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*The Body of the Community: Peirce, Royce, and Nietzsche*

In *The Problem of Christianity*<sup>1</sup>, in a chapter of an altogether semiotic and hermeneutic character, Josiah Royce pays immediately his debt to Charles Sanders Peirce, and declares that he is nothing but summarizing, in his own way, “some still neglected opinions which were first set forth, in outline, more than forty years ago by our American logician, Mr Charles Peirce, in papers which have been little read, but which, to my mind, remain of very high value as guides of inquiry, both in Logic and in Theory of Knowledge” (Royce 2001: 275). He concludes: “let me next call attention to matters which I should never have viewed as I now view them without his direct or indirect aid” (Royce 2001: 277).

He refers to Peirce’s 1868 essays *Questions Concerning Some Faculties Claimed for Man and Some Consequences of Four Incapacities*<sup>2</sup>, which appeared in the “Journal of Speculative Philosophy” and where Peirce tried to demolish the traditional concepts of interiority, introspection, immediate intuition and mental image. Here Peirce sustained that we have no power of introspection, but that all knowledge of the internal world is derived from hypothetical reasoning based on our knowledge of external facts, and that we have no power of intuition, but every cognition is logically determined by previous cognition, that is, every sign is a train of other signs. All thought is, in his opinion, to be reduced to sign inferences, and this signifies that every thought must address itself to some other, must be interpreted by some other, because this is the essence of the sign. Cognizability and being are nearly synonymous, and reality itself is determined by the public truths developed by a community, which plays its interpretations establishing what has to be considered, in the long run, “real”. “The real, then, is that which, sooner or later, information and reasoning would finally result in, and which is therefore independent of the vagaries of me and you. Thus, the very origin of the conception of reality shows that this conception essentially involves the notion of COMMUNITY, without definite limits, and capable of an indefinite increase of knowledge” (EP1:52). Real things are of a “cognitive and therefore significative nature, so that the real is that which signifies something real” (EP1:58). As Royce writes, “by the ‘real world’ we mean simply the ‘true interpretation’” (PC: 337) and “were there no interpretations in the world, there would be neither selves nor communities” (PC: 274). Reality has the “structure of the Community”: “the interpretation is real only if the appropriate community is real, and is true only if that community reaches its goal” (PC: 339).

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<sup>1</sup> Josiah Royce, *The Problem of Christianity*, with the introduction of John E. Smith and a revised edition by F. Oppenheim. (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2001). From now on PC, followed by page number.

The interest for Peirce by Royce lead him to rescue Peirce manuscripts and work to bring them to Harvard after his death. “During the spring of 1915 it was impossible to enter the study of Professor Royce in Emerson Hall, without being acutely conscious of the manuscripts of Charles Sanders Peirce which at that time filled every available surface of table, chair and floor with their bulky, dusty and yet somehow intriguing disorder” (W.F.Kernan, 1965:3). It was Victor Lenzen to run to Arisbe, Peirce’s hideaway in Pennsylvania, to take care of Peirce’s papers, and Morris Cohen, another of the best Royce’s students, to sponsor some years later the *Collected Papers* edition and the engagement of Hartshorne and Weiss in it.

<sup>2</sup> C.S.Peirce (1868, in Peirce 1992: 26). From now on EP, followed by volume and page number.

And, finally, what is true? Truth is public, writes Peirce; it belongs to the public consent, to the “catholic” consent<sup>3</sup>. In a word: truth is not the plain correspondence to reality, but the infinite process of sign references developed by the community, *constituting* (and not *substituting*) the real. This is why Peirce could write that “reality is an event indefinitely future” (EP1:64).

In the 1868 writings reality, truth and cognition are but signs. The last move of this kind of “semiotization” of the existent, carried out by Peirce, is the brilliant theory of “man as a sign”. Peirce introduces it recalling that the content of consciousness, or of the mind, is simply a sign resulting from inference. There is *nothing* more profound and less phenomenal than this. Talking of a philosophy of mind is like talking of a philosophy of language, of sign and semiosis. So what distinguishes a man from a word? Is the mind more complicated, more conscious than a word? It may be, writes Peirce, but consciousness is a very vague term, and, as a matter of fact, all there is in the mind can just be expressed through signs, verbal or not-verbal. “When we think, we, ourselves, as we are at the moment, appear as a sign” (EP1: 38).

