

Humanism Questioned: On Sign, Language, and Value

Susan Petrilli

Over the past few years I have dedicated a good part of my time to the works of Victoria Welby (1837-1912) and her signification, or theory of sign and meaning, as formulated in her two monographs, *What Is Meaning?* (1983[1903]) and *Signification and Language* (1985 [1911]), in addition to her numerous papers, a good part of which is still unpublished. This has resulted in two publications that are particularly dear to me, the volumes: 1) *Signifying and Understanding. Reading the Works of Victoria Welby and the Signification Movement* (De Gruyter Mouton, Berlin, 2009), and; 2) *Victoria Welby and the Science of Signs. Signification, Semiotics, Philosophy of Language* (Transaction, Brunswick, NJ, 2015).

Using Welby's work as a pretext, the text I am now proposing – with its references not only to the work of a woman from the Victorian era, more than ever topical today, but also to women from the contemporary world – is fundamentally a critique, in a semioethical key, of human relations and their current organization into the socio-economic form generally known as globalization. Under this aspect, my main focus in this paper is on a specific characteristic of today's globalized world, that is, the logic of "identity," therefore of "difference" and the central role they carry out in interpersonal relations, in society at large. My allusion here is to identity understood as *closed identity*, and to difference based on the logic of identity thus described, therefore "identity-difference". In the first place, identity concerns this world itself, mainstream values and dominant socio-economic practice in a globalized world, which are oriented by the logic of identity. Identity as we understand it here does not admit of anything else, it does not admit of any other, outside itself. In the relation of identification with itself, the globalized world is a world devoid of alterity, of otherness.

On the contrary, the sign, semiosis, which is the material out of which this world and the human being that inhabits it is made, has a vocation for "otherness" and for difference understood in terms of otherness, "otherness-difference." Otherness distinguishes the sign from the signal and its static nature, from univocity, monologism, thereby opening it to the dialogism and plurivocality of infinite semiosis.

Instead, the sign used to fix difference and identity, the sign reduced to the status of signal, is the sign that has lost its capacity for deferral, for otherness. In fact, well before Jacques Derrida (1967) replaces the 'e' with an 'a' in the French word *différance* to indicate the process of deferral, Charles S. Peirce had already conveyed the dynamical sense of difference, in the sense of deferral among signs, with his idea of *infinite semiosis*. Deferral among sign and interpretant may be understood in the *dialogical terms of question and answer*: the interpretant responds to the sign which presents itself as a question and which as such sets clear limits to interpretation, according to a dialogical relation that is open to, oriented by and at once restrained by the irreducible otherness of its terms. Here, with the expression "limits" we are referring to the so-called "semiotic materiality" of the sign (see Petrilli 2010, 137-158), that is, its otherness, precisely, and not at all to the limits of identity, when proposed in terms of closed identity that does not recognize the other, that is indifferent to the other, that expunges the other.

The sign *refers to or defers to another sign* which acts as its interpretant: in this case identity, difference, that is, otherness-difference, difference oriented by the other and not by the same, is not reduced to a static fact of pre-established relationships, but rather involves *processes of deferral*, of infinite deferral, as Peirce says, from one interpretant to another. Peirce describes the sign as *stat pro aliquo* which in fact evidences the sign's structural vocation for the other, how the sign *is* in the relation with the other, and with the other how the sign is in becoming, in open-ended semiotic fluxes oriented by the logic of otherness, how the sign *is in translation*, how it evolves across dynamic and dialogic processes of deferral / transferral from one sign interpretant to the next, called forth and developed in the relation with the other.

According to Thomas A. Sebeok (2001) with his "global semiotics" (which develops Peirce's view that the entire universe is perfused with signs), *semiosis* or sign activity is co-extensive with *life*. In other words, signs and life, semiosis and life converge. From this perspective, signs and life flourish together in ongoing, open-ended semiotic chains and *make the difference* between life and non-life. Here difference is a question of *difference that characterizes the sign world in its globality, and not of difference internal to that world*.

But if we look at the world of signs internally, most regrettably we soon see that with respect to the global semio-biosphere, in the sphere of anthroposemiosis, in human semiosis sign processes are frequently deviated. In fact, human cultures today tend more than ever to stop the processes of deferral among signs, thereby blocking the vocation of signs for the other and fixing identity in terms of identity-difference.

