

Introduction

A Portrait of Franco Ferrarotti

European social scientists have long recognized the pioneering role of Franco Ferrarotti in the rediscovery of sociology in Italy at the end of the Second World War. In fact, it was not mere chance that Ferrarotti, in 1960, was awarded the first full-time chair in sociology ever established in the Italian academic system at the University of Rome. At the University of Turin, from which he graduated in 1949, Ferrarotti had never followed a regular course of study in social science, since sociology had been banned by the Fascist state in the mid-1920s just as, ten years later, it was abolished by Nazi Germany, branded “a corrosive science.” It is interesting, however, that Ferrarotti’s graduation was based on a dissertation dealing with the sociology of Thorstein Veblen, reflecting, at least in part, his translation of Veblen’s best-known work, *The Theory of the Leisure Class*, and his deep-seated interest in sociology as a special field of knowledge.

Early Years

Franco Ferrarotti was born on 7 April 1926 in Piedmont, in northern Italy, in the village of Palazzolo Vercellese, where his family moved from the original Ferrarotti township of Robella. The Ferrarottis were a relatively affluent tradition-bound landowning family; Franco’s father one of a number of enterprising independent farmers. But, in the very year of Franco’s birth, the Fascist government drastically devalued the lira, at ninety to the British pound. This devaluation, the so-called Quota Ninety (*Quota Novanta*) gave rise to a dramatic process of deflation that was especially hard on farmers who, during the inflationary period after the First World War, had expanded their holdings using their lands as collateral. Together with quite a few independent farmers, Franco’s father was economically ruined by the Quota Ninety. The family then had to face the harsh contradictions of unexpected status “incongruence,” typical of persons who were reasonably affluent and found themselves suddenly plunged into poverty or, at least, into a situation of previously unknown financial hardship. To make things more complicated, young Franco was in poor health. However, with the support of a maternal cousin, Monsignor Leopoldo Ferrarotti, who also acted

as an exacting private tutor, he succeeded in passing the final gymnasium “licence” in 1940, and two years later in attaining his Lyceum diploma, the so-called *maturità* a precondition to enter the university.

The Discoveries of a Private Student

During periods of convalescence in San Remo where he was sent for a variety of respiratory problems, Ferrarotti spent most of his time in the local public library, a venerable institution full of dust and old books, where he discovered the works of early Italian positivists. Authors such as Cesare Lombroso, Enrico Ferri, Alfredo Niceforo, Fausto Squillace, and so on, not to mention Roberto Ardigò and Achille Loria, became his intellectual daily bread. Beyond and against the reigning Italian Neo-Idealism, young Ferrarotti was discovering for himself the great, although conceptually naive, Italian social research imaginary of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. When finally Italy was able to strike an armistice with the Allies on 8 September 1943, Ferrarotti left San Remo for Arma di Taggia, in the Ligurian interior and joined the Italian Resistance as a *staffetta*, or messenger, carrying news and orders for the underground fighters, and eventually weapons. On occasions, he took part in active engagements against Fascist and Nazi troops. By the end of the war, rather than accepting special awards and recognition, he preferred a passport to get away from it all, as soon as possible: first, to France in 1946; then, England in 1947 and 1948.

Veblen and Controversy

To support himself during these years, young Ferrarotti worked at first as a translator for the important Turin publishing house of Giulio Einaudi (his father, the economist Luigi Einaudi, became a president of the Italian Republic). Ready to translate almost any thing from any language—he ranged from the American novelist Howard Fast to the German psychoanalyst Theodor Reik—he centered his main effort on the difficult text of Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class*, submitted to him by the writer and his friend Cesare Pavese. Nobody in Italy had until then attempted to translate Veblen, his English being too difficult, and notorious for its almost impossible polysyllabic elusiveness. Well-known scholars and experienced translators didn’t want to have anything to do with it. But young Franco Ferrarotti was in no position to reject the offer. Even after he discovered and enjoyed the “pleasures” of Veblen, both linguistic and substantive, he would readily admit that, at least at first, he accepted the translation strictly out of economic necessity. It proved to be a good decision for him. Veblen’s book appeared on 3 January 1949, the first translation of his major work in Europe. Less than two weeks later, on 15 January 1949, Benedetto Croce—in an article in Italy’s most important daily, the *Corriere della Sera*—launched a

vitriolic attack against Veblen's book, accusing the author of the most "complete obtuseness" as far as historical phenomena were concerned. Ferrarotti answered Croce with two essays in the *Rivista di Filosofia*. A great scandal: How did an obscure translator dare to reply to the so-called intellectual pope, Benedetto Croce, who, colossuslike, bestrode Italian cultural life for over half-a-century? People thought that, perhaps, Ferrarotti was an aging, unaware middle-school teacher.

The Quaderni di Sociologia and the Battle for Sociology

With an intellectual courage verging on rashness, Ferrarotti was determined to attack simultaneously the three dominating Italian cultures that constituted the intellectual landscape of the 1940s: post-Hegelian Neo-Idealism; Catholic, or Neo-Scholastic, spiritualism; dogmatic Marxism. However, no instruments were readily available for the enterprise. Thanks to Professor Nicola Abbagnano, his doctoral dissertation on *The Sociology of Thorstein Veblen* had just been approved and passed at the University of Turin, in the Faculty of History and Philosophy. But he had no position in the university. He thought, however, it was indispensable to have a scientific journal completely devoted to the battle for sociology, for its rediscovery and eventual return to academic prominence.

After graduation, together with Abbagnano, he founded the *Quaderni di Sociologia* ("Notebooks of Sociology") as its editor-in-chief, with Professor Abbagnano, to the surprise of all concerned, as its assistant editor. In the first issue, the opening essay, entitled "Piano di lavoro" ("Work Plan") explained and mapped out the whole meaning of the initiative. In a nutshell: American sociology suffered from misplaced concreteness and fragmentary, nonoriented research; European sociology was systematic and historically conscious, but wanting of empirical validation and fieldwork; Ferrarotti intended to complement and integrate these two traditions in order to recapture the true meaning of sociology as a science of factual observation that is, at the same time, conceptually oriented and endowed with a definite historical consciousness.

In a jocular vein, Ferrarotti referred to this plan as his personal *Somnium Scipionis*—the famous passage of Cicero's *De Republica*, in which old Scipio tells his nephew that his great dream was to unite the theoretical life of the Greeks with the pragmatic sense of the Romans.

The American Experience

In 1951, just as the first issues of the *Quaderni di Sociologia* were coming out, Ferrarotti was aboard a ship heading from Genoa to New York. Previously, he had met the industrialist and social reformer Adriano Olivetti, son of the founder of the Olivetti business empire, who tried to discourage his overseas trip

in favor of more immediate goals. But Ferrarotti left anyway, wanting to test his dream against the American reality. He went first to New York, but stayed very briefly, going on to Chicago, where the first graduate program in sociology was established in 1892 and where, in the decades that followed, many outstanding social scientists gathered to outline the theories and methods of the developing discipline of sociology.

During his stay in Chicago, Ferrarotti had a chance to meet scholars closely associated with Chicago sociology—its uses of fieldwork, urban sociology, studies of the urban ghetto and its immigrants—including Earnest W. Burgess, Morris Janowitz, Harold Wilensky, and David Easton. He met others with whom he would later collaborate as members of the Inter-University Study of Labor Problems: Frederick H. Harbison, Clark Kerr, John T. Dunlop, and Charles Myers. In the development of this research, Ferrarotti emphasized the role of ideology in understanding U.S. labor and labor movements, an emphasis largely unknown to the “business unionism” that prevailed in the United States at the time. In this regard, Ferrarotti shared many of his views on labor and management and the processes of labor negotiation with his friend and colleague Herbert Blumer who was also at Chicago at this time. The path-breaking nature of Ferrarotti’s ideas on “ideological unionism”—virtually unknown in the United States of the 1950s—was remarked on by many sociologists, including Edward Shils.