So, we may conclude that man is a sign, also, in the sense that he acquires information, and comes to mean more than it did before, exactly as do words. Words could say to men: “You mean nothing which we have not taught you, and then only so far as you address some word as the interpretant of your thought” (EP1: 54).

The signs that men use *are* the men themselves, concludes Peirce. As life is a train of thoughts, and every thought is a sign, every man’s life is just a course of never-ending semiosis. “Thus my language is the sum total of myself, for the man is the thought”. I wish to recall that Wittgenstein expressed himself in the *Tractatus* in a similar way (Wittgenstein 1951: § 5.6)<sup>4</sup>. But, more precisely, every sign-thought is an external sign, a sign that expresses itself in some habit of response, some physical quality or action; so, not only can we say that man is a sign, but that he is an external sign (like any word, or gesture, habit or deed), a sign that expresses itself in practice. It is hard for us, continues Peirce, men of the Cartesian age, to bear this thought, because we identify the mind with the will, the pure consciousness, with rationality and interiority. But the identity of man resides in the *consistency* of what he does and thinks, and this consistency is expressed through a system of signs, and translated into habits and praxes, that are never completely individual or idiosyncratic. The identity of man comes, thus, from a sort of alterity, the alterity of the *external* signs in which his personhood is exposed and *extended*. A complexity of sign relations that he *is*, not that he *has*<sup>5</sup>.

His consistency is given, as Peirce wrote elsewhere (EP1: 29), by the overlapping of many fibres, and thus by some kind of interconnected multiplicity. As Leibniz wrote, every individual monad can be thought of as a garden full of plants; yet, each branch of these plants, each drop of its lymph, is also some such garden<sup>6</sup>. This represents a strong tradition of thinking in Western philosophy: Goethe writes that any individual is a plurality, and also when it appears as a singularity, it remains a reunion of living autonomous beings. Nietzsche, in turn, worked over and over again on this Goethian perspective, eventually developing his idea of a collective nature of the self<sup>7</sup>. The *in-dividuum* is not at all a “not di-

<sup>3</sup> These themes are approached in *Fraser’s The Works of George Berkeley*, a 1871 review, now in EP1: 83.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. on this point De Tienne (2002: 30).

<sup>5</sup> There is a similar phrase in a letter that E.C. Hegeler sent to Peirce. Cf. De Tienne (2002:29). Cf. on this themes also Colapietro (1989).

<sup>6</sup> Leibniz (1898), § 67.

<sup>7</sup> See on this point Tauber (1994: 27).

viduum” entity; but it is something internally spread, and externally open to interpretations and modifications.

Yet, there is another character that derives from the analogy traced between man and sign. If a sign, as Peirce states, is anything which stands to somebody for something, it is essentially a *relation* that lives in an endless chain of reference. If this series is broken off, he writes, the sign falls short of its significant character. So, if we admit that man is a sign, we ought to accept that man is a continually developing sign, never fully-acquired. At every step, we recalculate – so to say – our origin, our significance, and our destination.

Like any sign, the man-sign lives in the translations and the references it gives rise to, and its meaning resides in an uncertain area of transit. We must consent to thinking of man as a vague and potential entity, constantly addressing to other signs as its Interpretants. More precisely, as a sign dependent on the future thought of the community. In fact, as we have seen, in the last lines of *Some consequences*, Peirce approaches the idea of community: reality is nothing other than the “final product of mental action” (W2: 471) and it depends, thus, on an ideal state of complete interpretation, developed by an ideal community of thought. To be logical, man must not be selfish. He has to recognize the identification of his own interest with those of a large community, and he has to act following three sentiments (analogous to St.Paul’s trio of Charity, Faith and Hope): the interest in an indefinite community, the recognition of the possibility of this interest being made supreme, and the hope in the unlimited continuance of intellectual activity<sup>8</sup>. We’ll see that Royce is a perfect Peirce scholar on this point. “The individual man – concludes Peirce in *Some Consequences* (EP 1:55) – since his separate existence is manifested only by ignorance and error, so far as he is anything apart from his fellows, and from what he and they are to be, is only a negation. This is man,

proud man,  
Most ignorant of what he’s most assured,  
His glassy essence”<sup>9</sup>.

