

Semioethics, subjectivity and communication.

For the humanism of otherness^{*}

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Global communication, otherness and semioethics

The capitalistic system in its current phase of development may be characterised in terms of world communication, where reference is to both the extension of communication over the whole planet and to the fact that communication today corresponds perfectly to the real world, to the world as it is. The capitalist system today may also be characterised in terms of globalisation with reference to the fact that communication-production is omniscient and pervades life in its entirety over the whole planet, and not just specifically human life. Described in such terms the capitalist system calls for a perspective on existence that is just as globalised. And while the special sciences taken separately are not in a position to furnish such a perspective, a general science of signs or general semiotics is. However, this does not necessarily imply that semiotics today is ready to take on the task – indeed, from this point of view, it would seem that there is still a long way to go.

Semiotic theory and communication models that analyze communication without keeping account of communication as a worldwide and global phenomenon propose an analysis of communication that is reductive and inadequate, that is, shortsighted and outdated with respect to this historically new event called global communication.

As global semiotics, general semiotics today must carry out a detotalizing function. In other words general semiotics must present itself as a critique of all (claims to the status of) totalities, including world and global communication – a task which should have top priority among critics. If the critical and detotalizing dimension is lacking, general semiotics will prove to be no more than a mere juxtaposition to the special semiotics, a syncretic result of the latter, a transversal language of the encyclopaedia of the unified sciences, prevarication of philosophy suffering from the will to

omniscience with respect to the plurality of different disciplines and specialized fields of knowledge.

What we are proposing to call 'semioethics' must begin from the current phase in historico-social development and proceed to analyze today's society, contemporaneity, rigorously and critically, therefore, today's communication-production social structures, the communication-production relationships forming today's social world. And given that social forms of production in today's system of communication-production have been homogenized to a high degree, semioethics is at an advantage. Indeed, we could make the claim that the whole planet is regulated by a single type of market, by a single form of production, by a single form of consumption so that not only behavior, habits, fashions (including 'dress fashion'), but the imaginary, our capacity for the play of musement even have all been homogenized to a severe degree. We could make the claim that in today's dominant communication-production system difference understood in terms of otherness or alterity is substituted ever more by difference understood in terms of alternatives.

The 'advantage' of this situation as we are describing it is that it presents just one type of reality, a single monolithic block; therefore, the analyst's energies will not be dispersed in the effort to deal with a great multiplicity of different phenomena. Obviously, the term 'advantage' is used ironically here, for the advantage of a monolithic block is the advantage of monologism which by contrast with polylogism has the disadvantage of not being able to articulate critical discourse. In such a situation the critical task of semioethics is rendered extremely difficult, almost impossible, given that conceptual instruments adequate for the work of critique are not readily available. Semioethics must use categories which are not those of dominant ideology, therefore its working hypotheses do not derive from common sense or common knowledge and consequently cannot be taken for granted.

Global communication, global semiotics and the global subject

The present phase in the development of capitalist society may be characterised in terms of world communication and globalization. Given that communication has extended over the whole planet and that communicative practices are realistically accommodated to the world as it is, the expression

'world communication' seems especially appropriate; and given that communication prevades the entire production cycle and interferes not only with human life but with life in general, there can be no doubt that this is the era of globalization. Consequently, an adequate analysis of this phase in the development of capitalism calls for a perspective that is just as inclusive, just as global. This global view may come from the general science of signs or semiotics, and certainly not from the special sciences taken separately. However, this does not mean that semiotics as it is practiced today is ready for the task. If anything, the opposite is true. The point is that it is no longer possible to practice semiotics adequately, especially when a question of the science or theory of communication, without taking into account the current situation of worldwide, global communication. Failure to consider the global nature of world communication will render the communication model proposed for semiotic analysis, whichever it is, completely inadequate, short-sighted and anachronistic, with respect to this new historical phenomenon. General semiotics formally re-envisioned as global semiotics must now carry out a detotalizing function: a primary task is to develop a critique of all alleged totalities, in the first place the totality world and global communication. Failure to perform its detotalizing function will reduce general semiotics to a mere relation of juxtaposition to the special semiotics, a syncretic result of the latter, a transversal language of the encyclopaedia of the unified sciences, prevarication of philosophy suffering from the will to omniscience with respect to the plurality of different disciplines and specialized fields of knowledge.

The world-wide spread of communication is a surface phenomenon which can only be adequately understood by studying its foundations. This approach requires that we reject the communication model that reductively analyzes the communicative process in terms of transference, like a postal package (Rossi-Landi), so that we have messages that are encoded and emitted from a source and decoded by a receiver. In 1961, that is, at a time when communication was not yet the pervasive phenomenon it is today, the Italian semiotician Ferruccio Rossi-Landi (1921-1985) had already heavily criticized this model. We are referring to the 1950s when Italy had not yet been exposed to anything approximating the present level in social reorganisation relating to the production system. To interpret human communication reductively (that is, in terms of information and message transmission) as required by this particular communication model, which

is still influential, means to be uncritical toward virtually all components forming the communicative event (emitter, receiver, code, message, context, the objects communicated and the needs propelling communication), which, oversimplifying, are considered as preestablished and individualized with respect to the communicative process itself. Communication is thus reduced to the intentional exchange of messages among predefined and separate individuals, established on the basis of a common code accepted by convention, thereby losing sight of its complexity and articulation.

