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## **Paolo Fabbri (17 April 1939 – 2 June 2020)**



Paolo Fabbri was very much a man of the word: in every sense of the term. He studied languages, speeches, images, media, and with them everything that human societies use to communicate and to give meaning to the world, to themselves and to others: gestures, clothes, tattoos, clothes, food, buildings, entire cities. So, he was a happy semiologist, a lover of the science of signs that he helped to devise. Thus, he gazed with amazement at those who, for academic interests abandon, semiotics to move on to something else. "Else? What else might be interesting?" he repeated with frowning irony. "The sense is everywhere; is that not enough?".

He was a man of his word also for that reason: he did not tolerate intellectual fashions (all those "isms" and those "post-s" that follow each other in cultural chronicles), unless the case was not about critical inquiry. And it was precisely this loyalty to his discipline that allowed him to attend

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– with immense curiosity – many other disciplines, from anthropology to linguistics, from sociology to art history, from philosophy to the theory of science.

Now we need to talk about Paolo Fabbri in the past tense, because he left us yesterday morning, in his home in Rimini, after a difficult illness. The loss is enormous, and it affects the whole of European culture, not to say planetary culture. In Italy, Fabbri taught in Bologna, Urbino, Palermo, Venice, Rome, Milan; but much of his research was carried out in Paris, where he followed the seminars of Lucien Goldmann and Roland Barthes from the early 1960s, and where he became the principal collaborator of Algirdas Greimas, his renowned master, from the early 1970s. He travelled extensively, for courses, congresses, seminars, lectures, from Latin America to Japan, from Australia to Canada and the United States. In the mid-1970s he was in California, where he collaborated with Erving Goffman and the ethnomethodologists. Yet his heart was in Paris, where he regularly conversed with the leading French intellectuals of the second half of the twentieth century, such as Jean Baudrillard, Jean-François Lyotard, Paul Virilio, Félix Guattari, Louis Marin, Isabelle Stengers, Bruno Latour, Francois Jullien, Michel Maffesoli. And that's how he eventually became Director of the Italian Institute of Culture in Paris in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, also in Italy the dialogue with the main contemporary writers and thinkers was very dense: he was a close friend of Italo Calvino, Luciano Berio, Nanni Balestrini, Alberto Abruzzese, Valerio Adami and, of course, Umberto Eco. The latter, moreover, inserted Fabbri as a character *The Name of the Rose*, calling him Paul of Rimini and giving him the epithet of *Abbas agapheicus* because of his atavistic reluctance in writing.

Fabbri, it is true, was best known for his oral teaching rather than his writing: he was a very skilled lecturer, an amiable conversationalist but, above all, a great professor, and this is well known among the hundreds of his students around the world. His preference for the spoken word did not prevent him from publishing many essays, articles, prefaces, translations, etc., as well as a number of books, which now constitute his strongest legacy. Among them, *The Semiotic Turn* (1989), *Praise of Babel* (2000), *Signs of Time* (2003), *Semiotic Efficacy* (2017), *Under the Sign of Federico Fellini* (2019) will be remembered. For his 81<sup>st</sup> birthday, just a month ago, *Seeing Artfully (Vedere ad Arte)*, a collection of his writings on contemporary art, was published.

We're going to miss him.

Gianfranco Marrone