By the way, Peirce did not reject telepathy and carefully considered strange phenomena such as multiple personality, and this should not sound out of place, in this perspective that exalts individuality as dispersion in the community, openness to the future, a glassy, vague, multiple and not-centred essence. If we seek the self, Peirce seems to say, we find the other, many others, the whole community. The *ego cogito* is not our most evident certainty, but the abyss of our most profound ignorance. And personality is not a solid inner constitution, but a “bundle of habits”, of public truths and meanings. Better yet, as we read in a manuscript:

Personality, on both sides, that of the unification of all of a body’s experiences, and that of the isolation of different persons, is much exaggerated in our natural ways of thinking, - ways that tend to puff up the *person*, and make him think himself far more real than he veritably is. A *person* is, in truth, like a cluster of stars, which appears to be *one* star when viewed with the naked eye, but which scanned with the telescope of scientific psychology is found on the one hand, to be multiple within itself, and on the other to have no absolute demarcation from a neighboring condensation<sup>10</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> Cf. on these themes *The Doctrine of Chances* (EP1: 150).

<sup>9</sup> The verses are from Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure*, 2.2.143-48.

<sup>10</sup> I owe this quotation to André De Tienne’s writing quoted above. Peirce’s manuscript number is R 403.

Let's now come to Royce. In the very beginning of PC, Royce insists on the following idea: every community is a kind of organism, a live unit that has organs and a peculiar mind (PC: 80). Like any organism, it can grow and loose strength, may live a sane or insane life, may decay or undergo a complete metamorphosis, becoming a "corporate entity" of a different dimension. Like any organism, in fact, a community nourishes itself with foreign parts, that make its body grow and become a part of it (parts that are *incorporated*, we could say). The community is not simply the collection of its individuals, as an organism is not simply a whole composed, as a machine, by the assemblage of its parts. It has an identity, a consistency, a coordinated body and a "social soul", that has aims, hopes and common memories, that feels and suffers. The community is thus more real and concrete than any single individual. Still better, the real self *is* the community, and, loving my Beloved Community, I love my real self, *myself* in the others, myself in that *third* other represented by the mediation of a public interpretation (called by Peirce "Final Logical Interpretant" [CP 5.491]). The One and Simple I finds its real identity-as happened in the Peircean system-in the polarity of Three of a sign relation.

The notion of self, of the discrete individual as something to be overcome is in fact at the core of the later texts of Royce. Any individual must surrender its individuality and particularity, to join the collective self, the real unity of his community. "Every self's office is to conform to the mind to which he addresses his interpretation: his being chief is due to his being first of all a servant, and his surrender is his victory" (PC: 317). With astonishing similarity, Peirce wrote that "the great principle of logic is self-surrender, which does not mean that the self is to lay low for the sake of an ultimate triumph" (CP 5.402, n.2). The Community of Interpretation traces a triadic sign-relation between the individual, the community, and their common end; and, yet, it is only due to this act of connection, which is directed to the fulfilment of a determinate purpose, that this relationship can individuate its respective poles and eventually succeeds in being significant.<sup>11</sup>

We could then say that for Royce, too-although he actually never refers to this part of Peirce's article-man is simply a sign, a symbol that refers to other signs and interpretations. There is no I in his philosophy, but the I is simply a transition (like the single sign in the semiosis flux), and in any I is the We that talks. We must not say: so act I; but: so acts the community, in me and through me, and when I listen to my consciousness, I am listening to a plurality of voices, to a gorgeous polyphony. "We are indeed many [...] We may be many selves" (PC: 241)<sup>12</sup>.

Similarly, Peirce wrote that we should say that we are in thought, and not that thoughts are in us (as we say that we are in motion and not that motion is in a body [EP1: 42n]). Which thought? The Thought Common to all (*Logos*), as already Heraclitus said, the Logical Interpretant of our age and culture, as Peirce would have said. And remember that in ancient ages there was no Ego in play, but just the Community, the tribe, that judged, exercised will, and responsibility, determined shame and produced satisfactions. Any member of that group worked to potentiate the only real existent body, that of the Community, acting as a limb of it, as a single powerful muscle, or a tissue, a cell, that cooperated in the making of the living and fruitful practices of the group itself.

Yet, there is no 'melting' of the parts in the whole, losing their specificity: the idea of a "collective self" is the idea of multiple units linked together as a functioning entity in the

<sup>11</sup> Briody (1969: 27) proposes to see as members of the triad the Interpreter, the Interpretant and the Interpreted, and more specifically, the Beloved Community, the Individual and Christ.