For an adequate and comprehensive understanding of the current phase in world-wide and global communication, we must understand the risks involved in communication, including the risk of destroying communication itself. Destruction not only implies the relatively simple or banal phenomenon described with the term 'incommunicability' (a subjective-individualistic disease which emerged with the transition to communication in its current phase of development, that is, a phase that cannot be separated from production), theorized and represented in both filmic and literary discourse. When we speak of 'the risk of destroying communication itself', our reference is to nothing less than the possibility of the end of life over the entire planet: in other words, according to the global approach communication is no longer considered in the oversimplifying terms described above but rather is equated with life itself. Communication and life coincide, as Sebeok's biosemiotics in particular has made clear; therefore, the end of communication would involve the end of life. In fact, unlike all other previous phases in social development, production in today's society is endowed with an enormous potential for destruction.

To understand communication today in its historico-social specification as a world-wide phenomenon and in its relation to life over the whole planet (remembering that life and communication coincide), semiotics must adopt a 'planetary' perspective in both a spatial and temporal sense. Such an approach will permit the distancing necessary for an interpretation of contemporaneity that does not remain imprisoned within the boundaries of contemporaneity itself.

With the spread of 'bio-power' (Foucault) and the controlled insertion of bodies into the production system, world communication goes hand in hand with the spread of the concept of the individual as a separate and self-sufficient entity. The body is understood and experienced as an

isolated biological entity and as belonging to the individual. This has led to the almost total extinction of cultural practices and worldviews based on intercorporeity, interdependency, exposition and opening of the body (what we are left with are mummified remains studied by folklore analysts – the expression of a generalized situation of museumification – , archeological residues preserved in ethnological museums and in the histories of national literature).

By contrast Mikhail Bakhtin (1963 and 1965) analyzes the way the body is perceived in popular culture, the forms of ‘grotesque realism’ which do not at all conceive the body individualistically or separately from terrestrial life in its totality, indeed from the world. Signs of the grotesque body, of which only very weak traces have survived in the present day, include ritual masks, the masks used during popular festivities, carnival masks. ‘Grotesque realism’ in medieval popular culture antecedent to the development of individualism connected to the rise of the bourgeoisie, presents the body as an undefined entity flourishing in symbiotic relation with other bodies, in relations of transformation and renewal that exceed the limits of individual life. Such an individualistic, private and static conception of the body is not weakened in the context of contemporary global communication, but, on the contrary, is reinforced by it.

As Michel Foucault in particular has revealed (but we must also signal Rossi-Landi’s critique in his books of the 1970s), division and separatism among the sciences are functional to the ideologico-social requirements of the ‘new cannon of the individualized body’ (Bakhtin). This, in turn, is functional to the controlled insertion of bodies into the reproduction cycle of today’s production system.

A global and detotalizing approach in semiotics demands a high degree of availability toward others, a disposition to listen to others in their otherness, a capacity for opening to others not only quantitatively (the omnicomprehensive character of global semiotics), but also qualitatively. Semiotic interpretation cannot prescind from a dialogic relation with the other, especially at a metasemiotic level. Dialogism, in fact, is a fundamental condition for an approach in semiotics which, as much as it may be oriented globally, does not aim to englobe and enclose, but rather privileges the particular and the local. Such an approach is guided by the principle of detotalization rather than totalization.

As Emmanuel Lévinas above all has shown, otherness obliges the totality to reorganize itself always anew in a process related to what he calls ‘infinity’, and which may also be related to the concept of ‘infinite semiosis’ (to use an expression from Charles S. Peirce). This relation to infinity is not limited to a cognitive dimension: beyond the established order, beyond the symbolic order, beyond convention and habit, it implies a relation of involvement and responsibility with what is most refractory to the totality, that is, the otherness of others, of the other person, not in the sense of another self, another alter ego, an I belonging to the same community, but rather in the sense of the other in its extraneousness, strangeness, diversity, difference toward which indifference is impossible, in spite of all the efforts made by the identity of the I and guarantees offered by the latter.

These considerations present semiotics with a plan that is not connected to any particular ideological orientation. Viewed in these terms semiotics concerns behavior as it ensues from our awareness of the human being’s radical responsibility toward life as a ‘semiotic animal’. The ‘semiotic animal’ is a properly responsible actor, capable of signs of signs, of mediation, reflection, awareness in relation to semiosis over the whole planet. In this sense global semiotics must be adequately founded in cognitive semiotics, but it must also be open to a third dimension beyond the quantitative and the theoretical, that is, the ethical dimension of existence. Given that this third dimension concerns the ends worthy of our striving and sacrifice, we propose to characterize it as the ‘semioethical’ dimension.