Only in the human world are signs used to fix identities and render them static, to fix difference. Such practices amount to limiting the potential of the sign, to reducing its expressive resources, its interpretive and signifying power and as such are aberrant with respect to semiosis and life generally. In fact, these signs block the semiotic processes of ongoing deferral among signs, the dialogical movement oriented by the logic of otherness, the vital processes of becoming together in the open-ended fluxes of semiosis and life.

This reductive and aberrant use of the sign, of semiosis, characterizes the globalized world today, the world-as-it-is. The consequence is that relations of opposition, intolerance and expunction of the other, "with all necessary means" available (as stated in preparation for so-called "just and necessary", "humanitarian" and "preventive" war) have become ever more frequent, indeed are radicalized.

In fact, the world-as-it-is, today's world, our own, is orientated by identity logic and is focused on the representation of difference based on such logic. As anticipated, "identity" is understood here as *closed and egocentric identity* and difference based on identity logic thus understood is *identity-difference* (Petrilli 2013, 190–195). Closed identity leads to the creation of worlds and worldviews based on separation and dominion among identity-differences –whether pertaining to gender, ethnic group, ideology, or religion, etc. Identity logic thus understood subtends "the globalization of indifference" and inevitably results in the need to defend the interests of identities, closed identities, to the point even of accepting the logic of war.

Instead, from the perspective of *significs* to recall Welby, or *semioethics* which develops the fundamental instances of the former with its attention on the relation between signs and values, we propose another conception of identity and difference. The term "semioethics", introduced by myself with Augusto Ponzio toward the beginning of the 1990s, indicates a special "bend" in semiotics, the general science of

signs, which is committed to the search for sense and is critical of approaches to the life of signs that make claims to neutrality and pure descriptiveness (Petrilli and Ponzio 2003, 2005, 2010). In accordance with our semioethical approach to signs and life, our quest is for *humanizing difference*, that is, difference oriented by the logic of otherness, what we have described as "otherness-difference" as distinct from "identity-difference."

In contrast with dominant identity logic, difference considered from the point of view of semioethics is based on otherness logic and dialogism and emerges as *otherness-difference*. Such logic involves the capacity for unity on the basis of intercorporeal dialogue and co-participation, even when encounter involves discord. Global hospitality, peace and freedom call for the relation of involvement with the other, which cannot be achieved on the basis of closed identities, barriers and alibis. Instead, our quest is for the relation of participative responsibility for the other, dialogic responsiveness toward the other, to echo Mikhail Bakhtin (1986, 1993), across boundaries and relative alibis, for what, reading Emmanuel Lévinas (1961, 1972, 1974), we may indicate as the "humanism of otherness," where commitment to human rights implies commitment to the rights of the other (see also Ponzio 2009a, b), as opposed to the "humanism of identity".

Thus to return now more specifically to the contribution that can come from "significs," firstly it is important to evidence that this term names a discipline or theoretical orientation in studies on sign and language that leads to ask questions like: "What does it signify?," "What does it mean?," "In what sense?". It is not surprising that the expression "significs" was introduced (in 1894 circa) by a woman – Victoria Welby precisely. Nor is it surprising that she never entered the Pantheon or genealogical tree of the "Fathers" of the language and sign sciences, despite her connections with scholars like Charles S. Peirce, Bertrand Russell, Charles K. Ogden, George F. Stout, John M. Baldwin, Ferdinand S. Schiller, Ferdinand Tönnies, Frederik van Eeden, and many more.

"What does it signify?," "In what sense?," "Why?" are questions Welby encourages us to ask in the face of any form of expression, verbal and nonverbal, piece of human behaviour or social practice. As she claims in a paper dated 23 August 1911: "The most wonderful of all words is the 'Why.' It is ours wherewith to press into and probe, to conquer and govern the very centres of mental life" (in Petrilli 2009, 514). As a significian, she focused on the relation of signs to values, ultimately on the relation of signs to life. She thematized the need for critical awareness and interpretation to

enhance the value of the single individual, of the self in its uniqueness, singularity, the potential for significance and to safeguard human dignity under all aspects (Petrilli, Ponzio 2005, 80-130; Petrilli 2009, 371-384).