At the University of Wisconsin in Madison, Ferrarotti met the American economist Selig Perlman, known widely for his works on U.S. labor and the history of labor movements. Later, Ferrarotti would engage Perlman’s classic study, *A Theory of the Labor Movement* (1928), in his 1955 *La protesta operaia* (“The Workers’ Protest”). But it was in his *Il dilemma dei sindacati americani* (1954 [“The Dilemma of American Trade Unions”]) where Ferrarotti summed up his years of research on labor and labor movements and his many conversations with important figures like Perlman.

Other memorable encounters in those years were with Friedrich A. von Hayek, the economist and member of the University of Chicago’s Committee on Social Thought from 1950 to 1962. There were long discussions between these men on the problems of democratic freedom and economic planning. Ferrarotti was also a frequent guest at the home of David Riesman, the author of *The Lonely Crowd* and studies of Thorstein Veblen. The two men met frequently until Riesman left Chicago and moved to Harvard in 1958. Perhaps Ferrarotti’s most consequential encounters in the United States were with two very different scholars, Leo Strauss and Edward A. Shils. With Strauss, the focal point of the discussion was Machiavelli; with Shils, the supposed dichotomy between “facts” and “values.” With Louis Wirth, another great figure of the Chicago School, he participated in fieldwork in the “Kenwood Community area.” Some ideas of the famous author of *The Ghetto* are discussed by Ferrarotti in the Appendix on urban sociology of his book *Roma da capitale a periferia* (1970 [“Rome, from the Center to the Periphery”]).

Ferrarotti's first American sojourn was a period of "seminal" experiences and ideas. When in 1953 he returned to Italy (he would continue to return to the United States, year after year, for lectures, debates, and brief periods of teaching at different universities: Columbia and NYU in particular, as well as at the Graduate Center of the New York City University (1971) where he became a good friend of Joseph Bensman; in 1974 at Boston University with Mike Ritter; later, at the New School for Social Research with Stanford M. Lyman and Arthur J. Vidich.

When he returned to Italy in 1953, Ferrarotti was more than ever convinced of the importance and necessity of an interaction, if not an integration, between the American empirical approach to sociology and the European systematic and theoretical approach, which, he thought, especially in Italy, risked losing sight of society as a whole. American social research, on the other hand, tended to be fragmented and purely descriptive. It often amounted to a mindless quantification of the qualitative (both Shils and Strauss agree with him on this subject). It was self-evident to Ferrarotti that if data do not speak for themselves, neither can pure concepts give an account of specific realities. Ferrarotti developed an ambitious project: he concerned himself completely with sociology (refusing offers to teach philosophy); moreover, he tried to expound a *critical sociology* based on concepts that are *operative*, that is, able to orient research and to offer empirical indicators, which would permit, as a final outcome, a sociology that is a conceptually oriented science of observation. This would retrieve and reflect on premonitions already present in the classics. In this view, for instance, Auguste Comte, far from being a crude factualist, had already outlined the importance of what he calls "the luminous guidance of theory."

Italy in the 1950s

Such a project was difficult to realize in a country like Italy, dominated by the Neo-Idealism embodied by Giovanni Gentile and Benedetto Croce who had refused to credit the social sciences. A Marxism of the Stalinist type, according to Ferrarotti, was symmetrical to this Neo-Idealism. Years later, an article entitled "Sociology in Italy: Problems and Perspectives," (see Raj P. Morgan and Arthur S. Wilke, editors, *International Handbook of Contemporary Developments in Sociology* Greenwood Press, Westport, CT 1994) Ferrarotti explained what caused the practical disappearance of "proto-sociology" from the Italian cultural panorama:

This prefascist sociology had been taught for years as a course material but not officially by university chairs in faculties of jurisprudence and medicine, in the guise, somewhat reductively, of criminology. . . .

It is too easy to attribute the weakening and the subsequent fall of and disappearance of the social sciences, especially sociology, to the "fascist dictatorship." In prefascist sociology there were weaknesses of method and substance.

These prevented effective resistance to Croce's "clarification," which was in many ways ignorant and unaware of modern scientific procedure. Certainly fascism, with its autarchy in the cultural sphere as well, favored that critique.¹

It was difficult to start on the road of recovery, to recreate *ex novo* sociological studies. But he had innovative ideas and a great desire to assert and disseminate them.

Back in Rome, he started again his work with Adriano Olivetti and the Movimento di Comunità ("Community Movement"). He taught at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," in various departments, also in Florence and elsewhere (For about twenty years his teaching activity was intense and at first unpaid; however, his name gradually became identified with the subject he was teaching: he is "Mister Sociology.")

He wrote for weekly and daily papers and various journals; traveled a great deal through Europe, Latin America, and India, where he secured working locations for Olivetti—a success owed to the fact that at Olivetti he had made clear the importance of the cooperation between industrial and community development. This entailed commitment to an idea of progress that does not require abrupt ruptures and the violent imposition of a new equilibrium: in that context the Community Movement was already vitally interested in ecology and in the balance of the ecosystem.

All the while, Ferrarotti continued to busy himself with politics and business problems, American trade unions, sociology as a science. In 1954 his *Il dilemma dei sindacati americani* was published and successfully received; a new enlarged edition entitled *Sindacato e potere negli Stati Uniti d'America* ("Trade Union and Power in the United States of America") was republished in 1961 in which he examined and discussed the opinions of the greatest British and American scholars who had confronted this theme, ranging from Harold Laski to Charles E. Lindblom and Selig Perlman. He polemicized with Laski and with the extreme American left, both Trotskyite and Stalinist, but also with whom-ever believed that looking for better adaptations was a fundamental task. According to Ferrarotti, the dissolution of the "American dream" as an individual solitary success was also due to the businesslike bent of the American trade unions. The dilemma, in his opinion, was between the collective bargaining and autonomous and direct political action. Later he would develop this theme in his *Sindacato Industria e Società* (1967 ["Trade Union, Industry, and Society"]).

Diplomat in Paris

In 1958 at the age of thirty-two, Ferrarotti was asked to become the Director of Social Research at the OECE (Organization for European Economic Cooperation) in Paris. During this period he worked with many of the most important figures in European social science like the sociologists Alain Touraine and Michel Crozier, the philosopher, and political scientist Raymond Aron, and the

British-German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, author of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959).

Also at this time, Ferrarotti wrote *La sociologia industriale in America e in Europa* (1950 ["Industrial Sociology in America and in Europe"]) and expounded the "theory of dynastic capitalism." In particular, he criticized the sad confusion between development and mere expansion, and severely criticized some of the attitudes of trade unions, both Italian and American. In his opinion they were limited in their initiative which rarely, if ever, reached an understanding of the productive system as a global reality. He further clarified his basic stand about sociology: it does not have to be formally unexceptionable and humanly irrelevant; instead, it should struggle to offer theoretical instruments able to encourage the autonomous action of the working class—that is, an essentially critical sociology. He vigorously polemicized with the dominant Italian Marxism which, tied to the Neo-Idealistic perspective, was unable to understand the problems of an agricultural society in transformation into an industrial one.

Deputy for the Movimento di Comunità

In October of 1959 Adriano Olivetti resigned from the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament; Ferrarotti left Paris and succeeded Olivetti at the Movimento di Comunità. As a deputy, he was an independent whose vote proved to be of significance (cfr. his *Nelle fumose stanze*, Guerini, Milan 2006), far greater than the effective influence of the Movimento di Comunità.²

He remained a deputy for five years, until the end of the third legislature (1958-1963). At that time he worked mostly on such subjects as trade unions, the European Common Market, and the economy, and occupied himself with the problems of the cities in Piedmont that had given their support to the Movimento di Comunità. Ferrarotti, whose vote on certain important occasions was crucial, had his taste of power. Later he would recount in his memoir *Nella fumostanz* ("Smoke-filled Rooms") how he was courted by experienced politicians, constantly engaged in building and rebuilding ever changing alliances and equilibriums. Politics was his great temptation: he moved dexterously within its sphere and obtained concrete results for both his constituency and for sociology. He was awarded the first chair.

The University Chair

For Ferrarotti, the years 1953 to 1963 were very intense, during which he lived five lives simultaneously: an industrial organizer, a consultant, a diplomat on an international level, a university professor, and a politician. In 1960, after a public competition, he was awarded the first university chair in sociology; moreover, he succeeded in establishing a "*laurea*" or advanced degree in sociol-

ogy at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," breaking new ground and paving the way for a faculty of sociology and related social sciences, notably cultural anthropology and social psychology, by the end of the 1960s.

