mutual exclusion in a situation of complete mutual dependence. Our "material intercourse," the "language of real life," is thus reduced to a qualitative minimum and is self-contradictory, while our linguistic interchange serves to maintain us as ideally a species, mediating, among others, also our non-species material relations, so to speak, from without.

Both linguistic material products and non-linguistic material products may be used to form species relations through the satisfaction of the needs of others. The two kinds of production can be distinguished under capitalism by the fact that non-linguistic material products are used to form a particular kind of non- or anti-species relation. On the other hand, they can also be distinguished with regard to the kinds of needs they satisfy. Language satisfies a communicative need, while non-linguistic material production satisfies a material need. In satisfying communicative need, language permits the formation of human relations to something before these relations are formed in the use of the material thing itself. Despite the enormous restrictions of their relations to each other, the new material 'species' continue to reciprocally satisfy a large system of socially determined needs. As possessors of private property, the exchangers are mutually exclusive. The one act, which they perform in common, is exchange. The generalization of this situation and the requirement that the exchange be an equal one (so as not to detract from the substance of either dominant subject of the exchange) makes it necessary that their relations to each other in regard to this act, and thus to the object of the act, be prepared in advance. Thus exchange itself can be seen as containing communicative need.

## VI

*I*n the situation of commodity production and exchange, the communicative need re-presents itself, in a general way, as the need for interchange with other men regarding all the products which are produced by other men, and which satisfy the socially determined material needs of the individual. The individual must establish a relation with others in order to permit this interchange. We must remember that here we are talking about the “new species” of mutually exclusive “independent” individuals, whose communication is material communication. Granted the differences between the “ideal” species, which is mediated by language, and the “real” species of exchangers, we can see that, since in fact they are two developments of the form of life of human beings, the latter satisfies its communicative needs in a way, which is similar to the former.

The reciprocal independence of the individuals is the other side of their complete mutual dependence (*Grundrisse*, pp. 156-58). Each is independent as a producer, who produces something, which s/he does not h/erself use. As with linguistic communication, this product is destined for use by others, and one’s production for others is the means for establishing a relation with others which will allow interchange with them for himself. H/er own product is h/er only communicative instrument. Since, in exchange, the movement of the dialectic begins with the individual, we may say that the communicative need s/he is trying to satisfy is h/er own communicative need (h/er need for a means to exchange with others). It is a material need; but, since s/he is dependent on others for its satisfaction, s/he has to be able to establish a relation with them which will cause them to satisfy it. Thus it is a material need for which an instrument of communication, for establishing the relation is necessary, a material need which is also a communicative need. The individual thus produces for the other in order to establish a relation, which will cause or permit the other to produce for him. Here, as in the linguistic dialectic, the product receives its determination in the kind of use the other makes of it, and thus begins to exist for the individual as well. The other, in exchange, in fact, is under the

constriction of reciprocity, and h/er receipt of the first individual's product is for h/er the necessary alienation of h/er own. Each uses the satisfaction of the other's need as a means to cause the other to alienate h/er own product.

We said above that, if the satisfaction of another's socially determined need establishes species relations between human beings, it can also be used for that purpose. Since the character of communicative need in exchange arises with the generalization of exchange, it is much more clearly seen when this is mediated by money, for here the 'species' of exchangers is more clearly evolved. Here in fact, the commodity is seen as having two aspects, that of use value and that of value. As use value, it satisfies a socially determined need. As value, it is a product of abstract human labor and is expressed in, and replaced by, another commodity, money, the general equivalent. In its character as product of human labor, and in its exchangeability, the commodity is qualitatively similar to all other commodities, though they differ quantitatively. It is our hypothesis that value and exchange value may be seen as those aspects of production for others by which a species relation is established. In other words, they are the aspects of the commodity taken as a material communicative instrument. The mutually exclusive situation of exchange causes the splitting of the use-value and the exchange-value, for when the establishment of the species relation is used only for the maintenance of the isolated individual, what the individual receives from the other is only a different form of h/er original product, only something which satisfies a material need. (When a product has been exchanged, it drops out of circulation and is no longer a commodity but only a use-value.) The producer uses h/er ability to establish species being by means of h/er product, to transform h/er own product into a use-value, and, in fact, that is all s/he gets. The product is a commodity only when it is also exchange-value, and it is exchange-value only when it is "for others," and it is for others when it is in circulation, when it is not for the individual. It is thus in the zone of the use of being for others as a means that we must look for the communicative character of the commodity. What is the process involved?



We saw above that the dialectical process of language starts with others and then arrives at the individual. If commodity exchange has a communicative aspect, we would expect there to be in it a similar dialectical process. Marx discusses the expression of value in the first book of *Capital*: “x commodity A = y commodity B,” and says that “the whole mystery of the form of value lies hidden in this elementary form” (p. 18). The expression of value has a relative and an equivalent pole, which are “polar opposites.” The relative commodity expresses its value in the equivalent commodity through this relation. Both commodities are products of abstract labor; in our terms, both are produced “for others”; however, in the expression of value the equivalent “figures only as a definite quantity of some article” (p. 27) and as such is the expression of the value of the relative commodity.

The equation of value is, so to say, seen from the point of view of the producer, who wants to find out how much h/er product is worth. Thus s/he sees h/er product in relation to that of another, who will potentially exchange it with h/er. At this point, what is the point of view of the other? In what way does the product of the first producer exist for h/er? It exists for h/er only in the form of h/er own product (which s/he may give up in exchange for it). (“... your object is for you only the sensible hull, the hidden form [Gestalt] of my object; for its production means, wants to express the acquisition of my product” (“Excerpts from James Mill”:25).) If we then ask, what is the producer’s product for the other, the answer is, the product of the other. From the producer’s point of view, then, what h/er product is for the other, is what it really is also for h/erself. In other words, the producer’s product receives its determination as a particular kind (and quantity) of communicative instrument, in its present or actual existence for others as their own product, before the exchange takes place.

A commodity, taken by itself, has both use-value and value; however, it does not, on its own, have exchange-value. The latter only exists in its relation to something else. “A commodity is exchange-value only if it is expressed in another, i.e., as a relation” (*Grundrisse*, p. 205). In a situation of private property and mutual exclusion, the

commodity receives its determination first as something in the hands (or pockets) of others, in its relation to what is still their property. It is for its producer also what it is for the others, because on the one hand it cannot become something they do not have (a use-value which they do not produce), and on the other it cannot be exchanged for more than they will give up for it, and s/he will not exchange it for less. Moreover, since the producer is a commodity producer, the commodity does not exist for h/erself as a use-value, and thus it has no determined character for h/er except as a potential exchange-value, which is determined by others, by what is in their hands. It thus becomes really an exchange-value for him as well (it really begins to exist for him) when it expresses its value in something else which is someone else's property.

The exchangers, as a mutually dependent and mutually exclusive 'species', must prove themselves to be members of the 'species' in order to perform their one common act, that of exchange. (The fact that this act unites them behind their backs as producers in common of the same thing, that is, parts of the totality of social production, is important to our argument but must be left till later.) They provide this proof by producing for others. The need of another must really be satisfied (at least the use-value must become another's property) in order for a product to become a commodity, because a product which is not bought falls out of circulation completely, and has no existence, neither as use-value nor as exchange-value, even though its producer originally made it for others.

In a sense, however, the exchangers are not members of the same 'species', since their production for others is really only production for themselves. They are only members of the 'species' transitorily, in the zone of the operation of the means and its process. Each time the individual produces for others, s/he proves that s/he is a member of the 'species' and thus prepares a relation of exchange with them. Each time s/he receives a product in exchange for h/er own, however, s/he proves that h/er production (for others) was really only production for h/erself, and thus shows that s/he is not a member of the species. Though, more precisely, if species H(human) satisfies each others' needs, and a non-human species does not, the species

E(xchangers) must be said to be H and not H, E (H and not H), since though they do it as means, they do it. Once again, if the satisfaction of another's need proves that one is a species being, it can also be used for that purpose. Thus other interaction which is not directly need satisfaction is possible with the object. Here we find that it is used for that purpose as a means in order not to be used for that purpose. One establishes h/erself as a species being in order not to be a species being, but to continue as the "exclusive and dominant (determinant) subject" (*Grundrisse*, p. 244). This can also be expressed by saying that there is no identification of the needs of the individuals involved beyond the need to permit other interaction with regard to the object. When we enter the zone of the working of the means, the needs begin to coincide, since all need a means to the satisfaction of their own needs. They need their own products as this means. They momentarily need the need of others for their products, which is the only thing that will allow them to become means. And this takes the form of a need for the characterization of their products as exchangeable in the eyes of others (and of the products of others as exchangeable). It is on the basis of this shared need for the existence of one's own product (for others) as means, that exchange-value splits off from use-value. When in exchange the product really becomes for another, satisfying h/er need, and thus for h/er only the realized transformation of h/er own product into something useful for h/er, it becomes at the same time what it really is also for the first producer—an exchange-value, a means for inducing the satisfaction of h/er need by others. When money has entered the picture, and the moments of selling and buying have become distinguished, this appears more clearly. The 'aspect' of the product, that it may be used for proving the species being of the producer, and thus as a means for establishing relations with others and mediating interchange (exchange) with them, acquires a form of its own. It is divided from the aspect of the product that it satisfies a material need (as such only the transformation of the previous product of the one who buys it). In simple exchange by means of money, the producer, A, produces for another, B, who buys h/er product, giving to A the aspect "for others"

of A's product, in its equivalent in money. The original producer, A, then gives this aspect "for others" of h/er product to another, C, in exchange for a use-value for h/erself. At this point, the same sum of money becomes the aspect "for others" of the product s/he has bought, that is, for the present producer (seller's) C's product, and so on. In *Grundrisse*, Marx remarks that "The individual can employ money only by divesting himself of it, by positing it as being for others, in its social function" (p. 228). If money is "being for others" it must satisfy a need of others. How can this need be characterized? It is the need for a means for establishing species relations with others in order to permit the interchange or interaction of exchange, and in the situation of commodity exchange, all have this need. The buyer, when s/he gives money to the seller, satisfies this need. This allows the seller to keep the aspect "for others" of h/er product while giving up its aspect "only for h/erself" to another. The buyer is now related to the product which s/he had given up before as seller as contradictorily, pure "being for others" which is "only for h/erself."