The trichotomy global semiotics, cognitive semiotics and semioethics is of fundamental importance for our understanding of semiosis, indeed decisive, not only on a theoretical level but also for therapeutic reasons. Indeed, semiotics must continuously refine its auditory and critical functions, its capacity for listening and criticism in order to meet its commitment to the ‘health of semiosis’ a part from understanding the semiosical universe analytically. To accomplish these tasks, therefore, semiotics must be nothing less than (1) cognitive semiotics, (2) global semiotics, and (3) semioethics.

Subjectivity in a semiotical key, otherness and unindifference

The categories of 'identity' and of 'subjectivity' intimately connected to it play a central role in world-wide and global communication – whether a question of the identity of an individual subject or a collective subject ('Western world', European Community, nation, ethnic group, social class, etc.).

The concepts of individual identity and of community or collective identity need reconsideration in semiotical terms. In any case, whether a question of the single individual or of the collectivity, identity is oriented either monologically or dialogically, and which of the two orientations makes a profound difference.

Peirce's reflections have contributed to a redefinition of the subject. The human being, the I, is an extremely complex sign made of verbal and nonverbal material, of 'language'. We could describe the subject as a semiosical process: indeed, thanks to its interpretive-propositional commitment, as a sign the subject is made of a potentially infinite number of signifying trajectories. As says Peirce, 'men and words educate each other reciprocally; every increase in a man's information involves and is involved by a corresponding increase in word information' (CP 5.313). And still more explicitly:

there is no element whatever of man's consciousness which has not something corresponding to it in the word It is that the word or sign which man uses is the man himself. For, as the fact that every thought is a sign, taken in conjunction with the fact that life is a train of thought, proves that man is a sign; so, that every thought is an external sign, proves that man is an external sign. That is to say, the man and the external sign are identical, in the same sense in which the words homo and man are identical. Thus my language is the sum total of myself; for the man is the thought. (CP 5.314)

As a developing sign, the subject emerges as a dialogical and relational being, as an open subject, in becoming in the intrapersonal and interpersonal interrelationship with other signs and other subjects. The boundaries of the subject-sign are not defined once and for all, but can only be defined in and through dialogic encounters with other signs and other subjects.

The human person develops in sociality, in the relation with the experiences of others, and never in isolation. Indeed, the self is a community in itself and is subject to the logic of otherness. The self is a community of dialogically interrelated selves. If we take the word 'in-dividual' literally, that is, 'non divided, non divisible'. As says Peirce:

Two things here are all-important to assure oneself of and to remember. The first is that a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is 'saying to himself', that is, is saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man's circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respect of higher rank than the person of an individual organism. (CP 5.421)

Peirce contrasts the concepts of 'personality', 'personal self', 'individual self', which imply a self-sufficient self, or, as he says, a finite self, with the concept of self in communion with other selves. The finite self, the 'personal self', is an 'illusory phenomenon'. However, the different forms of egoism are not aware of this and the illusion of being able to egoistically isolate oneself ends up creating the very conditions for such isolation.

The social and communal character of the self does not contrast with its singularity and uniqueness or with its capacity for signifying otherness with respect to any interpretive process that may concern it. The uniqueness of self, its irreducibility to a single and fixed referent, is unveiled and developed in the relationship with the other. Insofar as it is unique, the self is ineffable (cf. CP 1.357). We could say with Lévinas that the self is saying beyond the said. The utterances of the self convey significance beyond words. And yet, the ineffability and uniqueness of the self do not imply the sacrifice of communicability, for what the self is in itself (in its firstness) can always be communicated to a degree, even if only to communicate the impossibility of communicating. Consequently, in a Peircean perspective neither solitude nor muteness characterize the human condition in its specificity, in its most profound nature.

The identity of the subject is multiplex, plurifaceted and plurivocal and is delineated and modeled in the dialogical relation among its various parts. Welby's unpublished manuscripts (in the Welby Collection, York University Archives, Scott Library, Downsview, Toronto, Canada, cf. Petrilli 1998a) include a file entitled Subjectivity. This file contains texts written between 1903 and 1910 dedicated to the problem of subjectivity, analyzed in terms of the complex and articulated relation between the 'I', or, introducing a neologism, Ident (cf. the manuscripts of 1907-10) and the 'self'. What Welby calls 'I' develops in the relation with what she calls 'Self', or better, with the multiple selves forming the various faces of the Ident. In Welby's analysis, otherness clearly emerges as a necessary condition for the constitution of subjectivity.

On establishing a distinction between the I and the Self, Welby clarifies that 'the Self is included in "I", but not conversely. ... The race like the individual has a Self because it is an "I"' ('The I and the Self', undated manuscript). The Self is a representation of the I, a part of it, what we have and therefore cannot be. The I is what we are and therefore alludes to what we cannot possess. My 'I' belongs to others just as 'mine' belongs to (but does not coincide with) me.

