Abduction, Medical Semeiotics
and Semioethics
Individual and Social Symptomatology
from a Semiotic Perspective

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Summary. My paper starts from Thomas A. Sebeok (1920-2001) and his conception of semiotics integrated with Charles Sanders Peirce’s pragmatic concept of “abduction”, disregarded by Sebeok in his own original reformulation of Peircean theory. Sebeok was not interested in logic just as he was not interested in critiquing today’s social system. Sebeok denominated his particular approach to semiotics as “global semiotics”. Taking global semiotics as our starting point, we propose to develop it in the direction of semioethics, which presupposes Sebeok’s interpretation of ancient medical semeiotics or symptomatology as an initial phase in the history of semiotics.

1 Abduction, Icon, and Agapasm from a Synchist Perspective

Abduction is the name of a given type of argumentation, of progression from one interpretant to another. Abduction is foreseen by logic, but (especially in its more risky expressions) supersedes the logic of identity and develops through argumentative procedures that are risky, that is, eccentric, creative, or inventive. By contrast with induction and deduction, in abduction the relation between interpreted sign and interpretant sign is regulated by similarity, attraction and reciprocal autonomy. Abduction is grounded in the logic of otherness, substantial dialogism, and creativity. It proceeds through relations of fortuitous attraction among signs and is dominated by iconicity.

We have made the claim that abductive argumentative procedure is risky; in other words, it advances through arguments that are tentative and hypothetical, leaving a minimal margin to convention and to mechanical necessity. To the extent that it transcends the logic of identity and equal exchange among parts, abduction belongs to the side of excess, exile, dépense, giving

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without a profit, the gift beyond exchange, desire. It proceeds more or less according to the “interesting”, and is articulated in the dialogic and disinterested relation among signs – a relation regulated by the law of creative love, so that abduction is also an argumentative procedure of the agapastic type.

In Charles S. Peirce’s philosophical system (see, for example, his writings collected in the volume *Chance, Love and Logic* [1]), “chance”, “love” and “necessity” indicate three modes of development. The connection between love, or what Peirce calls *agapasm*, is particularly interesting from the perspective of the present paper. In his renown paper “On a New List of Categories” [2, 1.545-559], Peirce elaborates his doctrine of categories in terms of the triad firstness, secondness, and thirdness, which are always co-present, interdependent and irreducible. The doctrine of categories constitutes the foundation of his ontology and cosmology, therefore it is connected to his ontological-cosmo-cological triad with the distinction between agapasm, anancasm, tychasm, to his typology of inferential logic with the triad abduction, induction, and deduction, and to his sign typology, in particular the triad icon, index, and symbol.

The connection between agapasm and abduction offers a platform to discuss Victoria Welby’s (1837-1912) work on signifying processes in relation to Peirce. In a reconstruction of the history of semiotics, Welby is a name to remember along with others like Mikhail M. Bakhtin and Emmanuel Levinas, for a better understanding of the sign in theoretical terms.

Understood as development through the forces of affinity and sympathy and with reference to the Peircean triad, icon, index and symbol, we may claim that agapasm is strongly iconic by virtue of the force of attraction, that is, the relation of similarity or affinity among interpretants. In agapastic evolution, chance (tychasm) and necessity (anancasm) are also operative. However the forces of attraction, affinity, freedom, and fortuitousness dominate in the relation among interpretants forming the continuous (synechetic) flow of infinite semiosis, just as iconicity dominates over indexicality and symbolicity. The concept of continuity or synechism involves regularity. As emerges from her own philosophy of the sign processes permeating the entire signifying universe, Welby too believed that development is articulated in a continuous sign structure, and that continuity presupposes relational logic grounded in otherness. The logic of otherness is a “dia-logic” – that is, logic that recovers the dimension of *dialogicality*, as understood by Bakhtin. In other words, following both Peirce and Bakhtin, dialogicality is considered as a modality of semiosis, which may or may not involve verbal signs and may or may not take the form of dialogue. Dialogicality thus described is determined by the degree of opening towards otherness. And agapastic evolution is achieved through the law of love; creative and altruistic love, love founded on the logic of otherness, as would say authors like Welby, Bakhtin and Levinas.

In tychastic development – connected to symbolicity in semiotic terms and to induction in argumentative terms, new interpretive routes with unpredictable outcomes, some of which are fixed in “habits”, are determined by