## VII

*T*he institution of money permits a mutually exclusive property relation with regard to something, which is only for others. The need for money may be characterized as communicative need, a need for (a means to) establishing species relations. But it must be remembered that, in exchange, the establishing of species relations is only a means to establishing non-species relations, or material interchange of private property. (The linguistic dialectic applied to money is that for others it is again for others, and therefore for ourselves as well, it is for others.) The common relation is the relation of mutual exclusion.

When the buyer gives up money to the seller, satisfying h/er communicative need, s/he causes the seller to have an actual relation to h/er product, which was before only a potential relation. The seller produced h/er product "for others" but it had to actually become for another, in order to be proven to have this aspect. Moreover, it had

to be proven to have this aspect in order to have it actually, in the form of money. The seller, after the sale, becomes directly related to h/er product as “being for others” in the form of its money equivalent. H/er relation to h/er product as having this particular social quality has changed from a potential to an actual relation. On the other hand, s/he is also related to h/er product as potentially only for h/erself. When s/he gives up the money to another, becoming a buyer, and satisfying the other’s communicative need, h/er previous potential relation to h/er own product as only for h/erself becomes an actual relation in regard to the new use-value which s/he has bought. Thus, in exchange each causes the other to have an actual relation to h/er product, which before was only a potential relation. From the point of view of each one taken singly, there is a succession of relations to the product, which is identical to that of the other. However, taken together, the moments in which these relations occur are different, and in fact each has a relation to the product which is the opposite of that of the other. At the moment in which the buyer gives up h/er money (h/er own product’s being for others) and thus allows the seller’s relation to h/er product to become purely social (a relation to a purely social object), s/he changes h/er own relation to h/er product into a purely private one. Or, insofar as the seller is considered as active, s/he changes the buyer’s relation to h/er (the buyer’s) own product from a purely social one into a purely private one, by giving h/er a use-value.

Considering both participants in the exchange as communicatively active, we can say that each changes the other’s relation to h/er (the other’s) product, in order to change h/er own relation to h/er own product. We saw above that the same thing happened in language. By satisfying the other’s communicative need with a verbal social object, we changed h/er relation to the material object with regard to which the communicative need arose.

## VIII

U<sub>p</sub> to now we have been looking at production and exchange as communicative processes, and we have seen the

exchangers in their reciprocal independence. Marx tells us, however (as we mentioned above), that this reciprocal independence is only the other side of their complete reciprocal dependence. In this regard, no one in commodity production can produce for h/erself, so that each is totally dependent on others for the satisfaction of all of h/er socially determined needs. Thus, the material interchange which takes place here is a particular kind of interchange. Others must satisfy all of the individual's material needs, since s/he h/erself is helpless and unable to satisfy them. The independent producer makes h/er product only as being for others (a means of access to the labor of others), and this is a communicative device or instrument; we can see that s/he is "free" and independent only in h/er communicative capacity. As a consumer s/he is completely dependent materially, and thus s/he is in a situation similar to that of the new-born child, who is capable only of crying (communicating) and whose needs must all be satisfied by others. On the other hand, s/he is also like a king, whose needs are all satisfied by others and who only produces communicatively. This centering upon the individual reflects the social relations present in the situation of private property, where the individual is related to h/er property as h/er own only socially—only because all others are related in a parallel way to their property as their own, and to h/er property as not their own, while s/he is related to their property as not h/er own. The relation of an individual to h/er own property involves a relation of others in general to h/er, as well as h/er relation to the property of any individual, as a member of 'others in general', equal to h/erself as having the same relation to others in general and to h/er own property as h/er own. Any individual appears to another as a member of others in general, with regard to the property relation. Money as a communicative instrument is particularly useful in that it permits communication with others in general, of which particular individuals become merely the momentary representatives.

Under this aspect, the individual does not produce for any other individual, nor does s/he consume the product of any other individual. Rather, s/he produces for others in general and consumes the products of others in general. Viewed on this abstract level, the

individuals have a common relation to each other with regard to a thing, in that each produces what the other also produces, and in that both consume the same thing, a portion of abstract labor, of the totality of production for others in that society. Money, in its character as general equivalent, discloses the relation between the individuals' own "private labor and the collective labor of society" (Capital, p. 49). Insofar as money expresses a general relation between the individual and others, and therefore a relation between h/er and another particular individual (who has the same relation to others in general that s/he has), it expresses a social relation. As the mediator of an exchange between isolated individuals, confronting each other directly, it serves as a communicative device, allowing them to continue as mutually exclusive, non-species beings. Despite the intention of the self interested individuals involved in the exchange, and within the zone of the operation of the means (production for others as a means for the satisfaction of one's own need) which has become extended in commodity production to cover all the economic relations, we find that they are actually satisfying each other's needs, insofar as these are needs for portions of the totality of social production. Thus they are "species beings" as producers and consumers of the same thing, the total social product. As a species, however, they are very limited, and their labor is, so to say, undivided, since all produce and consume the same thing. The only differences within the 'thing' that they produce are quantitative. Thus in order for there to be a momentary and particular species relation between two individuals, the quantitative measurement of their portions of the total social product is necessary, in order to prove that they are really producing and consuming the same thing. Money, as quantitatively divisible being for others, provides this measure.

## IX

When money was seen as the exchange-value of the commodity, it was a communicative device which, replacing the commodity, gave it an independent existence as something for others. This

allowed a series of changes in the relations of the producer (seller) and the consumer (buyer) to their own products. Though neither was directly related to the other's product as the product of that particular other, s/he was related to h/er as a representative of others in general—one producer of the totality of social production. The transfer of money satisfied the communicative need of the seller for h/er own product as being for others, and was a means for transforming it into its opposite, a use-value for h/er alone. In money as measure, on the other hand, the commodity becomes related not only qualitatively but also quantitatively to the rest of the total social product. This is done on the basis of a system of oppositions similar to that of the system of values in Saussure's conception of *langue*. That is, each sum of money, or price, has its particular positive character in opposition to all the other sums or prices which it is not. (See also Jakobson on phonetic value, 1962.) In this light, money can be seen as a sort of quantitative *langue*, containing also the articulation of larger into smaller elements which make them up. This *langue* is organized in a quantitative progression, giving a more stable relative 'position' to its elements than those of the *langue* proper. Moreover, it also gives the possibility of explaining the positive content of the price of any particular article, by analyzing it into the prices of its aspects, means of production, material, labor—something which the system of linguistic oppositions does not provide. This aspect of money is more directly and evidently linguistic than its aspect as qualitative equivalent. It makes use of a system of numbers which, after all, is itself a derivative of language. Marx himself notes the linguistic character of prices, calling them ideal money or the "money names" of the value contained in commodities. Money as qualitative equivalent confirms and expresses the commodity as for others, and as part of the total social product. As quantitative equivalent it expresses the commodity as a particular quantity of something for others, a particular quantitative part of the total product. As qualitative equivalent it permits the exchangers to establish equal qualitative species relations with one another, and as quantitative equivalent it permits the exchangers to establish particular quantitative relations with one another. These quantitative relations are particular in view



of all the other quantitative relations which they are not. By satisfying the communicative need with regard to money (sums of money), which is a material object itself satisfying material communicative need, price gives an ideal expression to the value of commodities, preparing the way for its real expression in money, in the material communicative act.

If we look at language as a means for establishing social relations between humans with regard to things, before individual relations are established with regard to these things, we can see that commodity production and exchange by means of money does much the same thing, and does it in a similar way. The specific differences in the two kinds of communication may be found in the different kinds of interchange which they serve to facilitate. The interchange which economic exchange mediates is in itself contradictory, since it requires some sort of mutual inclusion on the grounds of the mutual exclusion of private property. Its dialectic can be represented as follows: private property (for others and therefore not for me); communication (for others and therefore for me); private property (for me and therefore not for others). The dialectic of communication can be seen thus as inserted within the dialectic of private property, creating its own zone in the production and exchange of products for others, which has expanded and become generalized to such an extent that the originally “dominant (determinant) subjects” are in fact dominated and determined by it. (10) The material interchange which takes place is interchange between the individual and all others, as mediated by communicative relations established between h/er and a succession of particular others. Moreover, the communication that takes place in exchange is communication with regard to a single social object which is abstract labor, and its totality as contained in the total social product. The ‘species’ of exchangers communicates and becomes a community only with regard to one thing. It thus has a single communicative need and a single word for expressing and establishing relations in regard to this thing. This material word is money. Thus any comparison between language and commodity exchange must bear in mind the particular human situation of commodity exchange.