On another level, Ferrarotti sparked original thought and exchanged ideas with all those he met. As often happens with innovators, he was not interested in solidifying his own academic position, nor did accept the "baronial" power of his position, that is to say, a purely personal power prerogative. Rather, thanks to him, a number of teaching positions in sociology became available in the universities where he taught, and far from aggregating to himself student numbers, he split his own chair to secure teaching positions for his younger colleagues. It was in fact a custom at the time to ask for a split when the number of students reached 250. It was an opportunity which most professors generally did not take, preferring to keep for themselves a high number of students. He refused to act this way probably because of his own autodidactic past and also because he wanted to strengthen sociology—to stimulate the renaissance of that same sociology that had existed in the nineteenth century but had been completely eradicated under Fascism. However tied those sociologists were to a theoretically unsophisticated proto-positivism—and therefore an easy target for Benedetto Croce—they were the sociologists Ferrarotti studied and appreciated in his lonely readings as a youth, when he became acquainted with Roberto Ardigò, Alfredo Niceforo, and others and the whole elitist school, namely, Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Roberto Michels.

In the degree course he designed he taught critical sociology, arguing against Crocian historicism, demanding studies that are closer to social reality (he remembered and emphasized the importance of fieldwork practiced in the United States). He fought a battle in the name of sociology but also in favor of other social sciences like cultural anthropology and ethnology, previously reduced by Croce to mere classificatory devices without cognitive value. He engaged in difficult polemics with Marxism, which drew on Hegelian thought and which, in his opinion, not only did not comprehend the necessity of a radical structural reform but also acquiesced in the formation of an oppressive and static bureaucracy: the state ownership of the means of production in socialist countries was not enough; on its own it could not be a guaranty, insisted Ferrarotti. He also challenged the legacy of Catholicism, which pervaded all of Italian life in spite of the drop in the number of believers who practiced the precepts of the Catholic church.

Choosing Academia

Those were years of great sacrifice and hard work for Ferrarotti. Years of continuous traveling throughout Italy, because of his work as a deputy on one hand and because of his university lectures on the other. In 1962 he began delivering lectures at the University of Trento, while continuing to teach sociology at

the universities of Rome and Florence. Furthermore, during the summer (1962), Ferrarotti was at Columbia University, in New York, as a visiting professor.

Between 1963 and 1965, after a discussion with Kurt Wolff at Brandeis University⁷ and Joseph Lopreato, at the time chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas, Austin, Ferrarotti began a series of researches in Rome on how citizens experience power—power as it was seen from below. It was a research that he would replicate in 1974 and 1975. Immediately after, he conducted other research for the Italian Senate on the Sicilian Mafia, eventually in 1978 as *Rapporto sulla mafia: da costume locale a problema dello sviluppo nazionale* ("Report on the Mafia: From Local Custom to the Problem of National Development"). He was also invited by Dr. Ralph Tyler as a Fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California (1964-1965), where he renewed his friendship with Robert K. Merton, Talcott Parsons, Percy Tannenbaum, Stanley Hoffman, Nelson Polsby, and Fred Greenstein.

He finally chose to leave politics and its seductions in order to devote himself completely to teaching and writing. This decision was a response, on one hand, to his characteristic life-long yearning for a purely intellectual life and, on the other, to his profound understanding that politics implied certain compromises, that eventually he would either have to adhere to a party or represent the interests of the Olivetti family for which Adriano's death had posed an end to his sociopolitical project.

By the end of the 1960s, the Institute he created, initially sustained by his single professorship, became a gathering place for scholars from many different disciplines and engaged in various theoretical debates: the number of sociologists had multiplied, as well as philosophers, social psychologists, and anthropologists. The interdisciplinary approach had always been one of the cornerstones of Ferrarotti's teaching style as well as of his numerous academic activities. This is evident in the journal *La Critica Sociologica* ("Sociological Critique"), which was founded in 1967 and under his editorship. The journal was created and developed with the intention of focusing attention on politics and social problems, as well as the interdisciplinary debate. It was not, nor was it intended to become, a purely academic venture.

The Limits of the Survey Method

At this time Ferrarotti developed a strong impatience with the survey method as the primary instrument of social research, protesting the impossibility of explaining popular movements by means of rigid questionnaires, with both questions and answers preprogrammed and distributed to a stratified sample. His Roman research, partly incorporated in *Roma da capitale a periferia*, and subsequently in his *Vite di baraccati* (1974 ["The Lives of the Shantytown-Dwellers"]) and in *Vite di periferia* (1981 ["Lives on the Periphery"]) confirmed

the importance of the biographical approach—of the interview conceived as an interaction experience between “researcher” and “researched,” as *co-research*. In addition it pointed to and highlighted many difficulties and theoretical implications. In 1974, during an advanced sociology course at Boston University, he expounded the qualitative approach, insisting on its value to sociology in particular and to the social sciences in general. Daniel Bertaux, who would become one of the founders of the research committee *Biography and Society* of the ISA (International Sociological Association) was one of his students.

The years following 1968 were a time of intense research and publishing. There were colleagues who considered him too close to the student protest movements and to Marxism (for example, Mike Miller, the chairman of the Department of Sociology at Boston University, and Alvin W. Gouldner, author of *The Two Marxisms*, among many others). Ferrarotti declared his interest in the sociological roots of the body of Marxian research; he did not refrain from criticizing those Marxists who made a parasitic living on the legacy of Marx, without any capacity for renewal. He was also the target of heavy attacks by Soviet scholars, especially S. A. Efirov, a member of the Moscow Academy of Sciences (1975). Documents concerning this debate can be found in *La Critica Sociologica* and the review *Slavia*.

Research Themes

Power and its Components

In the 1980s his research on “power from beneath” came out in three volumes. Ferdinando Di Orio, professor of statistics and later a senator, worked out the sampling; Luigi Frudà, currently Director of the Department of Sociology and Communications at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” and I were responsible for the coordination of the students, the pretesting of the questionnaire, and so on. It was one of the last large-scale surveys based on a wide stratified sample. The research included important basic interrogatives: Who held power? Who were the recipients of the decisions taken at the top levels? One of the most interesting and controversial results that emerged both from the 1964 research and its later replica, was that power, rather than a rational intersubjective function was actually perceived as a personalization of roles. In other words, the individual counted more than the function. This tendency was present to a higher degree in the more marginalized groups. Those who, on the other hand, had a higher educational level and were younger, identified the individuals who possessed the greatest power as holders of economic and financial means of subsistence and career opportunities.

Drug Addiction

Ferrarotti investigated the subject of drug use among young people (*Giovani e droga*, 1977 [Youth and Drugs]) by gathering the life histories of some fifty young drug addicts, male and female. These were histories of great impact, delineating a phenomenon that crossed all social classes.

Religious Beliefs and Faith without Dogma

He was also interested in religious belief and devoted a number of books to the subject, among them *Il paradosso del sacro* (1983) and *Una teologia per atei* (1983).³ Was theology possible for self-professed atheists? What were the aspects of the sacred in the second half of the twentieth century, which according to some well-known sociologists, was becoming more and more secularized? Could secularization and the research on the sacred coexist? These were some of the questions that Ferrarotti posed in those writings. See also *Faith without Dogma* (Transaction Books, New Brunswick 1993).

Violence

He was always interested in and critical of formulations of violence as an aesthetic experience and as history's "midwife." In *Alle radici della violenza* (1979 ["At the Roots of Violence"]), Ferrarotti faced the subject of violence as an *historical fact*; that is, not as an unavoidable fate due to biological instincts to which one must submit but rather as a harsh and alarming symptom of institutional deficiencies that should be studied and understood, and for which remedies must be sought. It was necessary to confront these phenomena with reason: what types of violence do we know? Why do these violent acts take place? What are their main characteristics? How does one isolate terrorists? Certainly, he explained, in his *L'ipnosi della violenza* (1980 ["The Hypnosis of Violence"]), violence had its appeal. Therefore, an analysis of a socioeconomic and political type, conjoined with an in-depth study of the cultural climate and intellectual attitudes which have favored and continue to favor the development of violence, was indispensable. The responsibility of the intellectuals, all too eager to withdraw themselves solipsistically or, on the contrary, to advocate violence without stopping to analyze its causes or to suggest possible remedies for structural deficiencies, must be clarified. Common violence did exist, but there was also a violence endowed with significance and objective scope, violence of a political character, which demanded rational understanding. On the other hand, there was also a culture that justified and made violence attractive.