<sup>12</sup> On this point let me propose the following suggestion: could this vision of the We (or They) of the Community be read as an authentic version of the Heideggerian *Das Man*?

flux of action, in the pragmatic deed, that may also be, on each occasion, different. Like a dancer, this living body extends itself in time and space, reaching brand new dimensions. The community body's limbs do not work with reference to a centre that dominates them, but they cooperate in the extension and articulation of any parts, in the mobility and plasticity of the ensemble, in the reference to the same past events and in the expectations of the same future events. But the ideal extension of the self does not only imply an ideal extension in the past and future, in time and deeds, but is also an extension to the physical objects of his practice. The knight or the samurai regarded his sword as a part of himself, and so do we with our house or work's tools. Where are the self's boundaries? We must refer to this extended self, that expresses himself pragmatically in deeds and common actions, that addresses himself to larger interpretations. "The present self, the fleeting individual of today, is a mere gesticulation of a self" (PC: 255).

Let's now consider Peirce's writing of 1892, *Man's glassy essence*, published in "The Monist", in which he returns to his 1868 issues. Here he talks of the profound unity of certain general ideas, that made them similar to a sort of personality. Indeed, a person is just a particular kind of general idea, he writes, a pure symbol, and, viceversa, a general idea has the unified living feeling of a person, it is "our little creature". Similarly, there should be something like a personal consciousness in the bodies of men who are in intimate and intensely sympathetic communion. Peirce talks of *esprit de corps*, national sentiment, *sympathy* as not mere metaphors. There are, thus, such greater persons, sorts of corporations, of "corporate personalities" – and this word is very well found in a Roycean view. Finally, Peirce appeals to the fact that, acting for a same end and through the same means, many persons can behave as the same person, a strong and unique corps that moves as a single organism. "When the thirty thousand young people of the society for Christian Endeavour were in New York – he writes – there seemed to me to be some mysterious diffusion of sweetness and light" (EP1: 350)<sup>13</sup>. This is Peirce in 1892, and we saw what Royce had written later in 1913. More literally, in 1916, in a reply to Mary Calkins Royce says: "For me, at present, a genuinely and loyally united community which lives a coherent life is, in a perfectly [literal] sense, a person" (Royce 2001: 28). Which lives a coherent life, that is, which operates through some consolidated praxes, which translates in a living habit of response some definite pragmatic meanings. In the chapter of PC on the "Doctrine of signs", Royce's man, like Peirce's, says: "Alone I am lost, and am worse than nothing. I need a counsellor, I need my community. Interpret me. Let me join in this interpretation. Let there be the community[...] This alone is real [...] For if there is no interpretation, there is no world whatever" (PC: 362). Nor, we could add, something like a man: no object and no subject outside the realm of interpretation, and of his founding Community.

Although Royce did acknowledge Peirce's evaluations, on this ground, he never seemed to refer to the Peircean vision of "man-sign", nor to this 1892 writing, despite both so profoundly resonated with his own view.

But let's come to some conclusions: both for Peirce and Royce, the idea of man, grounded on the Cartesian division between soul and body, is something to be overcome. Towards the idea of Community. Is then Community a kind of Super-Man?

I propose this term thinking of Nietzsche, of course, and this should not sound strange, if we keep in mind that Royce knew Nietzsche's writings very well, especially the *Zarathustra*, and that he deeply appreciated some parts of his thought, introduced him in

<sup>13</sup> In this writing Peirce makes reference to his 1868 paper and the theory of man-sign, but says that it was "too nominalistic". This new version of the theory, without any doubt, is an expression of the realist doctrine (in the medieval sense) that Peirce emphasized during the second part of his life.

America and was perhaps one of the few to understand his philosophy's most original aims<sup>14</sup>. With Royce, and this is notable, Friedrich Nietzsche, in the early 1900's, entered one of the most important American Departments of Philosophy: Harvard in Cambridge. Royce, the utmost forerunner of Christianity, seems to have opened the way to the dangerous Anti-Christ.

Let's consider, in conclusion, one of the later texts of Royce's large production (published posthumously), the essay devoted to Nietzsche's thought (Royce 1917). It presumably marked some intense years of reflection on the problems of will and personhood, and it dealt with the tragic intertwining of life and interpretation of life in Nietzsche's very existence. There is then no doubt that Royce understood the problem of individuality as one of the leading themes of Nietzsche's speculations. And he was surely right, because the German author was in search of a new figure of man and humanity. Nonetheless, Royce individuated a loss in his analysis, regarding the concept of the social and communitarian dimension of self. The aristocratic Nietzsche had neither the instruments, nor the interest, for going in that direction<sup>15</sup>; yet, his main problem remained that of the "perfect individual selfhood" (Royce 1917: § IV)<sup>16</sup>, the creation of a "person of higher level" (PC: 83), a theme that was dear to Royce himself.