The self, for which Welby also proposes the term ephemeron, is mortal, ephemeral like the body. By contrast, the I tends toward immortality beyond the mortality of the body and of the Self. The I coincides with the activity of giftmaking, giving at a loss, beyond possession and eventual returns. As understood by Welby, the Ident refers to that part of human identity which resists the violence of monologism, univocality, the order of discourse, the said, and is other in terms of semiotic materiality in the continuous flow of change whose rhythm is beaten out by the succession, superimposition, multiplication, and cohabitation of our multiple selves.

Formed in this way, identity is not unitary and compact, but rather it presents an excess, something more with respect to closed and fixed identity. Self does not coincide with the I but is one of its representations, one of its openings, a means, an instrument, or modality, but never an end in itself. Therefore, contrary to the tendency to exalt the Self, to establish a relation of substitution, usurpation, identification between the self and the I, we must come to the realization that identity derives from the relationship of dialogic otherness among the multiple selves that constitute the Ident, among one's Self, rather one's Selves, and one's Ident. Identity is the ongoing, generative

and dynamic outcome of the relationship of dialogical distancing and differentiation of the Self with respect to the I. Welby's generative conception of human consciousness recalls Peirce's as it emerges from his writings.

Peirce maintains that 'self-love is no love' (CP 6.288). Along similar lines; the ultimate 'sin', Welby contends, 'consists in OUR giving our selves leave to demand and secure gratification, pleasure, ease, for their own sake: to be greedy of welfare at some human expense'. In other words, it consists in allowing the Self to transform Selfness into Selfishness. Though the action of the centripetal forces of Self may be necessary for 'self-preservation here', for 'survival now', the condition of being oriented univocally toward one's own self generally defeats evolutionary development to the extent that it generates 'Self-regarding Selfishness'. Indeed, in reality, 'egotism, however, properly speaking, is impossible: I cannot love or centre upon I, for I am essentially That which radiates: that which IS the knowing, living, activity: it is only selfism that we mean; not egoism'.

In Welby's view, Hedonist ethics, the dominant ideology of her times (as well as our own) implies a reduction of the vastness of the cosmos to the status of mere annex of the planetary egoist and parasite. Therefore, in the perspective of monological identity, it implies a reduction of the differences in the relationship between the I and the Self to the advantage of the Self, or rather our multiple Selves. On the contrary, the 'supreme function of the Ident's Self', as Welby says, is to put itself at the service of the Ident and to collaborate in generating, knowing, serving, mastering and transfiguring our actual and possible worlds; the mission of our Selves being 'to master the world for Identity in difference The Ident is one in all, but also All in each. The Ident's name is first multiplex – We, Us, then complex, I, Me. That Ident has, possesses, works through – a self, or even many selves'.

In Welby's description as in Peirce's, the subject is a community of distinct but inseparable parts. These parts or selves do not exclude each other but are interconnected by relations of reciprocal dependency grounded in the logic of otherness and of unindifference among differences. Such logic resists unindifferentiated confusion among the parts, signifying processes which tend to level the other onto the monological Self. As says Welby, 'to confound is to sacrifice distinction'.

Therefore, to the extent that it represents an excess with respect to the sum of its parts, the I or Ident is not the 'individual' but the 'unique'. 'It is precisely our di-viduality that forms the wealth of our gifts', she says. Here we may interpret what Welby understands by 'unique' – which has nothing to do with the monadic separatism of Stirner's conception of the unique, of singularity – with the concept of 'non relative otherness' or 'absolute otherness' as understood by Lévinas (1961), which implies involvement, compromission and unindifference toward the world and toward others.

Subjectivity and corporeality

Viewed in a semiotic key, it becomes clear that the body too is sign material structured interrelationally with other bodies, being the material through which the self acts, expresses itself and communicates, in which the self is embodied but not imprisoned:

When I communicate my thought and my sentiments to a friend with whom I am in full sympathy, so that my feelings pass into him and I am conscious of what he feels, do I not live in his brain as well as in my own – most literally? True, my animal life is not there but my soul, my feeling thought attention are. ... Each man has an identity which far transcends the mere animal; – an essence, a meaning subtle as it may be. He cannot know his own essential significance; of his eye it is eyebeam. But that he truly has this outreaching identity – such as a word has – is the true and exact expression of the fact of sympathy, fellow feeling – together with all unselfish interests – and all that makes us feel that he has an absolute worth. (CP 7.591)

That the subject is inevitably an incarnate subject and therefore intercorporeal semiotic material, that is, a body connected to other bodies from the very outset, an expression of the condition of intercorporeity on both a synchronic and diachronic level for the whole of its subsequent life; that the subject is not incarnated in a body isolatedly from other bodies, is not indifferent for our conception of the human person. The subject is an incarnated body from the point of view of biological evolution, of the species, as well as from the point of view of sociality and cultural history.