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach, which in the 1990s began to occupy a dominant place in Ferrarotti's thought, had already surfaced in many of his previous works, beginning with, for examples, the Roman researches, and most impor-

tantly in the *Vite di baraccati* and *Vite di periferia*. The former study registered conversations with a woman from a Roman working-class suburb. These recorded conversations were extended to whomever passed by and paused, curious to see what was happening, remaining to participate in the conversation for a while. In the end however, the book focused on one main interlocutor, a female sex-worker from the suburbs. In the transcription, the researcher's questions were inserted in between in parenthesis: it appeared that the woman's discourse was deemed more important than the academic's questions. Only later on would Ferrarotti and his closest colleagues and collaborators begin to recognize the importance of the interview "in two," an interview that would have a different meaning with a different interlocutor. Various narratives around two Roman neighborhoods were reported in *Vite in periferia*: Magliana, which was constructed on contaminated land below the level of the Tiber, was a neighborhood to which the *borgatari* (inhabitants of the borgate, the Roman working-class suburbs) from the Prato Rotondo were moved, and the Valle dell'Inferno ("The Valley of Hell"). According to different etymologies this name originated from the harsh winter cold and humidity of the place, or from the fact that soldiers under Charles V, on their way to invade Rome in the sixteenth century, had passed through the area and left behind infernal destruction and massacre. More recently, in the first part of twentieth century, another etymological layer was added; indeed, the zone was notorious for the black smoke which could be seen daily coming from the chimneys of its many furnaces: here the countless bricks that were used to construct the buildings of Rome were manufactured. In this case, the intention was to present the interviews exactly in the way they had been spoken, with all the pauses and repetitions, the numerous interjections that denoted difficulties in finding answers or embarrassments. It was a text written for amateurs, not an easy reading: in the future he would edit the text (of course, indicating the nature of the interventions) in order to make it enjoyable and readable.

Even the study *Giovani e droga* was enriched with life histories. But in 1981, with *Storia e storie di vita* ("History and Life History") Ferrarotti dealt with the theoretical and epistemological difficulties brought about by this approach. It was a text that problematized and reflected on the theoretical foundations of the qualitative approach and that opened a dialogue with a certain type of history (think of "oral history" and of the role that memories and autobiographical memories have in regard to it). (He would return to the same theme, but from a different perspective, in *Il ricordo e la temporalità* [1990] that came out in the United States in the same year with the title *Time, Memory and Society*.⁴ He would complete this trilogy dedicated to a reflection on the theoretical foundations of the qualitative approach with *La storia e il quotidiano* (1986 ["History and the Everyday"]).

Ferrarotti was fully aware of the difficulties of this approach. It implied knowledge not as private capital but rather conceived of research as participa-

tion, knowledge as co-research. In this regard, he had dedicated passages of this work to Kurt H. Wolff's concept of "surrender-and-catch."

In fact, the qualitative approach required the researcher's total involvement; it implied, at the moment of narration, the suspension of the researcher's own theoretical knowledge. Everything can be relevant, pertinent, even silences or, for instance, reluctance in confronting cultural themes. Erring in the historical-temporal reconstruction is pertinent and could open doors to interpretative choices, implied meanings, not necessarily and immediately clear to the *narrator* himself or herself. Rather than research, Ferrarotti claimed, it was co-research.

"Co-research" referred to the fact that already in the preliminary phase of establishing rapport, when motivations for the research, the modalities of conducting it, and the objectives are explained, and then after the various hours which biographical narration demands, a particular type of dialogue begins to form itself between the researcher and the narrator. It is an unrepeatable process that involves both subjects because what is spoken would not be the same with a different interlocutor. Moreover, the researcher is interrogated by the narration itself, his interlocutor could question him, could ask his opinion. The narrator could evaluate his levels of attention, his involvement. Then, he must try to overcome such states of mind, the sensation of being "captured." He must look for and take advantage of his sensibilities and culture, and adopt the conceptual frameworks he is accustomed to: the interviewee does not always accept the type of interpretation given to him. Even misunderstandings might happen, caused by diverging needs and levels of maturity. What I see today in a particular way does not necessarily correspond to what I will feel tomorrow: a narrator might have a reaction of disbelief at hearing her spoken word, although it is absolutely loyal to her previous oral discourse, because she had cancelled the recollection of what she had said, or simply had not weighted well the effects of her narrative abandon during the registration.

Ferrarotti insisted on the importance of contextualizing the spoken word, which never occurs in a social vacuum. He insisted on the connection between text and context which we separate for heuristic reasons, but which are closely interconnected. He insisted on the philosophical roots of the qualitative analysis, which questions subjects such as memory, the relationship between single and group memory, or the attempt to make group memories converge with social memory. In the end, it was a type of analysis which demanded a convergence of many capabilities, of many points of view, which risked being impoverished if one did not keep in mind the contribution of social psychology, oral history, philosophy, and so on. Ferrarotti focused on the existence of irrational behavior, the region of irrationality, since it dealt with the concrete behavior of men and women. It was a subject that could not be understood in its scope with sterile quantification and measurement.

Some of his writings from the 1980s onwards were published in the United States under the title *On the Science of Uncertainty: The Biographical Method*

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of the biographical method has also taken on a second, much more sophisticated, form. This is the reduction of biography to a simple social "file history" usable as an *example*, a *case*, or an *illustration* within an interpretation situated on a higher level of abstraction.⁷

Yet, despite risks of this type, Ferrarotti set out to tackle this epistemological challenge:

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Immigrants: Encounter among Cultures

Around 1980 an epochal change began to take place in Italy with the arrival of immigrants of diverse provenance. Mostly young males in search of autonomous work, predominantly Muslim, as a rule, they originated from North Africa. Women too came on their own, not merely following the footsteps of male family members. These independent women came mostly from the Philippines, Cape Verde and Latin America and they came alone. By religion, they were Catholic and were employed as domestic laborers. Upon arrival, they were seemingly more fortunate than the men because they did not have to struggle to resolve a housing situation, nor did they have to preoccupy themselves with is-

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However, throughout the eighties, the immigrant phenomenon became ever more visible, while the need for Italians to emigrate for work reasons declined. Ferrarotti was among the first social scientists to perceive and become interested in this phenomenon. The Municipality of Rome entrusted him with extensive research on the subject (more than eight hundred interviewees). The immigrants released interviews that painted an unflattering picture of Italians as employers: many of the immigrants did not have work papers and worked illegally, with salaries considerably below those of Italians. Many lived in a single room that they shared with more than one other person, a room they rented at a high price. For a long while, the representatives from the Municipality's Office of Studies hesitated and shelved the results of the research for several years before publishing them, although they were very much aware of the extreme significance of the research which was to change radically Italian society. However Ferrarotti remained loyal to what was to become his way of working: along with fieldwork he studied the theoretical presuppositions of the encounter between two cultures and communicated his position early on with a book entitled *Oltre il razzismo* (1988 ["Beyond Racism"]).

Moreover, he published many texts in which he discussed this argument thoroughly, referring to other times and cultures, for example in *L'enigma di Alessandro: Incontri fra culture e progresso civile* (2000 ["Alexander's Enigma: The Encounters between Cultures and Civil Progress"]). There he argued that we could still derive today from Alexander the Great's adventure an important lesson in appreciating differences, in overcoming racist temptations, and, most importantly, in the possibility of reaching a cultural cotradition. All this was based on the hypothesis that it was possible to pass from a concept of culture intended exclusively as a normative term to a wider, less hierarchically determined conception of culture, which did not solely encompass art and elite noble values, but which also included everyday practices. This required a history that was not exclusively focussed on ruling upper classes but that included those lower on the social pyramid and at the bottom.