Royce reasoned on this expression: what does the word *selfhood* mean? If we conceive man as *self-surrender*, we are destined to meet the Other as perfection of the One. Could we really think of the Superman as a stronger and superior man, as the "perfect self"? This is very puerile: we should rather think of a new dimension of humanity, in which the individual could live his dispersion in the community, finding a new body and a new self, a new reason and a new I<sup>17</sup>. In the same way, Peirce wrote that the individual man, "since his separate existence is manifested only by ignorance and error, so far as he is anything apart from his fellows, is only a negation". If we negate man, we are leading towards something different and must think totally anew: man can be thought of only as a shady and passing figure of thought, destined to vanish<sup>18</sup>. Thus, there are, as may be seen, some good reasons to interpret the meaning of the community in Royce (and Peirce) as something "super-human", in a Nietzschean sense. "The concept of the community possesses – writes Royce (PC: 252, my emphasis) – a *more than human* significance". It is something definitely "super-personal" (PC: 83) and "possesses the virtue of a person of higher level" (PC: 83). Something that guides towards a "larger self" (PC: 241).

What I am claiming is not that Royce actually took this direction, but that this could be a fruitful way of interpreting his ideas. Nonetheless, although it is absolutely true that Nietzsche looked at the mass of the community as a "herd", yet we can find some passages in his work (see for example Nietzsche 1909: § 132), in which he talks of the "suppression of the individual" and of the formation of "large corporations and their members", as a typical property of our time. Likely, at that period, he was not sure of the superiority of this

<sup>14</sup> See on these issues Bell (2005: 147). Royce proposes a "religious reinterpretation of the doctrine of the 'superman'", concludes Bell. Frank Oppenheim (1993: 189) writes that Nietzsche's conception of developmental individuality exercised a notable influence on Royce's mature thought.

<sup>15</sup> Cf. on this issue Bell (2005: 130). Yet, I would be oriented, as I will write, to reconsider the Nietzschean view of the "community". Cf. on these issues again Tauber (1994: 30) and Fabbrichesi (2010: 20-2).

<sup>16</sup> I could look up at an Italian translation of the essay in *Nietzsche e l'America*, Pisa, ETS, 2005, pp. 255-275.

<sup>17</sup> Cf. F. Nietzsche (1995, § 4): "'I', you say, and are proud of that word. But the greater thing- in which you are unwilling to believe is your body with its great wisdom; that does not say 'I', but does 'I' [...] The body is a great wisdom, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd". And remember that the despisers of the body "are no bridges to the Superman".

<sup>18</sup> For a similar view, cf. M. Foucault (1966).

process, but in a pseudo-aphorism of the *Will to power*, dated 1885, he recalled that in archaic times the will aspired not to be a single person, but “to be like a *polis*”, as happened in Greece, and that this was the honour and the virtue of the highest men, namely, to behave all together as a single organism, as a corporate entity. Nowadays, writes Nietzsche, we still see traces of it in the *esprit de corps*, which is typical of high rank officers, like in Prussia. We must strengthen, concludes the author, the will to disappear as individual and eventually dive into a “great type” (Nietzsche 1925: §783). Hence there are some hints that Nietzsche too thought of a new idea of community as a corporate body, a community that, of course, was neither the levelled and compassionate Christian community, as was Royce's<sup>19</sup>, nor the sum of many discrete individuals. He was probably thinking of a complex organism, as was the human body in the new version given by biologists like Roux and Virchow, where unity simply means organization, “a structure of power that *means* unity, but it's not unity” (Nietzsche 1925: § 561). The hierarchical organization of many *Machtquanta*, a group of *pares* dominated by a leading aristocracy<sup>20</sup>, a Beloved Community, as Royce wrote, but made of *aristoi*, not of servants.

In both authors, though in different ways, there is no more distinction between individual and community: every individual is a community and every real community is an individual. This “collective Self” (Tauber 1994: 27) is a real Body: the body with “a great wisdom, a plurality with one sense, a war and a peace, a flock and a shepherd”, which Nietzsche refers to in the *Zarathustra*. We must then proceed “beyond man”<sup>21</sup>.

