

# Situation, Structure, and the Context of Meaning\*

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Two of the approaches at the forefront of contemporary sociological interest in meaning, symbolic interactionism and structuralism, share an interest in the role of signs and symbols in social life, yet take radically different standpoints concerning the nature of signs and the locus of meaning. Symbolic interactionists stress the ongoing process of the "situation" as the determinant of meaning, whereas structuralists claim that meaning must be sought at the deeper level of "system" or "structure" rather than at the surface. By comparing some foundational concepts underlying these traditions, such as the nature of the sign in Peirce and Saussure and Durkheim and Mead, and then exploring recent developments in structuralism and symbolic interactionism, a critical appraisal of their theories of meaning is made in the context of an emerging semiotic sociology.

## The Significance of Meaning

For years neglected as a central sociological concern, the question of meaning has reemerged with a vengeance and now is demanding some kind of answer from those who would further social theory. Two of the approaches at the forefront of contemporary interest, symbolic interactionism and structuralism, claim that meaning forms the very basis of society, not instincts or genetics, materialist economics, or asocial psychological laws; and that the foundation of meaning is the sign or symbol. These approaches by and large reject the idea that social science is a search for empirical causal "facts," and in quite different ways they argue that "values" are what we are really after—that "significance" binds society together. One persistent problem in these and other interpretive approaches is the locus of meaning: whether it is to be found in existential and unique "situations" or in a deep-rooted system or code, i.e., a "structure." By comparing and contrasting some foundational concepts, such as the nature of the sign, and then exploring recent developments in symbolic interactionism and structuralism, I hope to evaluate critically their strengths and weaknesses in the context of an emerging semiotic sociology.

The term *symbolic interactionism* was formulated by Herbert Blumer (1969: 1) to reflect the milieu of social theory developed primarily at the University of Chicago in the early part of the century. Blumer himself cites the pragmatists William James, John Dewey, and George Herbert Mead, a number of Chicago sociologists including W. I. Thomas, Robert E. Park, Florian Znaniecki, Robert Redfield, and Louis Wirth, and also Charles Horton Cooley and James Mark Baldwin as among those who significantly contributed to the foundations of sym-

bolic interactionism. The common theme uniting these theorists is an emphasis on the situational context of meaning—a view of meaning as a communicative process located in interpretive acts, whose study demands close attention to the uniqueness and variability of situations as well as to the way situations reflect habitual attitudes of mind. W. I. Thomas, influenced by his friend and colleague Mead, as well as by Dewey and James, developed an explicitly "situational" approach to sociology that stated: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences. The total situation will always contain more and less subjective factors, and the behavior reaction can be studied only in connection with the whole context, i.e., the situation as it exists in verifiable, objective terms, and as it has seemed to exist in terms of the interested persons" (Thomas and Thomas, 1970:154-55). Thomas's two-sided concept of *situation* as the configuration of conditioning factors both selectively defined by the person and shaping behavior (Thomas, 1966:154-67) reveals a concern somewhat similar to Weber's concept of *action* as both subjectively intended meaning oriented, to a conditioning "outer world" of objects and processes of nature and as meaning determined through objectively rational means (Weber, 1981; Levine, 1981:10). The contemporary symbolic interactionist sees interaction itself as the medium of the symbolic process and for this reason has been criticized as both atheoretical and unsystematic, as illustrated by Lewis Coser's extremely negative comments (1976:156-57):

"Blumer and his co-thinker wish, in fact, to teach a lesson of humility to the sociological theorist, who is seen as incapable of constructing enduring, objective, theoretical structures, but who must, in their view, be attentive to the subjective interpretations, the definitions of the situations, and the emergent meanings that arise in human interaction and be content with that. Needless to say, though functionalists have availed themselves of many particular insights provided by Mead and his successors in the elucidation of social-psychological processes, they have rejected, as a kind of scientific Luddism, the extreme idiographic and antitheoretical bias inherent in symbolic interactionism. They, as well as other critics, have asserted that this orientation prevents the understanding of social structures and their constraining characteristics or of patterns of human organization such as class hierarchies or power constellations."