The body plays a fundamental role in the development of awareness or consciousness. Consciousness is incarnated consciousness. The body is a condition for the full development of consciousness, of the human being as a semiotic animal. The self develops interrelatedly with other bodies through which it extends its boundaries, which are also the boundaries of the world as it is experienced. The word is an extension of the body. Echoing Bakhtin, it forms a bridge joining one's own body to the body of the other. Peirce recurrently uses the expression 'flesh and blood' to refer to the body (cf. CP 1.337, 7.591), which helps distinguish between the physiological body and the semiotical body. In other words, the expression 'flesh and blood' serves to specify the distinction between physical extrasign instrumental materiality, on the one hand, and sign materiality, on the other, remembering, however, that the latter always has a physical referent even though it may not always be immediately obvious as, for example, in the case of dreaming or of silent thought.

Subjectivity from reason to reasonableness

Semiotics as semioethics must keep account of and account for the 'reason of things'. At the same time, the capacity for detotalization as the condition for critical and dialogic totalization means that the ability to grasp the reason of things cannot be separated from reasonableness. We could state the problem as follows: given the risks presented by today's global communication-production system for semiosis and for life generally, the human being must at its very earliest change from a rational animal into a reasonable animal.

Both Welby and Peirce have made a noteworthy contribution to the development of a truly global science of signs capable of accounting for signifying processes in all their complexity and articulation, of considering meaning in terms of signification, sense and significance. Following Peirce and Welby, a study of the life of signs and of the signs of life cannot be conducted in merely descriptive terms, we cannot make claims to neutrality. Welby coined the term 'significs' to indicate her comprehensive, critical approach to sign theory with which she confronts the problem of the relation between signs and values. The term 'significs' designates the disposition for evaluation calling attention to the value conferred upon something, its pertinence, scope, signifying value, significance.

It is significant that Peirce also should have turned his attention specifically to the normative sciences in the final phase of his research. He links logic to both ethics and esthetics: while logic is the normative science concerned with self-controlled thought, ethics is the normative science that focuses on self-controlled conduct, and esthetics the normative science that ascertains the end most worthy of our espousal. In this context of discourse, Peirce took up the question of the ultimate good, the summum bonum, or ultimate value, which he refused to identify with either individual pleasure (hedonism) or with a societal good, such as the greatest happiness for the greatest number of human beings (English utilitarianism). Rather he claims that the summum bonum can only be defined with reference to the 'evolutionary process', that is, to a process of growth. Specifically, he identified the highest good as the continuous 'growth of concrete reasonableness'.

The dialogical relation between self and other (both the other from self and the other of self) emerges as one of the most important conditions for continuity in the creative process. A driving force within this creative process is love, that is, agape. According to Peirce, the most advanced developments in reason and knowledge are based on the creative power of reasonableness and the transformational suasions of agape.

Thus conceived, reasonableness is endowed with the power of transforming one's horror of the stranger, the alien, one's fear of the other understood as the fear one experiences of the other foreign to oneself, into sympathy for the other become lovely. Developing Peirce's discourse in the direction of Lévinas's philosophy of subjectivity, we might add that under the hardened crust of its identity, the subject through love rediscovers its fear for the other, for the other's safety, fear that renders the subject incessantly restless and preoccupied for the other. Love, reasonableness, creativity are all grounded in the logic of otherness and dialogism, and together they move the evolutionary dynamics of human consciousness and beyond this of the entire universe taken globally.

While working on pragmatism with reference to the problem of subjectivity, of the self considered as a set of actions, practices, habits, Peirce identifies 'power', as opposed to 'force', as a fundamental characteristic of the self. Hence he describes the self as a centre oriented toward an end, an agent devoted to a more or less integrated set of 'purposes'. This approach may be related to

what Welby understands with the terms ‘purport’ or ‘ultimate value’ when she describes sense as signifying value as designated by the third element of her meaning triad, that is, ‘significance’ (the other two elements being ‘sense’ and ‘meaning’). Power is not ‘brute force’ but the ‘creative power of reasonableness’, which, by virtue of its agapastic orientation rules over all other forms of power (cf. CP 5.520). We could say that power, that is, the ideal of reasonableness, is the capacity to respond to the attraction exerted upon self by the other; power and reasonableness, therefore, is the capacity for response to the other and the modality of such response is dialogue.

Mother-sense: an a priori condition for subjectivity, signification and critique

In a series of unpublished manuscripts written at the beginning of the twentieth century (cf. Petrilli 1998a), Welby proposes the original concept of mother-sense (subsequently replaced by the term primal sense and its variant primary sense). Mother-sense plays a central role in the generation of sense, meaning and significance, therefore in the construction and interpretation of worldviews. Welby distinguishes between ‘sense’ and therefore ‘mother-sense’, on the one hand, and ‘intellect’ and therefore ‘father-reason’, on the other. With this distinction she wished to indicate the general difference between two fundamental modalities (which cuts across sexual differences) in the generation and interpretation of sense producing-processes. Here ‘sense’ is understood broadly to include both ‘meaning’ and ‘significance’. Such processes may be isolated by way of abstraction, hypothetically, for the sake of theorization, though on a pragmatic level, that is, in sense producing practices, they are strictly interrelated.