As a word, money is, so to say, in a continuous nascent state, for the species who speak it have only one kind of interchange to mediate—requiring its alienation. It is therefore a word which cannot be learned. Due to the singularity of the interchange, and to the fact that only one thing, abstract labor, is relevant to it, no sentences including qualitatively different elements can be formed with this word.

Our purpose in viewing commodity production and exchange in terms of communication has been to find in the former a basis for a non-separatistic conception of language. The alienated “language of real life” can be used as a point of comparison for language proper. To return to our original question, whether it is possible to generalize commodity production and exchange to language, we would say that the question should be put the other way around. The communicative forms which first developed in language are used in commodity production and exchange. The main instrument of the work of the head has been extended to the work of the hand. The continual bridging and reconstruction of the mutually exclusive relations of private property by the exchange of commodities is itself ‘alienated language’. Bearing in mind the reasons for its aberration, we may say that an investigation of language in this light should begin from the variety and the specific character of the interchanges which language is called upon to facilitate. We may then see how language is just as much a social product as is “the specification of a useful object as a value” (*Capital*, 1, p. 47).

From the point of view of semiotics, the consideration of money as a ‘word’ may provide a useful point of encounter between what is usually seen as a non-verbal system of communication—economic exchange—and language proper. It could allow us so to say, as in chemical analysis, to put a word into a test tube containing a different human social environment from the one in which it usually exists, thereby gaining a demonstration of some of its hidden properties. While this is not the place to go into the results of such an experiment, at least one suggestion may be given. For Marx money, as the excluded commodity, is not a conventional or arbitrary sign (except in the case of paper money, where due to the rapidity of circulation

“Its functional existence absorbs, so to say, its material existence,” (1962, p. 110). Rather, money arises of necessity when the need for it develops with the generalization of commodity exchange. Its functions change with the historical situation and mode of production, from the means of simple mercantile exchange to full-fledged capital. Moreover, it has a ‘natural’ physical form in gold or silver: “Nothing but a substance whose every specimen has identical and uniform qualities can serve as an adequate phenomenal form of value, or as the embodiment of abstract and therefore uniform human labour” (ibid., 65). Marx also takes great pains to show that abstract labor is contained both in the commodity and in money, and it is by reason of this that the latter expresses the value of the former as well as by the polarity between general equivalent and particular commodities. If we take money as the *signans* and the commodity as the *signatum*, we can see that abstract labor might be viewed as an “inner, iconic tie” between the two. According to Jakobson (1973: 18), “les liens internes, iconiques, du signifiant avec son signifié et, en particulier, les liens étroits entre les concepts grammaticaux et leur expression phonologique jettent un doute sur la croyance traditionnelle en ‘la nature arbitraire du signe linguistique’ telle qu’elle est affirmée dans le Cours.” Alfred SohnRethel, whose fascinating work attempts to derive philosophical and scientific categories from money and exchange in the Marxist analysis of commodities, says that “for all epochs and societies the basic logical pattern of the socially necessary mode of knowledge is the same as the form pattern of the social nexus” (1965:122). If, as we have tried to show in this paper, the ‘social nexus’ of commodity exchange includes and is in some senses a derivative of the nexus first developed in communication by means of language, we may attempt to find some “basic logical patterns” which are common to both.

We can also suggest that, as a type, money ‘means’ other commodities by the fact of its being their general equivalent, and it is this not only because it is the excluded commodity (a stable or polarized sample of a class), but also because its tokens ‘refer’ to particular commodities by directly and physically substituting for them over and over again in exchange, and it is from this that its generality derives.

The semiotic utility of an investigation of this type depends upon the differences between language and exchange as much as upon their similarities; whether or not the non-arbitrariness of money depends upon its social and physical character as a ‘real abstraction’ mediating commodities, is not a semiotically irrelevant question. Either way it is answered may be informative in a comparison of money to other means of communication, using Marx’s dialectical analysis of exchange as a guide.

### Endnotes

1. In his discussion of contracts in the *Philosophy of Right*, Hegel calls the gift a merely formal contract. This sort of gift exists within the framework of private property (p. 59).

2. In order to avoid the term ‘intercourse’, which is the Moscow edition’s English translation of *Verkehr*, the over-use of which would give our paper pornographic overtones, we have opted to use ‘social interchange’ as an unfortunately rather pallid alternative. ‘Commerce’ would have been better but it presently implies exchange. ‘Interaction’ smacks of the modern current in American psychology. Thus we will be using ‘social interchange’ or ‘interchange with other men’ except in the direct quotes from the Moscow edition of the German Ideology, where ‘intercourse with other men’ is the translation of *Verkehr*.

3. See Hegel’s discussion of the system of needs in the *Philosophy of Right* (pp. 126-128).

4. The reciprocal determination of production and consumption is described in the “Introduction of ’57”: “Consumption produces production in a double way, (1) because a product becomes a real product only by being consumed ... (2) because consumption creates the need for new production ... production produces consumption 1) by creating the material for it; 2) by determining the manner of consumption; and 3) by creating the products, initially posited by it as objects, in the form of a need felt by the consumer” (pp.91-92 in the English translation of the *Grundrisse*).

5. Marcel Mauss, in his “Essay on the Gift” concentrates his attention on the obligation of reciprocity. Taking reciprocity as a primary social relation obscures the fact that the simple satisfaction of another’s socially determined need is already a social relation. Much the same thing might perhaps be said with regard to the work of Lévi-Strauss.

6. We will not be dealing with consciousness here, but with language, since the relations between language and consciousness are complex and lie outside our scope, except as directly regarding the definition of language as “practical consciousness.”

7. The Hegelian conception of the “cunning of reason” which uses natural

processes for its own benefit in the formation of the instrument and in work could also apply here. L. S. Vygotsky makes much the same point with regard to the activity of mediation in the use of signs which consists in the “influence which man exercises on behavior through signs, and that is, the stimuli, making them act in a way which conforms to their psychological nature”(*Storia dello Sviluppo delle funzioni psichiche*: 137).

8. We are leaving to another place a discussion of the non-verbal sign systems which also have a large part in communication since in many cases their character as social and individual products is less clear than that of verbal objects.

9. We are justified in using this turn of phrase as an expository device because if we see humanity as a species which makes itself in the continuous process of its own production and socio-material interchange, the institution of a single kind of all-inclusive interchange based on the one common social relation of mutual exclusion, severely restricts the process and thus the character of the species which is determined by it. The exchangers are, as it were, a “species” which makes itself in order to un-make itself

10. Here we have only discussed two of the aspects Marx sees in money—Means of Circulation and Measure of Value. For the others, Means of Accumulation, Means of Payment and World Money (as well as general equivalent) there is a great deal to be said. Money as general equivalent in fact, in our terms, seems to parallel the function of the word in concept formation — however this must be left to another place. It also lies outside the scope of this paper to discuss the implications of salaried labor, surplus value and capital in terms of communication.

## Saussure and Vygotsky Via Marx

*Ars Semeiotica IV: 1. 57-83 (1981)*

### I

*I*f de Saussure was right to compare linguistic with economic value, the interpretation of economic value itself becomes of first importance for a theory of language. The influence of the marginalist school of Lausanne on de Saussure was noted by Piaget some years ago (1968, p. 77) and has been more fully explored recently in an article by Augusto Ponzio (1977).

This author suggests that the distinction diachrony/synchrony and that of *langue*/*parole* are directly comparable to similar distinctions made by the marginalists in the economic field. Most interesting perhaps is the parallel drawn by Ponzio between the *langue* as a system of values in a momentary state of equilibrium and the market seen in its static aspect by Pareto as a system of mutually dependent relations. In the present paper we will attempt to find out what kinds of consequences a Marxist theory of economic value would have for Saussure's theory of linguistic value.

For Saussure value in the *langue* appears as the position of items within a system of similar but qualitatively distinguishable units. As such language "looks like" a market in which money functions as the expression of the exchange value of commodities, and also as a system of both qualitatively and quantitatively distinguishable units. What is presented in Saussure's system is a vast array of qualitatively different values having varying reciprocal effects as to their position in regard to each other and to the totality.

For Marx, the conglomerate of qualitatively different use values has one common quality, which allows its measurement by money, itself containing this quality: abstract labor value. The relation between money and commodities permits the comparison of different quantities as expressed in the qualitatively similar but quantitatively distinguishable units of the money material. The position of the

commodities, their relation to one another as mediated by money, is basically determined by the socially necessary labor time spent upon them within the branch of production to which they belong, and this in turn is determined by the degree of development of the means of production as well as by the average productivity of labor, within one branch with respect to the others in the totality of social production. Changes in these produce changes in the reciprocal position of the exchange values of commodities as expressed in money.

The system of linguistic value as conceived by Saussure and Marx's conception of economic value are asymmetrical. For Marx, we have one kind of value, quantitatively divided, whereas for Saussure we have a large number of qualitatively diverse values. For Marx, value is motivated; for Saussure and the marginalists, it is not. In order to get at the root of their divergence, let us begin by looking at Saussure's idea of exchange and then see what Marx would say about it. In the famous passage from the Course, Saussure tells us that:

... even outside language all values are apparently governed by the same paradoxical principle. They are always composed:

1) of a dissimilar thing that can be exchanged for the thing of which the value is to be determined; and

2) of similar things that can be compared with the thing of which the value is to be determined.

Both factors are necessary for the existence of a value.