"French" structuralism has developed largely out of the ideas generated by Ferdinand de Saussure, Emile Durkheim and his circle, and more recently, Claude Levi-Strauss. In Levi-Strauss's definition of the term "social structure," one sees how structuralism stands in opposition to symbolic interactionism: "The term 'social structure' has nothing to do with empirical reality but with models which are built up after it. . . . It will be enough to state at this time that social relations consist of the raw materials out of which the models making up the social structure are built, while social structure can, by no means, be reduced to the ensemble of social relations to be described in a given society" (1967:271). Levi-Strauss views the goal of social science as the achievement of an understanding of the invariant laws of thought, the "deep structure" that provides the ordering of meaning and therefore of society itself (e.g., 1966:263-64). His heavy reliance on Saussure's concepts of the sign and of meaning as based on binary opposition, as well as his attempts to seek a scientific universal logic as

the ultimate basis of society, has drawn negative criticism from Clifford Geertz similar to that of Coser's concerning symbolic interactionism, but for precisely the opposite reasons (Geertz, 1973:355):

"It is all terribly ingenious. If a model of society which is "eternal and universal" can be built up out of the debris of dead and dying societies—a model which reflects neither time, nor place, nor circumstance but (this from *Totemism*) "a direct expression of the structure of the mind (and behind the mind, probably of the brain")—then this may be the way to build it.

For what Levi-Strauss has made for himself is an infernal culture machine. It annuls history, reduces sentiment to a shadow of the intellect, and replaces the particular minds of particular savages in particular jungles with the Savage Mind immanent in us all."

Neither the extremes of a structuralist "infernal culture machine" nor a symbolic interactionist "scientific luddism" can provide the comprehensive theory of meaning that seems to be the goal of the ongoing restructuring of social theory (Bernstein, 1976; Geertz, 1980). Yet these two traditions cannot be reduced solely to the work of Levi-Strauss and Blumer, and by exploring the concept of *sign* and the locus of meaning in the foundations of the symbolic interactionist and structuralist traditions, I hope to trace the parallel threads of situation and structure that define each tradition.

### **Peirce and Saussure on the Sign: Semiosis versus Structure**

Let us begin the discussion of symbolic interactionism and structuralism by examining their foundations in the definitions of the sign given by semiotic and semiology. The sources of symbolic interactionism can be traced, through Chicago sociology, to pragmatism, whereas the origins of structuralism are often attributed to Ferdinand de Saussure (1857-1913). For many contemporary symbolic interactionists, pragmatism means the work of Mead, who emphasized the role of gestural signs and significant symbols located in communicative acts. Yet social scientists and those interested in semiotic are becoming increasingly aware of the contemporary relevance of C. S. Peirce (1839-1914), who not only founded pragmatism but also founded modern sign theory, which he termed *semiotic* (see Rochberg-Halton and McMurtrey, 1982). Peirce's interest in signs was little appreciated in his lifetime, and one of the ironies of modern social theory is that the bulk of both Peirce's semiotic and Saussure's *semiology* was published posthumously (and in Saussure's case, was based on lecture notes). By exploring the Peircean and Saussurian definitions of sign and meaning the contrasts between situationalists and structuralists should become more apparent.

Saussure viewed the sign as consisting of the two-sided *signified* and *signifier* ("I call the combination of a concept and a sound-image a *sign*," 1966:67). In this perspective, meaning occurs through binary opposition within a system: "Instead of pre-existing ideas then, we find in all the foregoing examples *values* emanating from the system. When they are said to correspond to concepts, it is understood that the concepts are purely differential and defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not" (1966:117). The

very basis of meaning in the Saussurian model is *difference* (see Barthes, 1977), for "In language, as in any semiological system, whatever distinguishes one sign from the others constitutes it. Difference makes character just as it makes value and the unit" (Saussure, 1966:121).

Peirce defined the sign as a triadic process rather than a dyadic structure and viewed meaning as essentially *relation* rather than *difference*: "A sign ... is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. The sign stands for something, its *object*. It stands for that object, not in all respects but in reference to a sort of idea, which I have sometimes called the *ground* of the representamen" (1931-35, 2.228). Peirce argued that a sign only has meaning in the context of a continuing process of interpretation. Because each sign is part of a continuous temporal process of interpretation, his theory is intrinsically processual and thus incompatible with Saussure's dyadic and intrinsically static theory (see Singer, 1977). The arrow of time, the *diachronic*, is ultimately separable from the underlying system or synchronic dimension in the Saussurian view. The continuity of the temporal interpretive process assures freedom in the pragmatic tradition (e.g., Mead's "emergent present") but "cancels freedom" (Saussure, 1966:78) for Saussure in the sense of limiting the rational arbitrariness of language and the sign.