On Welby’s account ‘mother-sense’ refers to the generating source of sense and of the capacity for criticism. As such, it is regulated by the logic of otherness and corresponds to the capacity for knowing in a broad and creative sense through feeling, perception, intuition, and cognitive leaps. With Peirce, we could say that mother-sense, he uses the expression ‘mother-wit’, is the condition for the idea to be intuited before it is possessed, or before it possesses us. This noetic capacity may be described as agapic or sympathetic comprehension and recognition, to evoke Peirce, or as answering comprehension, in the language of Bakhtin. Whatever the terminology, ‘mother-sense’ or ‘mother-wit’ is a capacity specific to the humankind in its totality, being, as Welby says, ‘knowledge of the race’ which transcends gender, ‘an inheritance common to

humanity', even though on a historico-social level the woman may emerge as its main guardian. Instead, the intellect is described by Welby in a critical key as a cognitive capacity which often tends to be unduly governed by the value of identity in the sense that identity dominates in the balance with otherness. The intellect, understood as a cognitive capacity engendering rational knowledge, is articulated through the processes of asserting, reasoning, generalizing about data as they are observed and experimented in science and logic. Its limit is determined by the tendency to allow for the tyranny of data, which we choose to possess but which, on the contrary, tend to possess us. The reign of knowledge covered by the intellect is fundamentally entrusted to the jurisdiction of the male, says Welby, but this is only due to socio-cultural reasons, and certainly not to some special natural propensity for rational reasoning exclusive to the male. Healthy intellect derives from mother-sense and must not become detached from it: the price is the emptying of sense and significance, their levelling onto identity in monologic terms. That which the intellect must exert itself to reach, mother-sense with its capacity for knowing and transcendence already 'knows' in the dual sense of the Italian verb 'sapere' as derived from Latin: scire and sapere (scio and sapio).

With 'mother-sense' we are on the side of signifying processes dominated by the logic of otherness, therefore by the iconic dimension of signs; mother-sense, or 'racial sense', as Welby also calls it, also alludes to the creative and generative forces of sense resulting from the capacity to associate things which would seem distant from each other but which nonetheless are attracted to one another; from the point of view of argumentation, 'mother-sense' rests on the side of logical procedures of the abductive type insofar as they are regulated by the values of otherness, creativity, dialogism, freedom and desire.

Peirce explicitly associates desire to meaning where meaning is understood in both semiotic and axiological terms, and meaning as signifying value is connected with desirability. As to Welby, a significant part of her correspondence with Mary Everest Boole (the wife of the famous logician and mathematician George Boole and a writer in her own right) is dedicated to discussing the laws of thought and the connection among logic, love, passion and power (cf. Welby 1929: 86-92).

In Welby's view, logic proper should be understood as the place where the broader generative dimensions of sense (the original level, the primal level, mother-sense, racial sense, the 'matrix')

interweave with reason dialectically, or, better, dialogically. The relation of responsive comprehension, therefore, of reciprocal empowering between primal sense and rational life is necessary for the full development of critical sense and, therefore, to reach maximum value, meaning and purport of experience in its totality. Welby's mother-sense – or primal sense – brings into focus the value of significance before and after signification, as Lévinas (1978) would say. Mother-sense concerns both the real and the ideal aspects of our signifying practices: the real insofar as it concerns the concrete aspects of praxis and the ideal insofar as it is the condition by virtue of which humanity may aspire to continuity and perfection in the generation of actual and possible words and of signifying processes at large.

Welby's theorization of logic may also be associated with Peirce's when he describes the great principle of logic in terms of 'self-surrender'. However, as specified by Peirce, this principle from a pragmatic point of view does not imply that self is to lay low for the sake of ultimate triumph, which even if attained must not be the governing purpose of any action (cf. CP 5.402, note 2).

The self's vulnerability and readiness to venture toward the other with the risks this implies were portrayed by Plato in his myth about Eros (in the Symposium), a sort of intermediate divinity or demon generated by Penia (poverty, need) and Poros (the God of ingenuity), who find his way again even when hidden. Welby describes the connection between self enrichment and risky opening toward others as a condition for human evolution. From this connection we may develop a critique of 'being satisfied', an orientation toward 'transcendence' with respect to the world as it is, with respect to ontological being given and determined once and for all: 'We all tend now, men and women, to be satisfied ... with things as they are. But we have all entered the world precisely to be dissatisfied with it'. 'Dissatisfaction' is an important ingredient in the concept of 'mother sense' and signals the need to recover the critical instance of human intellectual capacities. Our allusion here, in the first place, is to the capacity for otherness, to the structural capacity for creativity and innovation, for shifting and displacing sense – all being gifts and talents specific to human beings. And thanks especially to the procedures of abductive logic, this critical instance allows for prevision and 'translation' in a broad sense, for interpretation and verification of the signs of one

language through the interpretants of other languages beyond the limits of merely interlingual translation.