He returned once again to these themes in *La convivenza delle culture: Un'alternativa alla logica degli opposti fondamentalismi* (2003 ["The Cohabitation of Cultures: An Alternative to the Logic of Opposing Fundamentalisms"]). There he underlined the need to pass from old imperial cultures to collaboration between cultures, overcoming poorly disguised feelings of pride and pushing the limits of the concept of ethnicity: all suggestions for possible peaceful development. In this sense he put forth the theme of the Mediterranean, the sea that had

These prevented effective resistance to Croce's "clarification," which was in many ways ignorant and unaware of modern scientific procedure. Certainly fascism, with its autarchy in the cultural sphere as well, favored that critique.¹

It was difficult to start on the road of recovery, to recreate *ex novo* sociological studies. But he had innovative ideas and a great desire to assert and disseminate them.

Back in Rome, he started again his work with Adriano Olivetti and the Movimento di Comunità ("Community Movement"). He taught at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," in various departments, also in Florence and elsewhere (For about twenty years his teaching activity was intense and at first unpaid; however, his name gradually became identified with the subject he was teaching: he is "Mister Sociology.")

He wrote for weekly and daily papers and various journals; traveled a great deal through Europe, Latin America, and India, where he secured working locations for Olivetti—a success owed to the fact that at Olivetti he had made clear the importance of the cooperation between industrial and community development. This entailed commitment to an idea of progress that does not require abrupt ruptures and the violent imposition of a new equilibrium: in that context the Community Movement was already vitally interested in ecology and in the balance of the ecosystem.

All the while, Ferrarotti continued to busy himself with politics and business problems, American trade unions, sociology as a science. In 1954 his *Il dilemma dei sindacati americani* was published and successfully received; a new enlarged edition entitled *Sindacato e potere negli Stati Uniti d'America* ("Trade Union and Power in the United States of America") was republished in 1961 in which he examined and discussed the opinions of the greatest British and American scholars who had confronted this theme, ranging from Harold Laski to Charles E. Lindblom and Selig Perlman. He polemicized with Laski and with the extreme American left, both Trotskyite and Stalinist, but also with whom-ever believed that looking for better adaptations was a fundamental task. According to Ferrarotti, the dissolution of the "American dream" as an individual solitary success was also due to the businesslike bent of the American trade unions. The dilemma, in his opinion, was between the collective bargaining and autonomous and direct political action. Later he would develop this theme in his *Sindacato Industria e Società* (1967 ["Trade Union, Industry, and Society"]).

Diplomat in Paris

In 1958 at the age of thirty-two, Ferrarotti was asked to become the Director of Social Research at the OECE (Organization for European Economic Cooperation) in Paris. During this period he worked with many of the most important figures in European social science like the sociologists Alain Touraine and Michel Crozier, the philosopher, and political scientist Raymond Aron, and the

British-German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, author of *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (1959).

Also at this time, Ferrarotti wrote *La sociologia industriale in America e in Europa* (1950 ["Industrial Sociology in America and in Europe"]) and expounded the "theory of dynastic capitalism." In particular, he criticized the sad confusion between development and mere expansion, and severely criticized some of the attitudes of trade unions, both Italian and American. In his opinion they were limited in their initiative which rarely, if ever, reached an understanding of the productive system as a global reality. He further clarified his basic stand about sociology: it does not have to be formally unexceptionable and humanly irrelevant; instead, it should struggle to offer theoretical instruments able to encourage the autonomous action of the working class—that is, an essentially critical sociology. He vigorously polemicized with the dominant Italian Marxism which, tied to the Neo-Idealistic perspective, was unable to understand the problems of an agricultural society in transformation into an industrial one.

Deputy for the Movimento di Comunità

In October of 1959 Adriano Olivetti resigned from the Chamber of Deputies of the Italian Parliament; Ferrarotti left Paris and succeeded Olivetti at the Movimento di Comunità. As a deputy, he was an independent whose vote proved to be of significance (cfr. his *Nelle fumose stanze*, Guerini, Milan 2006), far greater than the effective influence of the Movimento di Comunità.²

He remained a deputy for five years, until the end of the third legislature (1958-1963). At that time he worked mostly on such subjects as trade unions, the European Common Market, and the economy, and occupied himself with the problems of the cities in Piedmont that had given their support to the Movimento di Comunità. Ferrarotti, whose vote on certain important occasions was crucial, had his taste of power. Later he would recount in his memoir *Nella humostanz* ("Smoke-filled Rooms") how he was courted by experienced politicians, constantly engaged in building and rebuilding ever changing alliances and equilibriums. Politics was his great temptation: he moved dexterously within its sphere and obtained concrete results for both his constituency and for sociology. He was awarded the first chair.

The University Chair

For Ferrarotti, the years 1953 to 1963 were very intense, during which he lived five lives simultaneously: an industrial organizer, a consultant, a diplomat on an international level, a university professor, and a politician. In 1960, after a public competition, he was awarded the first university chair in sociology; moreover, he succeeded in establishing a "*laurea*" or advanced degree in sociol-

ogy at the University of Rome "La Sapienza," breaking new ground and paving the way for a faculty of sociology and related social sciences, notably cultural anthropology and social psychology, by the end of the 1960s.

On another level, Ferrarotti sparked original thought and exchanged ideas with all those he met. As often happens with innovators, he was not interested in solidifying his own academic position, nor did accept the "baronial" power of his position, that is to say, a purely personal power prerogative. Rather, thanks to him, a number of teaching positions in sociology became available in the universities where he taught, and far from aggregating to himself student numbers, he split his own chair to secure teaching positions for his younger colleagues. It was in fact a custom at the time to ask for a split when the number of students reached 250. It was an opportunity which most professors generally did not take, preferring to keep for themselves a high number of students. He refused to act this way probably because of his own autodidactic past and also because he wanted to strengthen sociology—to stimulate the renascence of that same sociology that had existed in the nineteenth century but had been completely eradicated under Fascism. However tied those sociologists were to a theoretically unsophisticated proto-positivism—and therefore an easy target for Benedetto Croce—they were the sociologists Ferrarotti studied and appreciated in his lonely readings as a youth, when he became acquainted with Roberto Ardigò, Alfredo Niceforo, and others and the whole elitist school, namely, Gaetano Mosca, Vilfredo Pareto, and Roberto Michels.

In the degree course he designed he taught critical sociology, arguing against Crocian historicism, demanding studies that are closer to social reality (he remembered and emphasized the importance of fieldwork practiced in the United States). He fought a battle in the name of sociology but also in favor of other social sciences like cultural anthropology and ethnology, previously reduced by Croce to mere classificatory devices without cognitive value. He engaged in difficult polemics with Marxism, which drew on Hegelian thought and which, in his opinion, not only did not comprehend the necessity of a radical structural reform but also acquiesced in the formation of an oppressive and static bureaucracy: the state ownership of the means of production in socialist countries was not enough; on its own it could not be a guaranty, insisted Ferrarotti. He also challenged the legacy of Catholicism, which pervaded all of Italian life in spite of the drop in the number of believers who practiced the precepts of the Catholic church.

Choosing Academia

Those were years of great sacrifice and hard work for Ferrarotti. Years of continuous traveling throughout Italy, because of his work as a deputy on one hand and because of his university lectures on the other. In 1962 he began delivering lectures at the University of Trento, while continuing to teach sociology at

the universities of Rome and Florence. Furthermore, during the summer (1962), Ferrarotti was at Columbia University, in New York, as a visiting professor.

Between 1963 and 1965, after a discussion with Kurt Wolff at Brandeis University and Joseph Lopreato, at the time chair of the Department of Sociology at the University of Texas, Austin, Ferrarotti began a series of researches in Rome on how citizens experience power—power as it was seen from below. It was a research that he would replicate in 1974 and 1975. Immediately after, he conducted other research for the Italian Senate on the Sicilian Mafia, eventually in 1978 as *Rapporto sulla mafia: da costume locale a problema dello sviluppo nazionale* ("Report on the Mafia: From Local Custom to the Problem of National Development"). He was also invited by Dr. Ralph Tyler as a Fellow at the Center for the Advanced Study in the Behavioral Sciences in Palo Alto, California (1964-1965), where he renewed his friendship with Robert K. Merton, Talcott Parsons, Percy Tannenbaum, Stanley Hoffman, Nelson Polsby, and Fred Greenstein.