Significs is associated with a new form of humanism, the “humanism of otherness,” as described by Lévinas, by contrast with the “humanism of identity” (see also Ponzio 1995, 2009). It is also associated with “dialogism,” “intercorporeal dialogism” (Bakhtin 1981; Ponzio 2006). In this framework, responsibility is connected with the other, with the capacity for responsiveness which, in turn, is connected with gift-giving logic, the capacity for creative love, care for the other, and construction of new worlds based on such values. Welby's special approach to sign and language favours reflection upon issues relating to human rights, understood as the rights of the other, on responsibility, freedom, hospitality, listening.

Welby thematizes gift logic, therefore love and care for the other, compassion, justice, and participation – all fundamental values for healthy social practice. Gift logic is a constitutive component in the relation among signs, in the generation of signifying practices, in the construction of subjectivity. Otherness, excess, transcendence with respect to identity are determining factors in the dynamics of interpretive processes and expressive systems, including the verbal, and are essential to the healthy development of subjectivity, interpersonal relations and experience of the world.

In a series of unpublished manuscripts from the early twentieth century (now collected in Petrilli 2009: 670-722), Welby proposes the original concept of *mother-sense* which plays a central role in her description of the self and signifying processes, of the human capacity for the construction / interpretation of new worlds and worldviews. Mother-sense is closely connected to gift logic. Synonyms include “primal sense,” “native sense”, “original sense”, “racial motherhood”, “matrix”. Welby distinguishes between “sense,” therefore “mother-sense,” and “intellect,” therefore “father-reason”. This distinction aims to indicate the general difference – which cuts across gender – between two fundamental modalities in modelling sense, therefore, in the generation / interpretation of signs. Mother-sense and father-sense can be isolated at the level of abstract theory, but in material reality and in terms of sense-producing practice (where “sense” includes “meaning” and “significance”), they are strictly interrelated. There is never either the one or the other because there's always both the one and the other in

relations of reciprocal complementarity: neither the logic of reason nor the sense of logic (Deleuze), nor any well-reasoned logic nor logical sensing, but reason-becoming and sense-becoming, both of which are beyond bivalent logic. Sexual identity is always ambiguous which is consonant with Peirce's "logic of vagueness" (Hardwick 1977; Petrilli 2014, 154-157).

Mother-sense is the originating source of sense and critique; it is implied by the logic of otherness and corresponds to the capacity for knowing in a broad and creative sense through feeling, perceiving, intuiting, beyond cognitive leaps. It is commonly described as "intuition," "judgement," "wisdom"; evoking Peirce, it allows for the idea to be intuited before it is possessed or before it possesses us. As the capacity for knowledge, also understood in the Peircean sense of *agapic or sympathetic comprehension-recognition*, or *à la* Bakhtin in terms of *responsive understanding*, mother-sense is a characterizing endowment of the "human race." In fact, another name for mother-sense is "racial sense," described as "an inheritance common to humanity" without boundaries in terms of sexual gender, the female, even though from a socio-historical perspective the woman easily emerges as its main guardian and disseminator.

In contrast to mother-sense, the intellect for Welby (in Petrilli 2009, 577, 584, 604-606) translates into a capacity for acquiring knowledge where identity logic often tends to dominate over otherness logic. Associated with rational inference, the intellect alludes to the acquisition of knowledge through processes of asserting, generalizing and reasoning about data as observed and experimented with the cognitive instruments of logic and science. Its limit lies in the tendency to allow for the tyranny of data we wish to possess, but which instead possess us. The reign of knowledge covered by intellect is mostly entrusted to the jurisdiction of the male, but this is mainly due to socio-cultural reasons and not because of some special natural propensity for rational reasoning exclusive to the male. In Welby's view, as emerges from her writings cited above (in Petrilli 2009, 715-722), the intellect derives from mother-sense and must not be separated from it: the penalty, otherwise, is loss of sense and significance, therefore homologation and leveling onto identity understood as monological, univocal, closed identity achieved by sacrificing the other. Mother-sense is understood in the double sense of the Latin verb *sapere* which means both "to know" and "to taste of" (in Latin *scio* and *sapio*): what the intellect must exert itself to reach and know, mother-sense – with

its special capacity for acquiring knowledge and at once transcending cognitive limits – already perceives in the double sense of this verb.