In a letter of January 21st. 1909, Welby agrees with Peirce's observation that logic is the 'ethics of the intellect', and relates his observation to her concept of mother-sense of primal sense: 'Of course I assent to your definition of a logical inference, and agree that Logic is in fact an application of morality in the largest and highest sense of the word. That is entirely consonant with the witness of Primal Sense' (in Hardwick 1977: 91). Scientific rigor in reasoning results from agapastic logical procedure, from 'primal sense', and therefore from the courage of admitting to the structural necessity of inexactitude, instability and crisis for the evolution of sign, subject and signifying processes.

Semioethics and the humanism of otherness

Semioethics may be considered as working toward a new form of humanism, which is inseparable from the question of otherness. This also emerges from its commitment at the level of pragmatics and focus on the relation between signs, values and behavior as well as from the intention of transcending separatism among the sciences insisting on the interrelation between the human sciences, the historico-social sciences and the natural, logico-mathematical sciences.

The new form of humanism we are proposing is the humanism of otherness or alterity, as perspected in particular by Lévinas in all his writings and especially in Humanisme de l'autre homme (1972). Human rights as they have so far been claimed tend to be centered on identity, leaving aside the rights of the other. Said differently, the expression 'human rights' is oriented in the direction of the humanism of identity and tends to refer to one's own rights, the rights of identity, of self, forgetting the rights of the other. On the contrary, in the perspective of our concern for life over the planet, human and nonhuman, for the health of semiosis generally, for the development of communication not only in strictly cultural terms but also in broader biosemiosical terms, this tendency must quickly be counteracted by the humanism of otherness, where the rights of the other are the first to be recognized. Our allusion here is not just to the rights of the other beyond self, but also to the self's very own other, to the other of self. Indeed, the self

characteristically removes, suffocates, and segregates otherness which tends to be sacrificed to the cause of identity. But developed in such terms identity is fictitious and all efforts to maintain or recover it are destined to fail.

Semiotics contributes to the humanism of otherness by evidencing the extension and consistency of the sign network connecting every human being to every other on both a synchronic and diachronic level. The world-wide extension of the communication network means that a system of communication is progressively being developed on a planetary level, and as such is a phenomenon susceptible to analysis in synchronic terms; also, given that the destiny of the human species is implied in all events, behaviors and decisions made by the single individual, in the destiny of the individual from its remotest to its most recent and closest manifestations, involving the past and the evolutionary future, on both the biological and the historico-social levels, diachronic investigations of all sorts are also necessary. The sign network involves what we know as the semiosphere constructed by humankind, in other words, culture with its signs, symbols, artifacts, etc.; but global semiotics teaches us that the semiosphere is far broader than the sphere of human culture, and in fact coincides with the great biosphere, if we accept Thomas A. Sebeok's axiom that semiosis and life coincide. The semio(bio)sphere is the habitat of humanity, the matrix whence we sprang and the stage on which we are destined to act.

Semiotics has the merit of having demonstrated that whatever is human involves signs, and in a global semiotic perspective we now know that whatever is simply alive involves signs. This is as far as cognitive semiotics and global semiotics reach. But semioethics pushes this awareness even farther by relating semiosis to values and focusing on the question of responsibility, of radical, inescapable responsibility inscribed in our bodies insofar as we are 'semiotic animals', the human capacity for responsibility for life over the entire planet. This also leads us to interpret the sign behavior of humanity in the light of the hypothesis that if the human involves signs, signs in turn are human. At the same time, however, we must clarify that such a humanistic commitment does not mean to reassert humanity's (monological) identity yet again, nor to propose yet another form of anthropocentrism. On the contrary, what is implied is radical decentralization, nothing less than a Copernican revolution. As Welby would say, 'geocentrism' must be superceded, then even

‘heliocentrism’ until we approximate a truly cosmic perspective where global semiotics and semioethics intersect. Otherness more than anything else is at stake when a question of responsibility and therefore of humanism understood as the humanism of otherness. And by otherness is understood not only the otherness of our neighbor, or even of another person at a distance – though now relatively so given the world-wide expansion of the communication network –, but also the otherness of living beings most distant from us in genetic terms.

Reformulating a famous saying by Terence (‘homo sum: umani nihil a me alienum puto’), Roman Jakobson asserts that: ‘linguista sum: linguistici nihil a me alienum puto’. This commitment on the part of the semiotician to all that is linguistic, indeed, to all that is sign material (not only relatively to anthroposemiosis or more extensively to zoosemiosis, but to the whole semiobiosphere) should not only be understood in a cognitive sense but also in an ethical sense. Such a commitment involves concern for the other, not only in the sense of ‘being concerned with...’, but also in the sense of ‘being concerned for...’, ‘taking care of...’. Indeed, viewed in such a perspective, concern for the other, care of the other imply a capacity for responsibility without limitations of belonging, proximity or community, a capacity which, in truth, is not exclusive to the ‘linguist’ or ‘semiotician’. Developing Jakobson’s intuition, we could claim that it is not as professional linguists or semioticians, but more significantly as human beings that no sign is ‘a me alienum’; leaving the first part of Terence’s saying, ‘homo sum’, unmodified, we may continue that as humans not only are we semiosical animals (like all other animals), but we are also semiotic animals, and in this sense humans are unique with respect to the rest of the animal kingdom with the consequence that nothing semiosical, including the biosphere and the evolutionary cosmos whence it sprang, ‘a me alienum puto’.