He finally chose to leave politics and its seductions in order to devote himself completely to teaching and writing. This decision was a response, on one hand, to his characteristic life-long yearning for a purely intellectual life and, on the other, to his profound understanding that politics implied certain compromises, that eventually he would either have to adhere to a party or represent the interests of the Olivetti family for which Adriano's death had posed an end to his sociopolitical project.

By the end of the 1960s, the Institute he created, initially sustained by his single professorship, became a gathering place for scholars from many different disciplines and engaged in various theoretical debates: the number of sociologists had multiplied, as well as philosophers, social psychologists, and anthropologists. The interdisciplinary approach had always been one of the cornerstones of Ferrarotti's teaching style as well as of his numerous academic activities. This is evident in the journal *La Critica Sociologica* ("Sociological Critique"), which was founded in 1967 and under his editorship. The journal was created and developed with the intention of focusing attention on politics and social problems, as well as the interdisciplinary debate. It was not, nor was it intended to become, a purely academic venture.

The Limits of the Survey Method

At this time Ferrarotti developed a strong impatience with the survey method as the primary instrument of social research, protesting the impossibility of explaining popular movements by means of rigid questionnaires, with both questions and answers preprogrammed and distributed to a stratified sample. His Roman research, partly incorporated in *Roma da capitale a periferia*, and subsequently in his *Vite di baraccati* (1974 ["The Lives of the Shantytown-Dwellers"]) and in *Vite di periferia* (1981 ["Lives on the Periphery"]) confirmed

the importance of the biographical approach—of the interview conceived as an interaction experience between “researcher” and “researched,” as *co-research*. In addition it pointed to and highlighted many difficulties and theoretical implications. In 1974, during an advanced sociology course at Boston University, he expounded the qualitative approach, insisting on its value to sociology in particular and to the social sciences in general. Daniel Bertaux, who would become one of the founders of the research committee *Biography and Society* of the ISA (International Sociological Association) was one of his students.

The years following 1968 were a time of intense research and publishing. There were colleagues who considered him too close to the student protest movements and to Marxism (for example, Mike Miller, the chairman of the Department of Sociology at Boston University, and Alvin W. Gouldner, author of *The Two Marxisms*, among many others). Ferrarotti declared his interest in the sociological roots of the body of Marxian research; he did not refrain from criticizing those Marxists who made a parasitic living on the legacy of Marx, without any capacity for renewal. He was also the target of heavy attacks by Soviet scholars, especially S. A. Efirov, a member of the Moscow Academy of Sciences (1975). Documents concerning this debate can be found in *La Critica Sociologica* and the review *Slavia*.

Research Themes

Power and its Components

In the 1980s his research on “power from beneath” came out in three volumes. Ferdinando Di Orio, professor of statistics and later a senator, worked out the sampling; Luigi Frudà, currently Director of the Department of Sociology and Communications at the University of Rome “La Sapienza,” and I were responsible for the coordination of the students, the pretesting of the questionnaire, and so on. It was one of the last large-scale surveys based on a wide stratified sample. The research included important basic interrogatives: Who held power? Who were the recipients of the decisions taken at the top levels? One of the most interesting and controversial results that emerged both from the 1964 research and its later replica, was that power, rather than a rational intersubjective function was actually perceived as a personalization of roles. In other words, the individual counted more than the function. This tendency was present to a higher degree in the more marginalized groups. Those who, on the other hand, had a higher educational level and were younger, identified the individuals who possessed the greatest power as holders of economic and financial means of subsistence and career opportunities.

Drug Addiction

Ferrarotti investigated the subject of drug use among young people (*Giovani e droga*, 1977 [Youth and Drugs]) by gathering the life histories of some fifty young drug addicts, male and female. These were histories of great impact, delineating a phenomenon that crossed all social classes.

Religious Beliefs and Faith without Dogma

He was also interested in religious belief and devoted a number of books to the subject, among them *Il paradosso del sacro* (1983) and *Una teologia per atei* (1983).³ Was theology possible for self-professed atheists? What were the aspects of the sacred in the second half of the twentieth century, which according to some well-known sociologists, was becoming more and more secularized? Could secularization and the research on the sacred coexist? These were some of the questions that Ferrarotti posed in those writings. See also *Faith without Dogma* (Transaction Books, New Brunswick 1993).

Violence

He was always interested in and critical of formulations of violence as an aesthetic experience and as history's "midwife." In *Alle radici della violenza* (1979 ["At the Roots of Violence"]), Ferrarotti faced the subject of violence as an *historical fact*; that is, not as an unavoidable fate due to biological instincts to which one must submit but rather as a harsh and alarming symptom of institutional deficiencies that should be studied and understood, and for which remedies must be sought. It was necessary to confront these phenomena with reason: what types of violence do we know? Why do these violent acts take place? What are their main characteristics? How does one isolate terrorists? Certainly, he explained, in his *L'ipnosi della violenza* (1980 ["The Hypnosis of Violence"]), violence had its appeal. Therefore, an analysis of a socioeconomic and political type, conjoined with an in-depth study of the cultural climate and intellectual attitudes which have favored and continue to favor the development of violence, was indispensable. The responsibility of the intellectuals, all too eager to withdraw themselves solipsistically or, on the contrary, to advocate violence without stopping to analyze its causes or to suggest possible remedies for structural deficiencies, must be clarified. Common violence did exist, but there was also a violence endowed with significance and objective scope, violence of a political character, which demanded rational understanding. On the other hand, there was also a culture that justified and made violence attractive.

The Qualitative Approach

The qualitative approach, which in the 1990s began to occupy a dominant place in Ferrarotti's thought, had already surfaced in many of his previous works, beginning with, for examples, the Roman researches, and most impor-

tantly in the *Vite di baraccati* and *Vite di periferia*. The former study registered conversations with a woman from a Roman working-class suburb. These recorded conversations were extended to whomever passed by and paused, curious to see what was happening, remaining to participate in the conversation for a while. In the end however, the book focused on one main interlocutor, a female sex-worker from the suburbs. In the transcription, the researcher's questions were inserted in between in parenthesis: it appeared that the woman's discourse was deemed more important than the academic's questions. Only later on would Ferrarotti and his closest colleagues and collaborators begin to recognize the importance of the interview "in two," an interview that would have a different meaning with a different interlocutor. Various narratives around two Roman neighborhoods were reported in *Vite in periferia*: Magliana, which was constructed on contaminated land below the level of the Tiber, was a neighborhood to which the *borgatari* (inhabitants of the borgate, the Roman working-class suburbs) from the Prato Rotondo were moved, and the Valle dell'Inferno ("The Valley of Hell"). According to different etymologies this name originated from the harsh winter cold and humidity of the place, or from the fact that soldiers under Charles V, on their way to invade Rome in the sixteenth century, had passed through the area and left behind infernal destruction and massacre. More recently, in the first part of twentieth century, another etymological layer was added; indeed, the zone was notorious for the black smoke which could be seen daily coming from the chimneys of its many furnaces: here the countless bricks that were used to construct the buildings of Rome were manufactured. In this case, the intention was to present the interviews exactly in the way they had been spoken, with all the pauses and repetitions, the numerous interjections that denoted difficulties in finding answers or embarrassments. It was a text written for amateurs, not an easy reading: in the future he would edit the text (of course, indicating the nature of the interventions) in order to make it enjoyable and readable.

Even the study *Giovani e droga* was enriched with life histories. But in 1981, with *Storia e storie di vita* ("History and Life History") Ferrarotti dealt with the theoretical and epistemological difficulties brought about by this approach. It was a text that problematized and reflected on the theoretical foundations of the qualitative approach and that opened a dialogue with a certain type of history (think of "oral history" and of the role that memories and autobiographical memories have in regard to it). (He would return to the same theme, but from a different perspective, in *Il ricordo e la temporalità* [1990] that came out in the United States in the same year with the title *Time, Memory and Society*.⁴ He would complete this trilogy dedicated to a reflection on the theoretical foundations of the qualitative approach with *La storia e il quotidiano* (1986 ["History and the Everyday"]).