In terms of logic, to the expression “intellect” is associated the capacity for inductive and deductive inferential processes, where identity logic dominates over otherness logic. Instead, “mother-sense” favours signifying processes oriented by the logic of otherness, in semiotic terms by the iconic dimension of signs; “mother-sense” alludes to the creative and generative force of sense resulting from the capacity of connecting things that seem distant from each other, but that in reality are attracted to each other; on the level of argumentation, “mother-sense” implies logical procedure of the abductive type regulated, precisely, by otherness logic, creativity, dialogism, freedom and desire. Peirce established a relation between meaning and desire: both belong to the sphere of signs and values, where meaning value is connected with desirability. For the full development of cognitive and expressive potential, logic and reason, scientific research must be grounded in mother-sense. Furthermore, “mother-sense” includes “father-reason” (even if latently), while the contrary is not necessarily true. Consequently, both mother-sense and the intellect must be recovered in their original condition of dialectic and dialogic interrelation on both the phylogenetic and ontogenetic levels. In logic as understood by Welby, the broader and generative dimension of sense, mother-sense, interweaves with rational, intellectual life, father-reason in relations of dialectic interdependency and reciprocal enrichment and empowering.

Significs aims to recover the relationship of reciprocal interpretation between the constant *données* of mother-sense and the continuous constructions of the intellect. Mother-sense supplies the material of immediate, unconscious and interpretative intuition; from an evolutionary viewpoint, it constitutes a further stage in the development of our sense for value with respect to animal instinct. Therefore, as Welby writes in her paper “Mother-Sense and Significs,” dated 15 April 1907: “mother-sense” is together “primordial and universal, at all stages of human development; though varying greatly in the part which it plays in the thought-life of human beings at such stages. And as Mother-sense is the Mother of sense, it is still occasionally found in women. Hence the peculiar authority accorded in all times to ‘wise women’” (Petrilli 2009, 704). As such mother-sense is the condition for significance before and after signification. It concerns

the real insofar as it is part of human practice; and the ideal insofar as it is the condition by virtue of which humanity aspires to continuity and ongoing development in the generation of actual and possible worlds and of signifying processes at large.

Mother-sense converges with knowledge that is instinctively religious, intending by “religious”, recalling the etymology from *religare* (to unite, to relate, to link), our feeling consciousness of the solar relationship; a universal sense of *dependency*, particularly developed in women, upon something greater beyond the limitations of the human; therefore, as Welby states in a paper dated 29 October 1906 (in Petrilli 2009, 809-811), a universal tendency towards religion where “religion” is understood as interconnection with a world that is other, vaster, more elevated, a world made of other origins and other relationships beyond the merely planetary, a world at the highest degrees of otherness and creativity, which involves the capacity for translation/interpretation, for the processes of analogy and association. Mother-sense is a transcendent sense, that is, it converges with the capacity to transcend the limits of sense itself when subjugated to the official order, to the order of discourse. It tells of the true sense and value of the properly human beyond the barriers and alibis of identity. Mother-sense does not simply imply “anthropomorphism”, but more broadly “organicomorphism” and “cosmomorphism”. From this viewpoint too Welby’s approach can be associated with Peirce’s, in particular his synechism.

Important implications connected with the concept of “mother-sense” described as the generative motor of signs and sense emerge when read in light of the concept of “language” or “modeling device” (Sebeok 1986, 1994). Like language understood as writing *ante litteram*, writing before the letter (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005, 377–428), mother-sense is an a priori which precedes knowledge and communication, a necessary condition for the acquisition of knowledge through different sign systems, verbal and nonverbal (cf. Petrilli 2014, 17-21, 41-43). Secondary or derived forms of signifying behaviour, including that connected to intellectual work, proceed from a primary modeling source of sense, as its expressive possibilities, as possible and actual constructions of the world. As a modeling procedure, mother-sense is the condition of possibility for the development of sense and significance before and after the production of intentional meaning, of inferential procedure, in particular the abductive, and for translation into a potentially infinite number of different worldviews.