To determine what a five-franc piece is worth one must therefore know: 1) that it can be exchanged for a fixed quantity of a different thing, e.g., bread; and 2) that it can be compared with a similar value of the same system, e.g., a one-franc piece, or with coins of another system (a dollar, etc.) In the same way a word can be exchanged for something dissimilar, an idea; besides, it can be compared with something of the same nature, another word. Its value is therefore not fixed so long as one simply states that it can be "exchanged" for a

given concept, i.e., that it has this or that signification: one must also compare it with similar values, with other words that stand in opposition to it. Its content is really fixed only by the concurrence of everything that exists outside it. Being part of a system, it is endowed not only with a signification but also and especially with a value, and this is something quite different. (p. 115)

Now let us see what Marxist theory has to object to Saussure's description of exchange, beginning from the first Saussurian statement. Marx finds in the first book of *Capital* (p. 19-20) that dissimilar things can be equated and "quantitatively compared" only when they are "expressed in terms of the same unit." They must be "things of the same kind," although this is a hidden likeness; their value is a purely "social unit, namely, human labor" (p. 17).

Thus in Marx's terms, since money and commodities have something in common, Saussure's comparison of exchange with words and ideas would not function unless words and ideas too had something in common. As to the second point, that similar things can be compared with the thing of which the value is to be determined, analogously to coins of the same system, let us see what Marx says about money. Calling it the "material in which the values of commodities express themselves socially," Marx says that

nothing but a substance whose every specimen has identical and uniform qualities can serve as an adequate phenomenal form of value or as the embodiment of abstract and therefore uniform human labour. On the other hand, since the difference between magnitudes of value is purely quantitative, the commodity which is to function as money must be susceptible of purely quantitative differentiations, this meaning that it must be freely divisible at will, and yet capable of being reassembled out of the parts into which it has been divided. (p. 65)

Here, the qualitative identity of gold with itself is emphasized. Had Saussure followed this indication he might have first compared, as similar to similar, coins of the same denomination and different instances of the same word. This would have strained his analogy, however, as he would have had to make the instances of the same



word correspond to various instances of the five franc piece, where he would have found that five francs were in one instance exchangeable for bread, and in another for sugar, thus corresponding to very different “ideas.” In this case Saussure’s second consideration would undermine his first.

In order to find out what the five-franc piece is worth, Saussure looks for some one thing for which it can be exchanged. He sees the general equivalent, money being exchanged for the relative commodity. Marx, instead, says that if we wanted to find out the value of money, we would need a price list of all commodities (p. 71). The “general equivalent has no relative form of value which it shares with other commodities; its value expresses itself relatively in the endless series of other commodities” (p. 42). Thus, by asking himself what the value of a five-franc piece was, Saussure got off on the wrong foot at the beginning. From Marx’s viewpoint the question could only have been answered by a list of all the commodities which could have been bought at the time by any five-franc piece. By not taking this path Saussure missed the character of generality which money has, and thus, correspondingly the general character of the word. And he made things worse by responding to the question with “a given quantity” of a single commodity, thus leaving aside the whole economic problem of why such a quantity was “given” and consequently the important epistemological problem of why a concept is “given.”

Marx’s treatment of money is dialectical and deals explicitly with the question of the relation between the general and the particular. Although this question would seem to be especially pertinent in any characterization of language, and the more so in one which is formed under the auspices of a comparison between money and words, Saussure does not touch upon it. Marx discusses what he calls the “polar” character of the equation of commodities and money. Here, the general equivalent has acquired “the character of being directly exchangeable for all other commodities ... because and insofar as other commodities have not acquired that character ... (p. 41). While we express the relative value of a commodity in the general equivalent, we cannot express the value of the general

equivalent in a single commodity, because the general equivalent has, in fact, the social characteristic of being general and of being the equivalent, the directly exchangeable commodity. If a word is comparable to money and thus is a general equivalent for something, or some class of things, then the same polarity could apply. The word is general while everything relative to it (what the word stands for) is to some degree particular. Consequently if one turns the equation around as Saussure seems to do, making the word relative and the “idea” equivalent, one may either lose the character of generality of the word, or improperly augment the generality of the “idea.” Thus one must always bear in mind uses of other instances of the same word, that is, the word must maintain its generality—even in such borderline cases as in ostensive definition. In fact, words are used to express ideas, not ideas to express words: just as money is used to express the value of commodities, not viceversa. ‘Horse’ for example can be used to refer to a particular horse only by virtue of its capacity to refer to other horses in other instances of itself as well as to the same horse in different moments.

V. N. Volosinov makes a telling comparison between the “abstract objectivist” way of studying language and the interpretation of dead or foreign languages. “The first philologists and the first linguists were always and everywhere priests. History does not know of a nation whose sacred scripture or whose oral tradition was not in a certain measure a foreign language, incomprehensible to the profane. Deciphering the mystery of the sacred words was the task the priest-philologists had to do” (p. 142). Volosinov distinguishes between recognition of normatively identical units and comprehension, and says that even in the learning of a foreign language “a form should be assimilated not in its relation to the abstract system of a language, that is, as a form identical to itself, but in the concrete structure of the expression, that is, as a mutable and malleable sign” (p. 273).

Thus, it is perhaps the practice of extracting the word from the context of its use and seeing it in “its relation to the abstract system of a language” which gives it the similarity to the general equivalent with regard to the things for which it stands. The signifier can be detached from its various signifieds and be treated by itself as a

physical object in coordination with other physical objects (other signifiers) or substituted by a signifier from the same or from another language while the things for which it stands remain unaltered. This takes place also in the study of language and within any single language in the definition.

In Grundrisse, Marx says: "To compare money with language is ... erroneous. Language does not transform ideas, so that the peculiarity of ideas is dissolved and their social character runs alongside them as a separate entity, like prices alongside commodities. Ideas do not exist separately from language. Ideas which have first to be translated out of their mother tongue in order to circulate, in order to become exchangeable, offer a somewhat better analogy; but the analogy then lies not in the language, but in the foreignness of language" (p. 163).

Commenting this passage, Jean-Joseph Goux says that "the linguistic sign is always-already in the posture of translation" (p. 198), and goes on to say that "the distinction between 'intra-lingual' translation and 'inter-lingual' translation is not pertinent" (ibid.). We would disagree with Goux that the linguistic sign is always-already in such a posture, and would see this appearance as occasional and a consequence of some uses of language and the study of language. "Linguistics studies a living language as if it were a dead language, and the mother tongue as if it were a foreign language" (Volosinov, p. 274). We can, in this regard, re-formulate Goux's second statement by saying that the similarity between intra-lingual and inter-lingual translation is pertinent, locating an especially sensitive zone within language, that of the definition, of taking a word out of context.

Priests, as interpreters and depositories of the foreign language of the gods within the community, were the first "mental" as opposed to "manual" laborers in the division of labor. Without going into the differences between the word of the gods and the language of the community, we can say that, when priests isolated words from their contexts, trying to divine or interpret their meanings to others, they were doing something similar to what is still being done at present, by linguists, in dictionaries, and even in the definition itself. We can see this activity as a harbinger, in linguistic communication, of what

Sohn-Rethel calls “the exchange abstraction” in economic communication (1970).

We have tried to show in another place how money can be seen as the only “word” (bearing in mind that it is a material word with a social function) people have in the situation of the exchange of private property, which is itself a kind of alienated communication, existing on the background of linguistic communication proper. The communities along whose borderline the new attitude of translation arises could thus be seen as those of the “community” of exchangers and the community of speakers.

Sohn-Rethel has described the effect of the “exchange abstraction” on natural science, seeing the quantification of nature as a result of the reflection in people’s consciousness of what they do in their economic life, turning use values into static entities on the market, separating them from their “social nexus.” At the risk of over-simplification, one might apply the same sort of criteria to social sciences such as economics and linguistics. The static state of the market and the static state of the *langue* are both ideal constructions made to allow the investigation of the laws of “mutual dependence” among economic or linguistic phenomena. It is interesting that the marginalist economist Walras uses the conception of numerary. “This is a good used as a counting unit. It is not however money in the ordinary sense of the word, since Walras assumes the numerary simply as a counting unit and assumes that there is no demand for it except for that which is relative to its non monetary qualities” (Roll, p. 399). One can see how Walras reduces money to the level of other commodities in order to have a homogeneous system. Saussure does much the same thing, though in the opposite direction. With his distinction between *langue* and *parole*, he raises the whole of *langue* to the level of a single word taken out of context. The synchrony-diachrony distinction subtracts the historical context, the *langue-parole* subtracts the context of speakers, dividing the social from the individual. In Sohn-Rethel’s manner one might say that Saussure considers *langue* as similar to a market where all commodities wait statically for their change of status from commodities to use values, from the property of those

for whom they have no use value (and whose only importance to them lies in their capacity to be exchanged) to the property of those for whom they have use value. We have seen, however, above that words taken out of context already have the character of general equivalent. Money, in fact, in its “normative identity,” is the material correspondent of the exchange abstraction.

What happens, then, is that Saussure’s distinctions put *langue* as a whole not in the position of commodities on the market, but in the position of money. “Money,” Marx says, “is the alienated ability of mankind” (*Manuscripts*, p. 168). This is perhaps why Goux is led to describe language as a whole as the general equivalent of other signs (1973). The whole *langue* has taken on the “posture” of translation.