Ferrarotti was fully aware of the difficulties of this approach. It implied knowledge not as private capital but rather conceived of research as participa-

tion, knowledge as co-research. In this regard, he had dedicated passages of this work to Kurt H. Wolff's concept of "surrender-and-catch."

In fact, the qualitative approach required the researcher's total involvement; it implied, at the moment of narration, the suspension of the researcher's own theoretical knowledge. Everything can be relevant, pertinent, even silences or, for instance, reluctance in confronting cultural themes. Erring in the historical-temporal reconstruction is pertinent and could open doors to interpretative choices, implied meanings, not necessarily and immediately clear to the *narrator* himself or herself. Rather than research, Ferrarotti claimed, it was co-research.

"Co-research" referred to the fact that already in the preliminary phase of establishing rapport, when motivations for the research, the modalities of conducting it, and the objectives are explained, and then after the various hours which biographical narration demands, a particular type of dialogue begins to form itself between the researcher and the narrator. It is an unrepeatable process that involves both subjects because what is spoken would not be the same with a different interlocutor. Moreover, the researcher is interrogated by the narration itself, his interlocutor could question him, could ask his opinion. The narrator could evaluate his levels of attention, his involvement. Then, he must try to overcome such states of mind, the sensation of being "captured." He must look for and take advantage of his sensibilities and culture, and adopt the conceptual frameworks he is accustomed to: the interviewee does not always accept the type of interpretation given to him. Even misunderstandings might happen, caused by diverging needs and levels of maturity. What I see today in a particular way does not necessarily correspond to what I will feel tomorrow: a narrator might have a reaction of disbelief at hearing her spoken word, although it is absolutely loyal to her previous oral discourse, because she had cancelled the recollection of what she had said, or simply had not weighted well the effects of her narrative abandon during the registration.

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acted as a bridge between different peoples, which had allowed contacts, confrontations, and cultural exchange. But he also took up and examined critically Arthur de Gobineau's and Oswald Spengler's thought, both diachronic theories of the historical development and the "religion" of progress. For Ferrarotti, the only way to avoid an ever more problematic and uncertain future is to seek confrontations between various positions—even if difficult, and often harsh—to bring about mutual enlightenment.

Meanwhile, he began distancing himself from the university.

Crisis on Campus

After such a long university career and a period of various activities, Ferrarotti started to take note of the changes within the academic world. He noticed first the eclipse of the figure of the university professor, once regarded with esteem, by students wishing to deepen their studies, who arrived at the university equipped with the basic knowledge acquired from classical studies in high school. The university professor found himself before a situation of constant decline.

Beginning in the 1980s, there was an increase in bureaucratic-formal work that absorbed a great part of the energies and attention of professors. This distracted from concentration on studies and uninterrupted writing. The Italian university had undoubtedly enlarged its bases, but without adequate investments.

So, for example, the library of the Faculty of Sociology and Communication Sciences (a new school formed in the wake of that of sociology) suffered profoundly from the limitations of space, storing its latest acquisitions in unopened boxes—a situation that still continues.

On account of the changes brought about by the student protests of 1968, the university was open to students of various and diverse high school backgrounds (previously the university was open only to the students who had attended the classical and scientific gymnasiums). However, no corresponding investment regarding the university structure and its professors had been made. Numbers of students are continually increasing without making adequate space available adequate space or sufficient classrooms. For years, university professors have been forced to sustain a very heavy teaching load (eight hundred to a thousand students), to holding lectures in places not equipped for lectures, very often in movie theaters. Widening the bases of access to the universities did not necessarily translate itself in the multiplication of learning situations. The average level of preparation has been decisively reduced, while university courses do not always succeed in bridging these gaps. A famous linguist, Tullio De Mauro, repeatedly sounded the alarm that present-day teenagers and young Italians are familiar with an extremely low number of words, compared to those of twenty and even ten years ago.

In this troubled university situation, however, sociology seems to be thriving, present as it now is, as a degree and as a faculty in all the main Italian universities. The university chairs, the departments, the degrees, as well as publications and sociology series have all multiplied. Behind this immense consolidation and success is, most certainly, the work of Franco Ferrarotti. However, as most innovators he does not have the virtues of a consolidator. He is not interested in raising a group of apprentices who will act as mediators between his thought and future generations: he had an endless number of students, but he had only a few advisees. He didn't leave behind an actual school of thought. For years (until retirement), he chaired the doctorate founded by him in Social Theory and Research. But I do not believe that he would know how to get in touch with many of those who have obtained the Doctorate under his direction. Before retiring as emeritus, the doctoral program was the last thing he remained attached to, and he chaired it until the end. He gave up the Directorship of the Institute a long time ago, and never wanted to enter into the debate regarding the management of new department. He was even less attracted by the idea of the presidency over the new School of Sociology, opened by one of his ex-assistants, who had graduated with him and had begun his university career with him, but who soon after dedicated himself to well-financed surveys and who had a conception of sociology as a convenient launching pad to power and money (an ex-assistant who had, at a one point, organized a meeting entitled "Against Qualitative Sociology"). At this university, Ferrarotti, accustomed to dedicating a certain number of hours a day to reading and writing, and uninterested in the small battles for power (he had at one time renounced political power) began to feel out of place in the last years.

Memoirs of an Outsider

Ferrarotti does not much like present-day sociology, divided and fragmented as it is, not in multiplicity of thought but in squabbles over various competitive projects. In his opinion, sociology has had too much success and so has lost its critical spirit, its real reason to be. At this point, Ferrarotti does not like being identified with the discipline. He does not like being stopped in the street and asked by passers-by whether he is the sociologist whose book he might have read, or more frequently, whose face he might have seen on television.

According to Ferrarotti, there exists an evident paradox: for the most part, he holds himself to be solitary, an outsider. Yet he is a person who early on attained the career he sought, or better, the many careers: in the field of industry, where he had become the consultant *ad personam* to the president of Olivetti; in politics he was elected as a deputy; in Paris he was a diplomat; in the university where he was the first professor of his field. Furthermore, he has received numerous awards for his works, even from the Municipality of Rome and the Italian state (The Ministry of Cultural Heritage and in 2005 from the President of

the Republic). In 2001 the Accademia dei Lincei, probably the most prestigious Italian cultural institution, awarded him a career achievement award.

He has presided over numerous panels. His presence has always been and continues to be in demand by intellectuals and politicians in various circumstances (he has refused many times offers to re-enter politics, at the national as well as the municipal level). He has given lectures and courses in prestigious European universities, from Spain to France to Germany, in the Middle East, Russia, and Japan, not to speak of the Brazilian and Mexican universities that have hosted him, as well as of the American universities as well. He was and continues to be in demand for interviews and opinions by Italian and foreign radio and television.

Present-Day Intellectual Development and Writings

Today Ferrarotti's feeling of estrangement has probably more to do with sociology and the academy than with other spheres. However, he never ceased his sociological writings. It is sufficient to recall his recent volumes *Il potere* (2004 ["Power"]) and *Il capitalismo* (2005 ["Capitalism"]), in which he questions power relations after the fall of the USSR and the end of the regimes of "real socialism," as well as the emerging role on the international scene of countries such as India and China. In this framework, capitalism comes to be a socially innovative and not subversive force, rich with contradictions. He examines the movement, by now universally recognized, of globalisation, which neither brings about the resolution of many existing and induced structural problems nor the end of underdevelopment. Rather, in this text Ferrarotti reintroduces, in the final part, an argument dear to him: the inability of capitalism to bring about integral human development (for which he had fought for as a youth, next to Adriano Olivetti). He denounces the irresponsible power of transnational capital and purely commercial globalization.