"Mother-sense" is transcendent with respect to gender as much as it may be sexually differentiated in patriarchal capitalist society. All the same though it is a transgender concept it does tend to be more alive in women for the daily practices they carry out, for example, in their role as mother or wife. Such practices are oriented by the logic of self-donation, gift-giving and responsibility for the other, responsiveness towards the other, care for the other. Most importantly throughout her writings Welby also underlines the woman's role as the main repository of mother-sense in the development of language, which means to say in the construction of the symbolic order (Petrilli 2009, 580-582). She claims that the history of the evolution of humankind is the history of deviations in the signifying social network, in the capacity for discernment and critique which is the most serious deviation of all insofar as it leads human beings to be satisfied with things as they are, with the world-as-it-is.

This attitude contrasts with the condition of eternal dissatisfaction necessary for the development of experience, awareness and the expressive capacity generally. In her papers on eugenics, Welby claims that "We are all, men and women, apt to be satisfied now ... with things as they are. But that is just what we all came into the world to be dissatisfied with" (Petrilli 2009, 727). The concept of "mother-sense" signals the need to recover the human capacity for gift logic implicated in inferential procedure, the capacity for otherness, dialogism and unprejudiced thinking. It accounts for the critical instance of the intellectual capacity, for open-mindedness. This involves the capacity for shift and dislocation in sense producing processes beyond the order of discourse, for prevision and anticipation, for translation (understood in a broad sense) across time and space, across the different orders of signs systems and value systems related to them, across different languages and cultures.

Recovery of the relation of rational intellect to mother-sense, of reason to reasonableness, that is, reason oriented by the logic of otherness, is a condition for developing a radically critical social consciousness capable of transcending the constraints of convention, while criticizing the threat of vague and void abstractions.

Welby thematizes the need to safeguard mother-sense for the sake of future generations and their development. Like Peirce who introduces the concept of agapasm (creative love) and maintains that the evolutionary results it generates are directed towards something concrete, Welby too (independently from Peirce) describes the logic

of mother-sense as oriented towards one's concrete neighbour, that is, one's neighbour by affinity and similarity, though distant in time and space. Human behaviour oriented by "creative love" involves inferential procedure of the abductive order, ruled by the logic of otherness. The self is structured and articulated in the relation with the other, turned to the other in close "proximity" (Levinas 1961), the other understood as a "concrete abstraction" (Marx 1973), in its "sign materiality" which alludes to the self's incarnation in a body and its signs.

The sense of symbolic pertinence (particularly alive in the child) can be recovered by reasserting the connection between mother-sense and reason. Considering that critical work is largely mediated by language understood as verbal language, Welby thematized the need for a "critique of language" and focused on the relation of language to consciousness, thought, to the self, which is grounded in mother-sense (Petrilli 2009, 379–84). She thematized the need for "critical linguistic consciousness", for linguistic practices free from prejudice and ignorance, which otherwise obstacle the full development of the human understanding, expression and interpretation.

As to inferential procedure, abduction is characterized by high degrees of otherness, creativity, even eccentricity. In contrast to induction and deduction where the logic of identity and certainty dominates, in abductive argumentation the relationship among signs is not guaranteed, but emerges in terms of risky hypothesis. Abductive inferential procedure is founded in the logic of otherness, where the parts are related by similarity, attraction and reciprocal autonomy, and is substantially dialogic; abduction is characterized, therefore, by otherness, dialogism, and creativity. It proceeds on the basis of fortuitous attraction among signs in relations dominated by iconicity (by contrast with indexicality and symbolicity). Abductive inferential procedure is risky, it formulates arguments that are mainly tentative and hypothetical, leaving a minimal margin to convention (symbolicity) and to mechanical necessity (indexicality). To the extent that it transcends the logic of identity and equal exchange, abduction belongs to the sphere of excess, exile, *dépense*, of giving without a counterpart, without returns, of desire (Bataille 1970, 2001; Mauss 1923–4). Insofar as it is regulated by the law of creative love, it is articulated in the dialogic relation among interpretants and develops in terms of the "interesting".

The concepts of agapasm, abduction and desire are closely interrelated. The end of agapastic development is the evolutionary process itself (cosmos, language, thought,

self), continuity in signifying processes and semiosis in general. Creative development articulated through hypotheses, discoveries and qualitative leaps is achieved thanks to the combined effect of agapasm, the relation of attraction among interpretants, and of synechism, so that no datum, idea or individual exists in isolation.