Marx tells us in *Capital* that

Money fulfills two entirely distinct functions, as the measure of value, and as the standard of price. It is the measure of value, because it is the social incarnation of human labor; it is the standard of price insofar as it exists in the form of a fixed weight of metal. As the measure of value, it serves to transform the values of the manifold commodities into prices, into imaginary quantities of gold; as the standard of prices, it measures these quantities of gold. (p. 74)

Prices are possible because gold is a qualitatively homogeneous material, internally divisible into reciprocally comparable units. These units are measured quantitatively with regard to weight, and are organized in a quantitative progression, since what they serve to measure is quantities of labor value. Bearing in mind the differences in the kinds of materiality which may be ascribed to money and to language, the differences in their functions—the one mediates the exchange of private property while the other mediates the extension of ideal common “property” in communication, we can nonetheless compare the *langue* to money. In this vein the *langue* can be seen as a system of qualitatively similar units (composed of a given group of phonemes for each language), which differ, again qualitatively.

Money, on the other hand, is a system of qualitatively similar units, which differ not qualitatively again but quantitatively. According to Marx, money measures one kind of value, abstract labor

value. Language, to continue the comparison, measures not a single kind of value but a very large range of qualitatively different values. Here we come upon a crucial point in our comparison. For Saussure and the marginalists the value of money is not motivated. In the same way, linguistic values are not motivated. For Marx the value of money is motivated in that it is the expression of abstract labor (which it also contains) existing in another commodity. Therefore if a theory of language based on Marx's analysis of the commodity and money is to be consistent, it must also see linguistic values as motivated, at least upon the occasions in which language or some of its elements function as general equivalents. This is not the place to go into the question in depth but we may suggest that words and the cultural elements they express have a relevance to the community and to communication, which may be seen as a value underlying both the *langue* as a whole and words when they are in the position of translation or definition. Relevance to the community and to communication would thus be a value category broad enough to comprehend both linguistic and economic value. The aspect of language corresponding to quantification of value in economics can be seen simply as the achievement of semioticization. That is, a cultural element becomes relevant enough to be related to a word which is itself a value among other values.

Having taken this step we can reverse our comparison again and look at money as a language of only one word, always in the position of translation in a community in which, because of the exchange of private property, there is a single relevant cultural element, abstract labor. This cultural element, due to its singularity, is relevant in different quantities rather than different qualities. There is nothing within the community that has the importance, or the same kind of importance as labor value and money. Thus there is nothing with which money stands to form a system of values at the same level (although of course it stands together with other monies outside national boundaries). As such it is like a word which is, so to say, inflated to contain within itself an oppositional structure similar to *langue*. The system and array of qualitative values which language presents are compressed into a quantitative system in money, using

quantitative determinations, numbers, which function like the words in Saussure's *langue*, on the principle of the mutual exclusion of units.

One price is what it is in so far as it is not other prices, just as one word is what it is in opposition to other words. Marx calls prices the "money name of the value embodied" in a commodity. He conceives of prices as proper names, and says: "I know nothing about a man simply because I know that he is called James" (*Capital*, p. 77). Like proper names, prices are distinguished from each other insofar as one of them is none of the others. However, just as we can say that 6 is not 5 in a different way than that in which 100 or 25 are not 5, so we can say that some prices are closer to each other, so we can say that a price of 5 is closer to a price of 6, and is more likely to become 6 than 100. Moreover, a price of 25 is related to a price of 5 because it indicates a quantity 5 times as large, etc. In the same way, in *langue* there are different ways in which "related" words are not a particular word. Saussure gives us an example of an associative series of *enseignement- enseigner, enseignons, etc.; apprentissage, éducation, etc.; changement, armement, etc.; élément, justement, etc.* All of these can be viewed of course as associated, but they can also be seen as differences in the ways in which they are not *enseignement*. Saussure locates such associative chains in the brain saying that "the associative relation unites terms *in absentia* in a potential mnemonic series" (*Course*, p. 123).

Such relations are similar to those of prices as "imaginary gold" when money is functioning as "standard of price."

Since the *langue* is the compendium of words taken out of context, general equivalents in the position of translation as we said above, and since, on the other hand, as we tried to show elsewhere, money can be seen as a single word, we can turn this around and say that in *langue* it is as if each word were a different kind of money. One kind of money would thus be identifiable insofar as it was not all the others, and it would be difficult to find similarities other than merely physical ones. In this case one kind of money would be seen as "related" to another because both were long and thin, while the differences between the two would seem more important for fixing the relative position of one of them than the differences between it and round,

square or spherical money. If one ignored the theory of labor value, one could try to determine their positive character by looking for some commodity for which they could be exchanged as well as for the other kinds of money with which they could be exchanged or into which they could be “translated.” If one abstracted from history, from the practice of exchange, and from commodities, like Saussure one would be left with a merely differential system.

For Saussure “in language there are only differences without positive terms” but this “is true only if the signified and the signifier are considered separately; when we consider the sign in its totality, we have something that is positive in its own class” (Course, p. 120). As a system of differences, *langue* is like such a collection of different kinds of money, separated from commodities and labor. All the money has value, because it is also created by human labor, and has the specific use value of serving socially to express the values of commodities.

What Saussure is looking for is the value or price of money in terms of other money. When he turns to consider thought he says that without “language, thought is a vague, uncharted whole” (p. 112) and “initially the concept is nothing, it is only a value determined by its relations with other similar values” (p. 117). The comparison that can be made here is one between labor value, disembodied from its products, and commodities seen as reciprocally related without a fixed unit in which to measure them.

Saussure’s operation consists in turning the equation of the general equivalent around, as we said above, giving the “idea” more generality than is warranted by making it equivalent, and then saying that it depends for its existence as a value on the value of the word. The fact is that neither the word nor the idea is general unless the operation of taking it out of context is performed. And the idea does not become general unless it is taken as the equivalent of the word. No doubt the constant possibility of this priestly activity influences the use of language, standing beside the flow of speech like a guardian angel.

In the same way that the oppositional system of prices would not exist without money as measure of values so the system of opposition of physical words to one another would not exist without the totality



of signifieds which justify it. And just as when one considers price as an abstract system, one is brought to see its ground in physical quantities of money as the standard of price—and one may thus be brought to ignore the first step of money as measure of value—so in considering words as a system, one looks at their physical qualities and may be brought to set aside the reasons for their existence.

Marx's analysis of commodities and money shows the means of economic communication, money, as having a "meaning" in abstract labor. So also the *langue* of Saussure taken as a whole can be seen as having a meaning, expressing a common quality, that of relevance to the community. At the same time each word may be seen as expressing the value of some cultural element containing the quality of relevance. The fact that a cultural element is related to a word as its name, that is, its semiotization, is not arbitrary but depends on the general importance or relevance of the cultural element. It is only the specific phonetic pattern to which the cultural element becomes related which is arbitrary and functions on the principle of mutual opposition.

## II

*A*n experiment by Lev Vygotsky on the development of concepts (1962) gives us the possibility to view Saussure's distinctions between *langue* and *parole* and between signifier and signified from another perspective. The experiment may be seen as using a *langue* of four mutually exclusive signifiers (nonsense words which are all names) taken out of verbal context. The signifiers are separated from their signifieds insofar as these are unknown to the subjects of the experiment. Using the signifiers as a guide to the relevant and nonrelevant characteristics of a number of blocks the subjects have the task of grouping the blocks according to concepts pre-determined by the experimenters. After the task has been completed the subjects are asked to use the words they have just learned to describe objects other than those in the experiment, that is they are asked to operate with them as they do in their usual use of language.

Here, then, there is a dynamic relation between the signifiers and the signified as well as between *langue* and *parole*. Moreover, in the course of the experiment, one can see how the mutual exclusion of the signifiers in the *langue* aids in “cutting out” the signifieds, though we must add that this metaphor of cutting out applies more readily in the experiment to the blocks as referents having or not having certain characteristics, than it does to the concepts themselves, which Vigotsky sees as something which is developed, new mental organization. Also in contrast to Saussure, the concepts in this experiment pre-exist to the *langue* in that there is a proper way of grouping the blocks, which have themselves been made by the experimenters with characteristics, which are similar but not immediately obvious. Thus while it is true that for each individual subject, the signifier is separated from the signified, it is also true that the signified already exists as the goal defined by the experimenters.

Vygotsky’s experiment is a modification of Ach’s experiments in concept development and was worked out by L. S. Sakharov. Vygotsky calls it the “method of double stimulation” in that it includes both objects and signs. In order to make the rest of our discussion clear, we will quote in full the description of the experiment added by Vygotsky’s editor from *Conceptual Thinking in Schizophrenia* by E. Hanfmann and J. Kasamin (1942), since Vygotsky himself did not supply such a description.