Semioethics does not have a program with intended aims and practices to propose, nor a decalogue or formula to apply more or less sincerely, or more or less hypocritically. From this point of view, semioethics contrasts with stereotypes as much as with norms and ideology. If anything, it is a critique of stereotypes, norms and ideology and, consequently, of the different types of value as described, for example, by Charles Morris in his book of 1964, Signification and Significance (think of his triad ‘operative value’, ‘conceived value’, and ‘object value’ and such subordinate

tripartitions as ‘detachment’, ‘dominance’, and ‘dependence’). Semioethics accounts for the human capacity for critique, its vocation is to evidence sign networks where it seemed that there were none. This means to bring to light and to evaluate connections and implications, which in truth cannot be escaped, where there seemed to exist only net separations and divisions, boundaries and distances, with relative alibis. Alibis serve to safeguard responsibility in a limited sense and, therefore, the individual conscience which readily presents itself in the form of a good conscience, a clean conscience. Semioethics is not fixed upon a given value or preestablished end, an ultimate end or summum bonum, but rather is concerned with semiosis in its dialogical and detotalized globality: indeed semioethics pushes beyond the totality, outside the closure of totality, with a gaze that transcends the totality, a given being, a defined entity, in the direction of unending semiosis – a movement toward the infinite, desire of the other. A special task for semioethics is to unmask the illusoriness of the claim to the status of indifferent differences and to evidence the biosemiotic condition of dialogic involvement among signs, intercorporeity.

Semiotics understood not only as a science but as an attitude and orientation arises and develops within the field of anthroposemiosis. Therefore, it is connected with the Umwelt and species-specific modeling device proper to human beings. This species-specific primary modeling device, also called language, endows human beings (differently from other animals) with the special capacity to produce a great plurality of different worlds, real and imaginary. This means that human beings are not condemned to remain imprisoned in the world as it is, to forms of vulgar realism. Semiotics is a fact of the human species. But the possibility of its effective realization is a fact of the historico-social order. Our Umwelt is a historico-social product in addition to a biosemiotic endowment, so that any possibility of transformation or alternative hypotheses finds its effective grounding and starting point, its terms of confrontation, the materials necessary for critique and programming in historico-social reality as it gradually evolves and is distinguished from merely biological material.

The critical work of semioethics helps to uncover as illusory the condition of differences that are reciprocally indifferent to each other, showing, instead, how the whole planet’s destiny, in the last analysis, is implied in the choices of each and every one of us. As such semioethics must

necessarily begin by analysing and questioning without reserve the social system in which it has been formulated and is advocated. Semioethics must begin from where we are today in historico-social terms. Therefore, its point of departure must be a lucid reflection on contemporaneity with a focus on today's communication-production relationships which truly require rigorous and precise analysis.

As anticipated at the beginning of this paper, the task of semioethics has been facilitated by the fact that globalised communication-production has reached high degrees in homogenization and leveling of the differences in the various forms of social reproduction. In fact, a dominant form of market, production and consumption has pervaded the entire planet in the world of global communication-production which has led to spreading the same types of behaviors, habits, fashions world-wide, the same type of imaginary. Indeed, we have seen that in today's production system as it dominates and englobes the whole planet, difference understood in terms of otherness has been replaced by difference understood in terms of mere alternatives.

The advantage of such a situation consists in the fact that having eliminated diversity and difference according to the logic of otherness, analysis has a single block to deal with. Therefore this advantage has short legs for it is the advantage of monologism which backfires and translates into the impossibility of criticism and creativity. Instead, plurivocality and polylogism favor creative interpretation and critical questioning. Consequently the critical task of semioethics is obstructed by the fact that appropriate conceptual instruments for the task are not necessarily yet available; categories must be constructed that are not the dominant ones, and presuppositions cannot be taken for granted when they run counter to common sense pervading the presentday communication-production system.

We believe that semioethics offers the broadest view possible on existence available today to the so-called 'semiotic animal' – or human being, who is also the cosmically responsible agent. Therefore, not only must we do justice to the human capacity for semioethics on a theoretical level, but we must also evidence our vital, inexorable need for this semioethical capacity, these days more than ever before, not just for the sake of safeguarding human life but all of life generally over the entire planet. Indeed, today more than ever in this situation of global communication-production

where short-sighted identity dominates over the rights of the other, not only must we explain and understand this capacity, but we must also stress our inescapable need for it, our need to cultivate our semioethical propension in the most conscientious, imaginative, and responsible manner possible for the health of semiosis at large and therefore of identity itself. Otherness requires nothing less.

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