Working in a pragmatic framework with reference to subjectivity, to self considered as a set of actions, practices, habits, Peirce (see *CP* 5.520) identified power as opposed to force as a fundamental characteristic. Self is a centre oriented *towards* an end, an agent devoted to a more or less integrated set of purposes. The latter can be related to Welby's purport or ultimate value, the third element of her meaning triad or significance. 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. Power, or the ideal of reasonableness, is the capacity to respond to attraction exerted on self by the other; power and reasonableness are related to the capacity for response to the other and the modality of such response is dialogue.

Semiotics understood as semioethics must account for the "reason of things". However, the *reason* of things cannot be separated from the capacity for *reasonableness* which is other orientated. The issue at stake is the following: given the risks inherent in social reproduction today for life, *human beings must at their very earliest transform from rational animals into reasonable animals.*

Welby's signifiacs and Peirce's semiotics contribute importantly to a better understanding of individual identity and the interpersonal relation. Welby describes the single individual in terms of the relation between "Ident" and "self" (Petrilli 2009, 640-670). The Ident is a generative centre of multiple *selves* and at once a multiplicity inhabiting each one of our selves. Thus described the Ident is a dialectical and open unit with respect to the sum total of its parts, its multiple selves. With respect to the self, the Ident, as described by Welby, for example, in a paper of 1907 (in Petrilli 2009, 645), represents an overflow, an excess value, a gift.

The human being is a community of parts, distinct but not separate. Far from excluding each other, these parts, or selves, are interconnected by dialogic relations of mutual dependence. They are founded in the logic of otherness and non-indifference among differences. This approach excludes the possibility of undifferentiated confusion among parts, of homologating the other onto self. And to the extent that it represents an

excess, an overflow with respect to the sum of its parts, the I or Ident is not the "individual" but the "unique". What Welby understood by "unique"—which has no relation to Max Stirner's (1844) conception of the unique, of singularity and its monadic separatism—can be translated with the concept of "non relative otherness" and "significance" (Levinas 1961).

The relation between humility, fragility and vulnerability of the self and the risks implied in its readiness to venture *towards* the other are 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 finds his way even when it is hidden. Welby described the connection between self-enrichment and risky opening *towards* the other as a condition for evolution.

On the basis of this connection we can develop a critique of the condition of "being satisfied," and propose a transcendent orientation with respect to reality, that is, the world-as-it-is, ontological being, given and determined once and for all. "Dissatisfaction" is an essential component in the concept of mother-sense. It signals the need to recover the critical instance of the human intellect, the capacity for otherness, creativity and innovation, for displacement of sense with respect to the official order of discourse. Thanks especially to the procedures of abductive logic, this critical instance allows for prevision and translation understood in a broad sense, that is, beyond interlingual translation, as a method for the acquisition of sense and knowledge, for interpretation and verification of signifying processes through verbal and nonverbal signs alike. Scientific rigour in reasoning inevitably involves mother-sense or primal sense, as conceived by Welby, and agapastic logical procedure, as described by Peirce. Reason worthy of this name implies the capacity for reasonableness as a necessary component in the evolution of sign, subject and consciousness, which means to recognize that ultimately intellectual procedure is inspired by otherness, intercorporeity, dialogue, love, inexactitude, instability and crisis.

A semiotic approach to the self allows for a more global perspective – biological and cosmical – than any historical-cultural contextualization can offer. Rereading Peirce, "chance", "love" and "necessity" each regulate three respective modes of evolutionary development in the cosmos. In relation to the semiotic self, "love" or "agapasm" provides a significant framework to discuss problems at the heart of Welby's own research and precisely in relation to Peirce's. Moreover, Peirce's logic of vagueness highlights

abduction as the main protagonist in the development of the “thought-sign” (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005, 473–7).

A connection can be established between the gift economy as thematized by Genevieve Vaughan (1997, 2004, 2007) and mother-sense as thematized by Welby (who did her research independently from academic institutions in the Victorian era, as Vaughan does today). Vaughan claims that gift-giving exists in many places in the social, though made invisible by capitalism in today's world, what she refers to as "patriarchal capitalism". Gift logic is at the heart of language (Vaughan 2015). Therefore, not even linguistic work, now defined as “immaterial work” (Petrilli 2003–4) can be separated from gift-giving logic; language converges with gift-giving, linguistic gift-giving. Gift logic is the generating nucleus of communication generally and can still be traced in the capitalist economy, in the extreme phase of its development, the “communication-production” phase (Petrilli and Ponzio 2005). Indeed, traces of gift-giving are still visible on a large-scale at the borders of the capitalist system: for example, in economies of indigenous cultures, in women's free housework or the remittances sent by immigrants to their families in their home countries.