“The material used in the concept formation tests consists of 22 wooden blocks varying in color, shape, height, and size. There are 5 different colors, 6 different shapes, 2 heights (the tall blocks and the flat blocks), and 2 sizes of the horizontal surface (large and small). On the underside of each figure, which is not seen by the subject, is written one of the four nonsense words: ‘lag’, ‘bik’, ‘mur’, ‘cev’. Regardless of color or shape, ‘lag’ is written on all tall large figures, ‘bik’ on all flat large figures, ‘mur’ on the tall small ones, and ‘cev’ on the flat small ones. At the beginning of the experiment all blocks, well mixed as to color, size and shape, are scattered on a table in front of the subject... The examiner turns up one of the blocks (the “sample”), shows and reads its name to the subject, and asks him to pick out all the blocks which he thinks might belong to the same

kind. After the subject has done so . . . the examiner turns up one of the “wrongly” selected blocks, shows that this is a block of a different kind, and encourages the subject to continue trying. After each new attempt another of the wrongly placed blocks is turned up. As the number of the turned blocks increases, the subject by degrees obtains a basis for discovering to which characteristic of the blocks the nonsense words refer. As soon as he makes this discovery the . . . words . . . come to stand for definite kinds of objects (e.g., ‘lag’ for large tall blocks, ‘bik’ for large flat ones), and new concepts for which the language provides no names are thus built up. The subject is then able to complete the task of separating the four kinds of blocks indicated by the nonsense words. Thus the use of concepts has a definite functional value for the performance required by the test. Whether the subject actually uses conceptual thinking in trying to solve the problem... can be inferred from the nature of the groups he builds and from his procedure in building them. Nearly every step in his reasoning is reflected in his manipulations of the blocks. The first attack on the problem; the handling of the sample; the response to correction; the finding of the solution—all these stages of the experiment provide data that can serve as indicators of the subjects level of thinking.”

Vygotsky describes various stages in the grouping of the objects, culminating in the stage of grouping according to the concept. He says that “when the process of the formation of concepts is seen in all its complexity, it appears as a movement of thought within the pyramid of concepts, constantly alternating between two directions, from the particular to the general, and from the general to the particular.” (p. 80) We saw above, in the first part of this article that for Marx, money is the “excluded commodity,” having the same quality (abstract labor value) which other commodities have and capable of expressing this by its direct exchangeability for them. There is a polarity between the excluded commodity and all the others, between the equivalent and the relative side of the equation. The “character of being generally and directly exchangeable is, so to say, a polar one, and is as inseparable from its polar opposite, the character of not being directly exchangeable, as the positive pole of a magnet is from the

negative” (Capital, p. 41). We believe that Vigotsky’s experiment shows us stages in the development of a similar polar relation between the sample object and the objects, which are to be related to it, together with a relation between the word and all the objects belonging to a conceptual group or class.

Actually, two processes of polarization are necessary for the formation of the concept, that between the sample as equivalent and the other objects as relative, and that between the relevant and the non relevant characteristics of the sample as well as of the other objects. The latter is aided by the mutual exclusion among the names of the objects, since some are discarded, their characteristics being seen as non-relevant by virtue of their having different names. Money, at least within the boundaries of a single country, does not exist within a *langue* of other monies. It stands alone, expressing in exchange a single, all-important common quality, labor value. In the act of exchange, however, people do exclude objects not having this quality, as well as those not having use value (the labor time spent on these would not have been socially necessary). The polarity between the general equivalent and the relative commodities thus also implies a polarity between these and all objects not having the common quality. In exchange we may find the factors of equivalence and substitutability; these are double, in fact exchange may be described as a double substitution in the sense that at least two persons are involved and in the sense that the exchange takes place for each at least twice, once in selling and once in buying. It is the mutually exclusive relation of private property, which imposes this doubling. Marx tells us, however, that it was in response to a common need that people performed the common action of excluding one commodity by which to measure their various private commodities (Capital, p. 61). Thus, both in the linguistic and in the economic context, one can see the factors of exchange as equivalence and substitution, if viewed from a broad enough perspective.

In Vygotsky’s experiment, the first stage on the way towards the formation of the concept is that of “unorganized congeries” or “heaps.” “The heap, consisting of disparate objects grouped together without any basis reveals a diffuse, undirected extension of the meaning of

the sign (artificial word) to inherently unrelated objects linked by chance in the child's perception" (p. 59). The child operates on the basis of subjective connections among the objects rather than objective ones. The first level of this stage is that of simple trial and error. Here the child discards the objects which are shown to him to have a different name, but this does not indicate to him anything having to do with the relevance or non relevance or the characteristics of that kind of object for the class he is constructing. Of the next two levels, one is formed with regard to the "organization of the child's visual field" and the other of "elements taken from different groups or heaps that have already been formed by the child. . . ." (p. 60-61). At this earliest "congerie" stage it seems that there is no polarity between the sample and the other objects, nor is there one between kinds of characteristics. One might call it simple nominalism if it is the case that the heaps of objects, which are constructed by the child, are related by h/er to the word as their name. This would seem to be borne out by the fact of h/er discarding objects having a different name. One might say here that h/er reasoning is of the type that objects are the same because they have the same name.

The second stage in concept development is that of the associative or surname complex. Here a polarity has already developed between the sample and the other objects but this does not imply a polarity between the relevant and non-relevant characteristics. Moreover, while the sample becomes repeatedly the equivalent of the other objects, this is not carried through into a relation of reciprocal equivalence among the objects themselves, except perhaps, a nominal relation similar to that above. At this stage "factual bonds" are seen among the objects. "In building an associative complex, the child may add one block to the nuclear object because it is of the same color, another because it is similar to the nucleus in shape or in size, or in any other attribute that happens to strike him. Any bond between the nucleus and another object suffices to make the child include that object in the group and to designate it by the common "family name" (p. 62). Interestingly enough, this complex is very similar to the "associative series" of Saussure cited above, where "enseignement" would function as the sample object and the

various other members of the series as relative objects. It is not clear whether Saussure is looking at the associated words as whole signs, that is, including their signifieds. He does seem to shift levels when he sees words as associated by similarity of prefix or suffix and then includes also those having similar signifieds without any similarity of the signifier. Though one might try to make a case here for the signifieds having a common quality (considering the signifieds connected with the prefixes and suffixes or the roots as similar) there does not seem to be any reason to try to arrive at such an abstract level. In the first place, “enseignement” is really only partially substitutable for the various different words which are associated with it; it is not their name. In the second place Vygotsky finds thinking by means of complexes very widespread, not only among children but also among adults, and he gives examples of this also with regard to language, especially in the derivation of words. Nevertheless, linguists and philosophers do stand in front of language in much the same way as the subjects of such an experiment as Vygotsky’s stand in front of the blocks of different colors, forms and sizes. This happens both in regard to words and to ideas. Wittgenstein for instance took a step backwards from the formation of concepts at any cost. The relation, which he describes as “family relation” and that of fibres in a thread can be seen as similar to those in the complexes found in Vygotsky’s experiment, especially in the “chain complex” described below.

The next complex mentioned by Vygotsky, the collection, is an alternative to the concept, in that though one aspect of the sample is taken as most important, and thus there is a polarity between the relevant and non relevant aspects of the sample, no relation of equivalence or substitutability is established between the sample and the other objects. They do not become relative to it as an equivalent with regard to the same aspect, and thus do not become related to each other as equals. Still, the grouping here has its own kind of coherence. The child forms a collection of objects which contrast and complement each other with regard to the attribute he has chosen such as a collection of blocks of different colors. This is however sometimes mixed with the associative complex, the child choosing

more than one aspect of the sample as that with regard to which he forms his collection. Vygotsky calls this kind of complex that of “functional grouping” as in such sets as cup, saucer and spoon. He says “We might say that the collection complex is a grouping of objects on the basis of their participation in the same practical operation of their functional cooperation” (p. 63 Vygotsky’s italics). This too reminds us of Wittgenstein: “Think of the tools in a tool-box: there is a hammer, pliers, a saw, a screwdriver, a rule, a glue-pot, glue, nails and screws.—The functions of words are as diverse as the functions of these objects. (And in both cases there are similarities).” (*Philosophical Investigations*, n. 11)

In the following complex, the “chain” complex, the sample object remains particular rather than general as substitutable and equivalent for the other objects, in that it is itself substituted as a sample. “For instance, if the experimental sample is a yellow triangle, the child might pick out a few triangular blocks until his attention is caught by, let us say, the blue color of a block he has just added; he switches to selecting blue blocks of any shape—angular, circular, semicircular. This in turn is sufficient to change the criterion again; oblivious of color, the child begins to choose rounded blocks... The original sample has no central significance. Each link, once included in a chain complex, is as important as the first and may become the magnet for a series of other objects” (Vygotsky p.64). The organization of the material, which results from this kind of operation is comparable to the kind of organization Wittgenstein sees in different sorts of games. Not finding anything common to them all, but only similarities among individual kinds of games which have other similarities to other kinds of games, Wittgenstein says “I can think of no better expression to characterize these similarities than ‘family resemblances’; for the various resemblances between members of a family: build, features, colour of eyes, gait, temperament, etc., overlap and criss-cross in the same way. —And I shall say: ‘games’ form a family.” (*Philosophical Investigations*, n. 67)

These comparisons do not mean to suggest that Wittgenstein was influenced by Vygotsky. Rather what Vygotsky saw in his experiments and applied to language itself in the derivation of words, Wittgenstein

saw in the relations among “sub-concepts.” Wittgenstein raises the status of the complex as an explanatory device, and thus lowers that of the concept, which no longer stands alone as the only proper standard of linguistic organization. Here we can see a process somewhat similar to those we saw above regarding Walras, who reduced the status of money the general equivalent to that of numerary, similar to all other commodities, and Saussure who raised all words to the level of a word taken singly as a general equivalent. Wittgenstein now places the concept in a context of complexes, robbing it of its position of privilege in the investigation of language.