He still writes on topics of great social impact, as well as on current issues. However, lately he is increasingly interested in a different type of writing, perhaps more literary, more reader-friendly, demonstrating a vibrancy of style that has earned him praise from established writers. In this vein, it is important to recall a book published in 1991, *I grattacieli non hanno fogli: Flash americani* ("Skyscrapers Have No Leaves: American Flash"). This is not a systematic treatise on the United States but a series of quick portraits of crowded and insignificant cocktail parties, of some university campuses, of adventures on the New York subways, of ethnic restaurants, of heavy rains in Pennsylvania or in Indiana; of dizzying contradictions, of great promises like that of Kennedy's American dream of a New Deal. . . . One reviewer wrote that the book reads like a glass of frozen water drunk on a hot day, but, at the same time, it discusses topics of profound interest and significance.

Some years later, in 1998, he wrote, *Leggere, leggersi* ("To Read, to be Read"), where he speaks of the agony of the book at the end of the twentieth century and of his great love for books and for reading. In fact, his studio and his houses are overflowing with books that have unbelievably filled all of his shelves, have piled up on the floor, and been stacked on chairs, driving to desperation whoever must do the cleaning—a highly forbidden activity since it might damage precious volumes. Further, he maintains that dust is the powder of books. A little book, written in a particularly pleasing style and apparently simple, it actually questions our present-day media society. He argues that communication today is only about communicating and not about content. These are subjects that he has addressed in more academic essays like *La perfezione del nulla* (2000 ["The Perfection of Nothing"]) and *La televisione* (2005 ["Television"]). His vision remains a critical vision, interpreting television as a new and unique force capable, it is true, of posing itself as a factor of sociopolitical integration, but at a minimal level. It is a communication that, rather than communicating, engulfs. Today, at least in part, his interests turn back to their origins, to the time when he graduated in philosophy, and when he discussed his thesis with Nicola Abbagnano.

He also maintains relations of mutual esteem with poets and painters. He was friends with the sculptor Amerigo Toth and Alberto Sughi, one of the most important Italian painters of his generation, whose sketches, many in black and white, appear in Ferrarotti's second autobiographical volume *Le briciole di Epulone* (2005 ["The Crumbs of Epulone"]) in which the Italian countryside of the first decades of the nineteenth century takes center stage.

It is difficult to predict the direction of his future writings; given the multiplicity of his interests, many different hypotheses and directions are possible. He has already comprehensively explored the terrains of philosophy, of sociology, and communication. Who knows whether in the future he might not set out in a new direction?

In spite of the great variety and impressive volume of his published output, it is possible to detect an underlying continuity that lends the scientific work of Franco Ferrarotti a substantive coherence, beyond and against any accidental inconsistency or superficial incongruity. What to the unaware reader might seem extravagant, if not a mere *hors d'oeuvre*, is actually tied up and interwoven with deep-seated interests. In essence, these interests touch upon four major areas: the destiny of reason in a technically advanced society, and the related issue of formal versus substantive rationality; time and memory in the making of human history both as an elite initiative and as a history from beneath; the search for meaning and the emergence of violence as the breakup of interpersonal and institutional communication; the social production of the sacred, conceived as a basis for the construction of a human community and as an escape from an excessively market-conscious society in which all human relations are reduced to utilitarian exchange and therefore are at the same time tragically impoverished, if not simply cancelled out.

Essays on Society and Culture

The essays collected in this volume were selected so that each of the major topics of Ferrarotti's corpus are represented: the idea of a critical sociology, sociological methodologies, as well as substantive topics like immigration, social movements, forms of power, studies of Thorstein Veblen, and forms of belief and the sacred. The topics are presented under three main headings: "Old and New Modernities," on some of the major themes of classical and contemporary sociology; "Social Theories and Methodologies," covering essays on positivism, biographical methods of study, theories of secularization, and others; "Sacred and Secular Modalities," offering a selection of topics close to Ferrarotti like the recent history of the Catholic church and papacy, American culture, and the sociological significance of the photo and film.

To highlight some of the topics covered in Part I, we read Ferrarotti on Max Weber and are reminded that sociologists, as well as others in our sister disciplines, are still concerned with the central question in Weber's work: "the nature, direction, and future of the 'modern world.'" One of Weber's key ideas of modernity is captured in what he called the "disenchantment" of the world (the term Weber borrowed from Friedrich Schiller), a process originating in the search for salvation or the *certitude* of one's salvation that found expression in the Puritan talent for rationalized and duty-bound money-making; the living out of a rational work ethic had the effect, in time, of transforming the world into one of *total calculability*; traditionalism and its view of personal destiny as transcendent was replaced by a world where values, as with everything else, are construed as so many *human productions*. In this section, we also read Ferrarotti's account of the "countercultural movements" of the 1980s and 1990s, an essay that provides an extended reflection on modern rebellions as oppositions to power and, in many cases, the withdrawal of the self from "society," taking many forms, from transcendentalism's turn to the inner self, brimming with nature, to movements of the 1960s against the inauthentic capitalist culture of machines and material commodities. The principal argument here should not be passed over: modern social movements are principally, and especially today, *cultural* movements, attempts at a transvaluation of values. In fact, all of the essays in this section show us how today's modernities are, in many important respects, continuous with the classical period of nineteenth-century industrial capitalism. But Ferrarotti also indicates—in essays on violence, the city and urbanization, immigration, the new social movements—how today's modernities offer us new and distinct problems as well as possibilities, such as the extraordinary changes known under the rubric of "globalization."

In Part II, Ferrarotti examines the actual practices of sociologists and the *social character of their science of society*. As an enterprise, the work of social science is inextricably part of modernity itself, its rationalizing and relativizing features, which is why this section's opening essay on modern rationality and secularization quite appropriately opens these methodological discussions. Ra-

tionality, Ferrarotti argues, is an intersubjective discourse of a particular, in this case, sociological community. This preeminently social and historical idea of the "rational" allows Ferrarotti to view it as something both intersubjective and communicable, "ready to extend its own boundaries" and become part of *culture* to new collective experiences and social understandings.

Among the many related themes Ferrarotti examines in this section are the historical dimensions of sociological inquiries (sociology's objects are "objects in motion"); the lasting lessons of positivism, a call for a dispassionate look at a contentious methodology; a proposal for the uses of biographical texts as sociologically illuminating materials, for they provide us access to collective experiences and values, the "living thread and privileged object" of sociology. As Ferrarotti argues in *The Present State of Sociology in Italy*, "We must bring back to the very heart of the biographical method primary materials and their explosive subjectivity. . . . Every human life reveals itself through its less generalizable aspects as a vertical synthesis of a social history."⁹

In two recent books, *An Invitation to Classical Sociology* and *On the Science of Uncertainty*, Ferrarotti provides a critical foundation for linking what C. Wright Mills called "personal troubles of milieu" with "public issues." Yet he does so at a safe distance from a psychologistic dilution and a paleo-positivistic reification of social phenomena. In this respect, sociology regains its stature as an intrinsically critical and historical enterprise, one whose dynamic human subject defies easy and eternal classifications and methodologies. The tensions built into the idea of a human science—explanation and understanding, critical distance and engagement—neither frustrate nor defeat. They make for the continuing challenges and fascination of the sociological enterprise.

In the opening essay of Part III ("Sacred and Secular Modalities"), Ferrarotti examines the case of the Catholic Church in modern history. The extraordinary events of Vatican Council II and its democratizing proclamation of the church as a "People of God" bore the clear signs of an end to the centuries-old linking of church and political power ("empire"). Yet, did this remarkable revolution in the Catholic understanding and practice end with the papacy of Paul VI?

As is typical of Ferrarotti as social observer, the church's modern history cannot be evaluated merely from within nor without recourse to its broader context. Forces in the Catholic Church, such as those of critical theologians and curial bureaucracy, appear to be "on a collision path." But so are the groups and forces in many national, political, and cultural arenas in Europe and North America today: "This century is closing in the insidious mists of a general crisis of 'rationalistic rationality,' and the total dissolution of the nineteenth-century points of reference and orientation. . . . The entry into history of whole peoples excluded till now, or perhaps only seen as passive raw material to be converted and shaped according to European cultural models, shakes the supposed European primacy and raises fears . . ." (pp. 285-86). What better time than now and with so much at stake, for a critical sociology like Ferrarotti's to return us to