In today's globalized world, in the global communication-production system, linguistic or immaterial work is recognized as a necessary “resource”, a basic “investment” (an “immaterial investment”), indispensable to the survival of that system. Gift logic is not an imperfect expression of equal exchange logic, but rather is regulated by the logic of otherness and excess, of care for the other before and beyond equal exchange. This is in net contrast with equal exchange logic insofar as it is based on exploitation of the other which generates the condition for social and linguistic alienation (see Rossi-Landi 1992).

Significs and semioethics contribute to a semio-philosophical founding of gift theory for a better understanding of the interpersonal relation in the world today. Ultimately, the task is to critique the world-as-it-is for social revolution according to the logic of “social agapism” (from *agape*), to use another happy expression suggested by Vaughan, alluding to Peirce. In fact, the bond between logic and love was theorized by Peirce and separately from him by Welby as well.

According to Vaughan the process of language learning is possible on the basis of gift-giving logic. Language is a verbal gift, a means of conveying the gifts of sense, that is,

sense as perception and experience not only in terms of mothering, but also of being mothered. Detailed and intense mother-work necessary for the health of young children habituates them to *being nurtured*. The giving-and-receiving process is projected and established as an interpretive “frame”. It follows that the creative reception of perceptions can be understood as a result of nurturing human needs (to perceive) by the general environment. Language itself involves verbal nurturing. It establishes gift-giving and gift-receiving logic at the level of syntax, therefore in the interpersonal relationship. We could speak here of verbal mother-sense. Unilateral, transitive, turn-taking giving-and-receiving has its own logic that contrasts with the self-reflecting logic of identity and the exchange of equivalents typical of equal exchange market logic, that is greedy exchange logic, exchange reduced to *do ut des*.

With reference to the issues raised so far, places characterized by gift logic include creative or abductive inference which, as we have seen is connected to “mother-sense”. The singularity, alterity, non replacibility of each one of us is characterized by gift logic as well. For Welby the secret of life itself is to perceive it as a gift, which also implies gift for truth, knowledge and interpretation. In her own words from her early papers: “The power of the Gift ... was vitalizing all truth, interpreting all problems, unifying all nature” (see Welby 1887). The gift is the capacity to perceive the significating potential of life in all its expressions, to experience nature, the world at large, the universe in dialogic relations of interconnectivity and vital interdependency. Gift logic allows for change, transformation and ongoing development, enhancing the human capacity for critique and transformation. The properly human refers to a dimension where interhuman relations cannot be reduced to identity, to relations among predefined subjects and objects, or to relations of exchange, equality, functionality, productivity, self-interest. Semioethics explores the possibility of response in a dimension beyond given being, “otherwise than being” (Levinas 1974).

Reading Vaughan the claim is that continuity between other-orientated logic and ego-orientated logic is the thread by which we can pull the mother back into philosophy. Working independently from Welby, Vaughan thematizes the relation between mothering and gift economy and on this platform can be associated with Welby's own work on the concept of mother-sense and gift-giving practices. In my own interpretation to pull the mother back into philosophy is not a question of gender or of the tendency to reestablish oppositional logic in the relation between male and female. Rather, it means

to recover the logic of otherness, unconditional listening and caring for the other, we might add to recover what Welby calls "mother-sense," what Vaughan calls "mother otherness," connected with global responsibility, global unindifference towards the other, "global hospitality".

Rather than "the globalization of indifference", Welby's mother-sense, like Vaughan's gift economy, shows the way to what might be indicated as "the globalization of responsibility" – just as global as the social system that governs us. This approach implies an understanding of the connection between language, or, rather, communication in general and life.

Barbara Godard (2008) associates Welby's concept of "mother-sense" with a tradition in critical semiotics that informs such thinkers as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Hélène Cixous, Mieke Bal, etc. Godard underlines the topicality of this voice from the past wholly projected toward future possibility, committed to the quest for radical social change. Welby's work promotes unity between theory and practice, between sign, value and behaviour as it unfolds along the boundaries between "critical theory" and "semiosis as action in the social, producing change." Such interconnection is considered as a signpost for future developments in semiotic research. Moreover, Godard relates Welby's signification and concept of "mother-sense" to the "sensible transcendental" as thematized by contemporary feminists, with its focus on "the *zoe* and *bios* reunited in becoming".