Differently from Wittgenstein, Vygotsky maintains the traditional hierarchy considering complexes more primitive forms of thought than concepts. The abstract relations which are seen in the formation of concepts contrast with the concrete relations among objects which are the basis of the complex. In complexes it is as if the word in its “guiding function” were followed only partially whereas in the concept this function is fully realized. So far we have seen the heap complex where the word functions as a guide neither with regard to the polarity of the sample nor with regard to the attributes. Second, the associative complex where a polarity is established between the sample and the other objects, (by virtue of the fact that it is the only object which has a name in evidence) but no polarity is set up among its attributes—each of these being seen successively as equivalent for those of the various other objects. Though Vygotsky does not say so explicitly, we may presume that this happens in spite of the fact that some of the wrongly chosen blocks are shown to have a different name. In this case we would say that while the guiding function of the word as a name is in operation, the guiding function of the words in the “langue” as mutually exclusive is not. We then saw an alternative to the concept, the “collection” complex also described as functional grouping. Here one might hypothesize that the name of the object is taken as a higher order word, having to do with the attribute itself, such as “color” for a collection of colors. The sample would thus be seen as only one of a group having color. This may change, however, and the subject go back to the sample in order to choose another attribute with regard to which to form another collection, so that the polarity between the



sample and the other objects is not entirely lost. In the chain complex, the sample itself was substituted, each new object becoming a new sample, as if the name had been transferred to each one successively. One might say that a new, particular polarity was established each time. The attribute is common only to two, or a few blocks.

The next complex described by Vygotsky is the “diffuse” complex, which is “marked by the fluidity of the very attribute that unites its single elements” (p. 65). Here, as in the congerie stage, the relation appears to be purely nominal. Vygotsky gives much importance to the complex which follows, which he calls the “pseudo-concept.” Here although the child picks out one attribute of the sample object, selects only other objects having that attribute “in reality the child is guided by the concrete, visible likeness and has formed only an associative complex limited to a certain kind of perceptual bond” (p. 66). An example of the pseudo concept is given by the editor, in which the turning over of a block having the supposed common characteristic but a different name does not indicate to the subject that the characteristic is the wrong one. Again it is the mutual exclusion of words, which is not functioning. Or, one might say that only the word written on the sample block has functioned to install a polarity, and blocks which are turned over and shown to have other names are not themselves considered as samples with regard to still other blocks with other characteristics. There is, so to say, a lack of a linguistic plenum. Only one signifier is seen together with its signified and this is not itself fully developed. There has not been sufficient abstraction.

We would like to suggest that the higher level of abstraction can be viewed as being reached by a reversal of the general polar equation. The sample object with its name has become general through the repeated comparison of the other objects to the sample. The sample has acquired the character of general equivalence, and is also substitutable for each relative object in turn, with regard to some quality. The relation of each relative object to the equivalent implies a relation among the relative objects themselves. The abstraction of this relation may be achieved by turning the equation around, thus changing its character, as Marx says. Now there is only one relative object, and various equivalent objects, seen as repeatedly equivalent to it.

But the relative object has a characteristic which it did not have before the operation began. This characteristic is its generality, which is shared by the word, its name (which has been applied to the other objects when they were seen as relative). The sample is thus something, which is both general and particular. In its relation to the objects it finds its equivalents not only in regard to its physical quality, but also in regard to its generality and particularity. The mutual relation of the objects to each other which had been developed by the relation of each to the same equivalent now develops, as equivalents themselves for the sample, into a relation of identity under the common quality. When this has been done, the concept has been abstracted, and any of the objects can be seen as “containing” the common quality. At this point the sample object may be seen as related to the word as its name because it contains the common quality, and in this being no different from any other object containing that quality. It is no longer necessary as a sample. The word itself is sufficient to maintain the relations among the objects. It substitutes the sample as that with regard to which all are related, since it is the name of each of the objects. In its generality it is the correspondent of the common quality, which has been abstracted from them. Moreover, like the sample, it is also particular, though for different reasons. The sample is particular from sense perception, while the word maintains its particularity in spite of the existence of various instances of the same word, by virtue of the relation of mutual exclusion with other words. If the word is not seen as “normatively identical” and as standing in such a relation of mutual exclusion, it cannot be seen as the equivalent of an abstracted common quality or concept (This is in fact what both Volosinov and Wittgenstein insisted upon, one with regard to words in context, and their ideological “themes,” the other with regard to the varied uses of language). In Vygostky’s experiment, which may be considered as a “language game” of denomination we do have the conditions for the formation of concepts. Especially interesting here is the role of the sample in its evolution from particular to general, while remaining a single object, as well as its final disappearance into the class or series of all the objects having the common quality when this has been abstracted. When the sample is no longer

necessary, the word takes over its function as general equivalent for the objects having the common quality, since each of these objects is now related to the word as its name, that is, its equivalent and substitute in the realm of human communication. Thus we have come full circle from the nominalist relation of the “heap” congeries where things were seen as the same because they had the same name. This relation now, so to say, contains the relation that things have the same name because they are the same. In other words the nominal relation expresses a factual relation of the objects to each other. This is done by the substitutability of the word for each of the objects of the class, just as, for Marx, it is the direct exchangeability of money for commodities which is so to say the mechanism of the expression of their value. Money can itself be seen as like the word in that it is the equivalent and substitute for commodities in that specific sector of the realm of human communication, which is economic exchange.

The word takes over the function of the sample object after the common quality has been abstracted through the latter's use. The word has all along been a “guide” to this process, as Vygotsky says, beginning with the fact that the sample is identified as a sample by virtue of its being the only object with its name in evidence. When the concept has been developed the word takes the place of the sample as general equivalent. One might see “mental images” related to words as phantom samples which are useful when one is unsure of what a word means, that is, when one asks: for what things having a relation to each other as things having a common quality or qualities, is this word the equivalent and substitute? When the concept has been developed any of the objects having that quality can be taken as a representative or example of that class, and if necessary can be used as a sample, instituting the polarity by which it becomes general. The mental image, being the image of one of these objects, can take on this function.

Here we can draw a parallel with gold and paper money. Gold can be seen as the sample object, containing the common quality of labor value, and equivalent and substitute for commodities in this regard. Moreover in its normatively identical units it presents the language of different quantities. However, when money functions “as a

sign of itself” (for instance as the circulating medium) it can be “replaced with a simple sign” (Capital p. 110), thus paper money. When gold is taken out of circulation altogether and becomes a country’s gold reserve, stashed away in such a place as Fort Knox, it is similar to the sample object stored in the memory but no longer necessary as a means of communication. Ideally either could be called upon, or actually put into the act of exchange or communication as the general equivalent. In practice this is not done also because paper money, like words, suffices to maintain the polarity, permitting the abstraction of the common quality of the relative objects, which in this case are commodities. Like gold, paper money is ordered according to the quantitative *langue*, thus making quantitative measurement possible. We can now see paper money as similar to the word, the equivalent and substitute for the general equivalent within that specific zone of communication, which is exchange. As normatively identical units both paper money and words can be seen themselves as general equivalents, which by their substitutability—for money, exchangeability—and equivalence repeatedly for particular things or commodities, maintain and give expression to a relation among these things or commodities. On the other hand, paper money may be exchanged for commodities and words may be used as the communicative substitutes for things or groups of things in a nominalistic way, without abstracting any common qualities. Vygotsky found that concepts developed only in adolescence, but that practically children were able to use language much earlier in a way which correspond to adults’ use. Similarly, money is used without referring to the common quality of abstract labor. When one moves into the stage of concepts and abstraction, one is entering the zone of “priestly” activity or of translation, as Volosinov would say. On the other hand, Marx says that in equating the “values of their exchanged products” people “equate the different kinds of labour expended in production, treating them as homogeneous human labour. They do not know they are doing this, but they do it” (Capital, p. 47).

In much the same way the use of the word as a guideline may show that we are actually following words along the lines of socially developed concepts while not knowing we are doing so.

In our comparison between language and money, two paths are open to us, which are not purely those of analogy, though they require it. First, we might take advantage of the position of translation in which money and *langue* are found, intentionally take on the priestly function, and try to translate the one into the other (an ideal alchemy which unfortunately does not have any effect upon the bank account). Second, considering *langue* as a collection of communicative phenomena (alienated from their signifieds, from *parole*, and from diachrony) and money as the communicative means in the alienated zone of communication which is exchange, we could try along the lines of Vygotsky's experiment to develop a concept under which both money and *langue* would fall, using money as the sample object with regard to those other objects which are the words in the *langue*. This would have two advantages. The first is that although money, like words in the *langue*, is separated from its signified, only coming into contact with it in the act of exchange in which it expresses the value of another commodity, when it is seen as the excluded commodity, as gold, it contains the common quality, abstract labor within it. On the other hand, as a sample object for the *langue*, money has the advantage of being already general. If it were not it could not be an equivalent for words, which, in this position, out of the context of *parole*, are also general. Thus we will have to consider the relations between money and commodities, and between signifiers and signifieds, and at least some of what they have in common will be found in these relations, since it is by virtue of these that money and words become general. The two possibilities of translation and of the use of Vygotsky's experimental procedure in another context, to some extent coincide. For the latter common qualities must be found but these can be seen especially in structures of relations. For the translation a common "idea" would be necessary, and we will leave this till later.