For Royce, man is a *persona*, but in the Latin sense: a mask of the community. But we could say the same for Nietzsche, that writes in a fragment that man “acquires his qualities as organ of the community”, and that his consciousness has evolved under the pressure of the need of communications, through signs, showing to be nothing else than a sign effect (Nietzsche 2001: § 354). For all three authors, then, the Ego is not a simple datum, but a result of interpretation, an *effect* of public, meaningful constructions, and not at all its *source*<sup>22</sup>. Such is self-consciousness: a pure rebound, a consequence of our being-with-others. Selfhood is a shady, wavering, complex, and not at all evident reality. Its tissues are frayed, its nature vague, glassy as a sheet of water, internally divided and open. So, again, where are its boundaries?

If man is a sign, it is not a mere finite entity, but, like any sign, it is an infinite and unlimited reference, that unfolds through time and space, and that, like Peirce's semiosis, has no beginning and no end, that is not consistent *per se*, that is “without walls”, as Royce says (PC: 240)<sup>23</sup>: pure flux, or a crossing-place. “I am a sort of meeting place of countless streams [...] left to myself alone, I can never find out what my will is” (Royce 1908: 27-28). Like Walt Whitman, whom he quotes, Royce would have said: “I am large, I contain multitudes”. These multitudes, contained in any I, this Many in which any One unfolds, is something properly superhuman. “The Superhuman is in us” (Royce 1908: 378). It is not something to wait for in the future. But the Superman is the one who knows how to live a

<sup>19</sup> “This new being is a corporate entity, the body of Christ, or the body of which the now divinely exalted Christ is the head. Of this body the exalted Christ is also, for Paul, the spirit, and also, in some new sense, the lover. This corporate entity is the Christian community itself” (PC: 93).

<sup>20</sup> Cf. on these themes Fabbrichesi (2010:12-13), and Tauber (1994: 27).

<sup>21</sup> Royce (1917: 126) quotes here *Zarathustra*, using a translation of the word “uebermensch” slightly different from the usual “superman” or “overman”. That is significant, in my opinion.

<sup>22</sup> Cf De Tienne (2002 and 2009), e PC (X.2). On this theme we could trace a fruitful link not only to Nietzsche's, but to Foucault's perspective, too, I think. The Self – as Colapietro underlines (1989: 43) – “is both a result and a transformer of the practice of signs”.

<sup>23</sup> See on this point Corrington (1983).

new corporeity, that great living body that Royce identifies with the Community. “Behind your thoughts and feelings – recites Zarathustra in the passage already quoted – there stands a mighty ruler, and unknown sage–whose name is Self. In your body he dwells: he is your body”. The real Self is the Body, but the only and real body is the Body of the Community, in Royce’s view. Royce permits us a vision of the communitarian self as an incorporated and carnal reality, something more than a pure and evanescent sign, as it was for the young Peirce<sup>24</sup>, and something more than a Superman considered as a man that simply exalts the sphere of instincts, as sometimes appears by a quick reading of Nietzsche.

As Nietzsche thought, the Death of God (considered as the loss of any ancient value) means the Death of Man, of a man considered as a simple and unitary organism, as the sum of a body and a soul. I think that Royce and Peirce could have joined him in this particular form of a-theism, in which the “Hope of a Great Community” (Royce) means the Hope of a “Great Politics” (Nietzsche 2001: §377) and, thus, of the “Great Health” (Nietzsche 2001: §38). In this peculiar sense, all three authors help us to start thinking of a process of de-personification of humanity.

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<sup>24</sup> In some personal exchanges A. de Tienne convinced me that Peirce, from *Man’s Glassy Essence* on, was interested in clearing a theory of protoplasm – this latter understood as a glassy substance that could behave both like a solid and like a liquid - in order to substantiate in a more physical and biological way the idea of the “glassy” essence of the man-sign. In fact, his idea of “corporate personalities” can be seen as a reinforcement of that perspective: “Consciousness is a sort of public spirit among the nerve-cells”, he wrote, and “man is a community of cells” (CP 1.672). Notwithstanding this biological implications, so close to Nietzsche’s interests, the idea of the man-sign as an incorporeal reality coincides with the stoic semiotic tradition, according to which meaning is one of the “incorporeal” realities.

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