Godard reads Welby and her signification in light of the present. Like all translations not limited to transferral from one code to another, we can read the past from the eyeview of the present, from the perspective of the translator's spatio-temporal localization, "interconnecting" different efforts in understanding, for the sake of change, expressed in different and diversified texts and contexts.

This is translation that opens to new perspectives in the reconstruction of genealogies and, at once, to the identification of new possibilities for evolutionary development in the *search for sense* and for the conditions that favour enhancement of life. Given that a major issue for this project is the *quality of life* globally, semiotics is involved both as global semiotics and as signification or semioethics.

The work of authors cited in this paper evidence the importance of such concepts as otherness (understood in its capacity to transcend the sphere of being, of the same,

the identical) and dialogism, but also of singularity and responsibility, listening and hospitality, for the critique of ontology and reformulation of humanism. By contrast to the "humanism of identity," we envisage a new form of humanism oriented by the logic of otherness and dialogism: dialogic otherness, non relative and absolute otherness. Though not our focus in this paper, it is important to remember that major contributions in this sense come from Mikhail Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas, both of whom thematize this new form of humanism. The "humanism of otherness" gets free from the logic of identity, from its short-sightedness and egocentrism, and opens to the other, is responsive to the other, to the rights of the other and not only of identity.

As claimed by Bakhtin in an early essay entitled "Author and Hero in Aesthetic Activity" (1920-1923, collected in Bakhtin 1990), where he evidences the interconnection between identity and alterity in the constitution of one's very own self: "Ethical and aesthetic objectification requires a powerful *point d'appui* outside itself; it requires some genuine source of real strength out of which I would be capable of seeing myself as another" (p. 31). And a few pages further on he concludes: "...one can speak of a human being's absolute need for the other, for the other's seeing, remembering, gathering, and unifying self-activity – the only self-activity capable of producing his outwardly finished personality. This outward personality could not exist, if the other did not create it: aesthetic memory is productive—it gives birth, for the first time, to the outward human being on a new plane of being" (pp. 35-36).

The problem of the relation between identity and alterity is ever more pressing in the communities, whether small or large, that form today's world – from one's own self considered as a community of selves, to an ethnic group, a language, religion, system of values, a state, a nation, continent, a phase in history, and so forth. And given that the relation between identity and alterity is no less than structural the sign, to the interpersonal relation, to ideology, to social programming and to human behavior at large, all of which are made of signs, this relation cannot be ignored by the sciences that study the sign with any claims to scientificity.

Globalization is characterized by the logic of concrete abstractions which coincides with the logic of identity whose vocation is exclusion of the other. This is the case of any form of community, or universal practice – Individual, Nation, Language,

Knowledge, Science and their various branches, Religion, Ethnic Group, Human Rights, the Market, Equal Exchange, etc. Such categories arise in the context of the humanism of identity where the rights of the other, the absolutely other, are not contemplated. In fact, in today's globalized world identity dominates over otherness and is supported by the trap of abstraction, universalization and reification. The logic of identity, of identity that shuts out the other, expunges the other, leads to separation of the self from the vital, dialogic processes of social reproduction and of life globally.

For a critique of social reproduction in a globalized and homologating world with any claims to adequacy, reference to dialogic otherness is indispensable. "Humanism questioned" means to question the logic of identity upon which it stands, and recover its original vocation for the other. We propose the methodics of detotalization for a better understanding of identity and its workings. The detotalizing method is oriented by the logic of otherness and as such is capable of transcending the barriers of abstract but concrete totalities, of surmounting artificial limits and separations which construct identity by expelling the other. Instead of separatism and indifference as generated by the humanism of identity and of human rights based on identity thus described, the detotalizing method evidences the inevitable condition of interconnectivity and interdependency among totalities, "detotalized totalities," in the great global network of semiosis that converges with life, a globality and polyphonic multiplicity where the other demands to be recognized and encounter is inevitable. Such is the quest of so-called "humanism of otherness," or better specified "humanism of the rights of otherness," of the rights of the other.

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