In order to see if words and money have structures in common, we must look to see if words and things have anything in common in correspondence to something money and commodities have in common. Here we can hazard that, when we take a word out of context and investigate its concept, the relation between this word and its referents reflects or repeats a relation, which may exist between these

referents and one of their number, which may be excluded as equivalent in the process of the development of the concept. The relation, which it already had to its referents nominalistically is now, so to say, doubled, through its substitution for a possible sample object, by which their relation to each other is brought forward. When the common quality has been abstracted the word maintains the relation of the referents to each other. Thus we can say that though words do not have anything formal in common with things in the early stages of the ontogenesis of language, they can come to have something at a certain period and in a certain use of language, when a relation among the referents is developed which is similar to that already existing between the word and the referents on a nominalistic basis, that is, when the stages of complexes have been overcome. The word would thus stand as the equivalent of the equivalent, and the referents have a relation of equivalence to each other, first, by virtue of their having the same name, and later by their relation to an equivalent by which their common quality was abstracted. Such a series of equivalent relations each of which may then be seen as equivalent to the other may remind one of Plato's "Third Man" paradox. On the other hand it might be seen as "reflection" in the sense of the German *Widerspiegelung*, since the relations of equivalence repeatedly mirror each other, having a "real" content only at one stage.

Marx sees the development of money as a resolution of the contradiction between private and social within the mutually exclusive situation of private property. In this situation "for every owner of a commodity, every commodity owned by another person counts as a particular equivalent for his own commodity and ... therefore, his own commodity counts as a general equivalent of all other commodities. " Such a private process is inadequate to the function of general equivalent socially, in which commodities "can be equated as values and have the magnitude of their values compared." Since value is a social quality, it requires a social means of expression. The owner of a "private general equivalent" is thus so to say at the nominalistic stage. There is, in fact, no common quality, which can be abstracted until commodities acquire a relation to each other and to a general equivalent on a social plane. "In this quandary, our owners

of commodities think after the manner of Faust: 'In the beginning was the deed'—action comes first. They have therefore acted before they have thought ... But the only way a particular commodity can become a general equivalent is by a social act. The social act performed by all other commodities therefore sets apart a particular commodity in which they all express their values. Thereby the bodily form of this commodity becomes the form of the socially recognized general equivalent" (*Capital*, p. 61). Interestingly enough, the "deed" of which Faust speaks (in opposition to St. John's "Word") is here the kind of deed which we have seen as underlying the formation of concepts, the "creation of a sample object."

Money, not just paper money, but money as the excluded commodity has many of the characteristics of a word. One must always remember of course that it is material in a different sense than is language, as is the labor which produces both money and commodities. However, in its mediation between the private and the social, it functions, as we just saw, as the social equivalent of private equivalents. In much the same way the word functions as the equivalent not only for the referents but also for the "samples" with which they are in a polar relation for various individuals. Marx tells us that "Language is practical consciousness as it exists for others and therefore really for me as well" (*German Ideology*). As we have tried to show elsewhere (Vaughan 1980) money is the aspect "for others" of commodities, and functions as the single word, expressing a single relevant quality, labor value, in the mutually exclusive situation of private property. Words, on the other hand, may be seen as the aspect "for others" of their referents, of the sample, of the relation between them, or of the relation among the referents that is the common quality, this depending on the stage of development of these relations for the individual. The type and context of the reception of words, their actual being for others, modifies what they also for the sender and it may be that this is the process whereby the adult's and the child's use of words coincide as well as one of the reasons why words function as the "guidelines" to concept formation. As the excluded commodity, money has both the characteristic of the word (it is as it were, a one word language

containing within itself the “*langue*” of prices) and those of the sample object. With paper money, as we saw above, the linguistic, or as Marx says, symbolic, aspect, becomes separated from the object which actually contains the common quality.

Money serves for the identification and expression of the commodity as a value, and this is functional to and directed towards the process of exchange. Words, taken out of context, in investigation of their concepts in definitions and in inter—or intra—lingual translation, serve for the identification and expression of their referents as having common qualities, and this is directed towards communication of various types. (This communication might be described as linguistic exchange, since the air of objectivity coming with the conceptual definition lends itself particularly to ideological use.) It is the moment in language, which is similar to the “exchange abstraction” of Sohn-Rethel in economics. The fact is, that aligning money and words for “translation” would give us the possibility of putting money, which heretofore stood alone into a context of words, a *langue*, while it gives to words the possibility of comparison with money as a sample object, something which was lacking before. This possibility is due to the double character of money as a material word in that it functions both as a sample and as a word. We can say that such reciprocal positioning is the first step in confronting money and language as an intralingual translation, or definition. On the other hand, money is also a foreign language which expresses by a qualitatively single word a single common quality of everything on the market. As such, it is foreign to any verbal language, which in its qualitative variety even when considered as *langue*, expresses a multitude of common qualities, relation, ideas.

Strangely enough, we know what the material word means in the foreign language of money, but not what language itself means in our own, verbal language.

Thus, if we want at least to indicate the direction a “translation” would take, we must begin with the signified of the foreign language and try to conduct it to something which we may not have noticed in our own. Marx discovers labor value by beginning with commodities, not with money. This gives us a clue as to where to



start looking for some quality, which may be similar for language. That is we should begin with things, relations, ideas, rather than with words. Volosinov again comes to our aid: "Every stage in the development of a society has its own special and restricted circle of items which alone have access to that society's attention and which can be endowed with evaluative accentuation by that attention. Only items within that circle will achieve sign formation and become objects in semiotic communication." In order for this to come about, any such item "...must be associated with the vital socioeconomic prerequisites of the particular group's existence; it must somehow, even if only obliquely, make contact with the bases of the group's material life" (V.N. Volosinov, *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*, pp. 21-22).

One may call such items socially relevant items. It is because they are relevant to, or have a value in, the life process of the community, that they are also relevant to communication. In turn, the means of communication have value in communication and both communication and its means can be seen as items, which are directed towards the life process of a community. When they reach a certain level of importance they also "achieve sign formation." Above, we described economic exchange as a section or zone of human communication.

We can thus look at the items for which money is exchanged, commodities, as socially relevant items, which have value in that kind of communication which is exchange. The means for that communication is money, which in its exchangeability for them expresses their common quality. The fact is that abstract labor is labor directed towards exchange. It follows the linguistic dialectic as labor "as it exists for others and therefore really for me as well." In order to become "for others" it must pass through the act of alienated, material communication, commodity exchange. Thus abstract labor is labor which is relevant to communication, the means of communication, and the life process of the community. Money, when it is the excluded commodity, also contains labor, and is thus relevant in the same way to communication. The substitution of paper money for the excluded commodity gives us a clue as to the abstract motivation of the sign,

which remains. Now, though paper money no longer itself contains labor, it is still relevant to the communicative act of exchange. Abstract labor is relevant to this act. Thus, what the two have in common is relevance to a particular kind of communicative act, and this, in turn, has a value for certain of the life processes of the community.

As with money and commodities, we can say that the communicative means, the word, its referents, and whatever common quality or idea may have developed from their relation, have in common the quality of relevance to communication. Moreover, the acts of communication in which they are evident are themselves directed towards the same life processes where these referents, ideas, etc. have, by their importance, gained access to the society's attention. We suggest that the relation of the items in the "circle" to words causes the "value" of those words, as does the use of the words in communicative acts relevant to the community's life. No quantitative differences pertain to such values, their only transformation being their expression in a word. On the other hand, commodities are also items striving to prove themselves relevant, that is, to achieve sign formation, in a relation with money in which this quality of relevance is expressed, relatively to all other commodities.

In exchange, in fact, we see happening so to say in slow motion and on a material plane what happens effortlessly as a social process with language. Here values are not quantitatively divided, although it may happen that an item becomes related to a word more than once, since it has been relevant to communication and to the community's life in more than one way. This is the case for instance for Saussure's 'sheep' and 'mutton' example. These divide the field covered by '*mouton*' in French because sheep were relevant to the English peasant and to the French aristocracy in England in different ways. That an item is related to a word at all shows that it has a value in communication, just as the relation of a commodity to a sum of money shows that it has a value in exchange.

By viewing economic exchange as an alienated zone of communication proper, finding in language a corresponding zone in the isolation of words for the investigation of their concepts,

translation and definition, and especially such philological creations as Saussure's *langue*, we have hoped to find a moment in the two languages, that of money and that of words, where the communicators are "saying the same thing." What they are talking about might be called 'value' but by including economic value in the wider notion of relevance to communication, we can see a signified, which is the same for both "languages." The parallel functions predominately with regard to words which express items, which are themselves relevant. In addition to this we have seen that by using money as the "sample object" with regard to language, as samples were used in Vygotsky's experiment regarding objects, a common structure can be seen between words and money as general equivalents.

We may now return to the questions we posed with regard to Saussure at the beginning of this article. In his comparison of money and language Saussure did, after all, begin with seeing words as comparable to money, and ideas to commodities. What was lacking to bring it into focus from the point of view of the Marxist analysis of commodities and money, was a conception of some thing that becomes general through a repeated relation to the particular, as well as a consequent relation of particulars to each other which can itself acquire generality. This was shown in Vygotsky's experiment, where what Saussure would call the "signified" undergoes a number of changes, only at the last stage becoming an "idea" for which a word can be "exchanged." Thus Saussure's analogy between economic exchange and language, when seen in the light of Marx's analysis of commodities and money, indicates a view of language, which contradicts some of Saussure's basic tenets.

## Notes

1) Speaking of coins, a particular case of money, Sohn-Rethel says: "A coin is therefore something that corresponds to the postulates of the exchange abstraction, an abstract thing, an abstract form made sensible" (1965 p. 120).