Saussure's emphasis on the arbitrariness of the sign and the context of cultural conventions as the sole basis for a sign's "reference" can be seen as an argument against the side of nominalism that holds that only individuals or particulars are real, and that signs ultimately refer to these particulars. Only differences within the language system constitute meaning, Saussure (1966) assures us, and "we shall find nothing simple in it regardless of our approach; everywhere and always there is the same complex equilibrium of terms that mutually condition each other. Putting it another way, *language is a form and not a substance*. This truth could not be overstressed, for all the mistakes in our terminology, all our incorrect ways of naming things that pertain to language, stem from the involuntary supposition that the linguistic phenomenon must have substance" (p. 122). Language is like a single sheet of paper with an inseparable obverse and reverse, thought and sound, signified and signifier, whose combination produces a form and not a substance. This "linguistic fact" explains the arbitrariness of the sign: "Not only are the two domains that are linked by the linguistic fact shapeless and confused, but the choice of a given slice of sound to name a given idea is completely arbitrary. If this were not true, the notion of value would be compromised, for it would include an externally imposed element. But actually values remain entirely relative, and that is why the bond between the sound and the idea is radically arbitrary" (p. 113). The arbitrary nature of the sign, Saussure continues, "explains in turn why the social fact alone can create a linguistic system. The community is necessary if values that owe their existence solely to usage and general acceptance are to be set up; by himself the individual is incapable of fixing a single value" (p. 113). Saussure argued for one of the basic tenets of semiology, structuralism, and poststructuralism: that the system or structure and not the individual person or instance constitutes meaning. Not even the linking of a certain sound with a certain concept determines value, because

this isolates the term from its system: In fact we begin with the interdependent whole and through analysis, rather than through the synthesis of individual elements, obtain the elements of the sign (p. 113). Hence meaning resides wholly within *langue* (the general language system), not *parole* (the actual speech act). In the Saussurian view any given instance of communication has significance by virtue of its underlying structure, not by virtue of the uniqueness of the situation. Though Saussure's approach seems to argue against one strain of nominalism

(the tendency that led to British empiricism and resulted in "naive realism" and Carnap's logical positivism, see Carnap, 1967), it can be argued that Saussure retains a basically nominalistic theory of meaning, one that claims to reside on the nominal side of mind rather than on the physicalistic side of "body," and which retains the nominalistic tendency to dichotomize thought and things, system and instance, social and individual, fact and value. Saussure held a variation of the Kantian view that we only know the world through the categories of thought and not as it is apart from mind. In a way Peirce agreed with Kant's idea that our knowledge of the world is constrained by the laws of mind, yet he differed in allowing that the laws of mind are objective products and refractions of the general laws of nature. It should be remembered that nominalism holds that only particular instances are real, and that signs are arbitrary names for these instances. Where scholastic realists such as John Duns Scotus held that some signs (or generals) are real, nominalists such as William of Ockham (famous for his scientific "razor") denied the reality of signs, arguing that although all thought is in signs, these signs are mere arbitrary conventions for real individual instances. In this way nominalism, the philosophical basis for modern Western thought and culture, drove a wedge between thought and things. Saussure, from this perspective, is thoroughly nominalist in agreeing that values are entirely relative and radically arbitrary, "mere names," having no "substance," and that all meaning resides in the conceptual system of language and not at all in any given instance of speech or action. In contrast, Peirce's pragmatism (later dubbed "pragmaticism" to distinguish it from what he considered distortions in James and others), which forms one domain within his wider theory of signs, is at root based on a thoroughgoing criticism of nominalism and its dichotomizing tendencies (Rochberg-Halton and McMurtrey, 1982).

To return to Peirce's definition of the sign, each sign consists of three elements: the *ground*, which stands for its *object*, to some other interpreting sign, the *interpretant*. The middle element of the Peircean sign, the object, is not included in the Saussurian conceptual-psychological definition of the sign. The ground, or inherent quality of the sign, would come closest to Saussure's signifier, the formal phonetic and graphic structure of the sign, and the interpretant would come closest to Saussure's signified, i.e., the meaning conveyed by the structure. Yet each of these elements of the Peircean triad is quite different from Saussure's scheme. The ground of a sign is the inherent quality of the sign, which represents through its own qualitative possibility rather than through opposition. The interpretant is not limited to arbitrary concepts in the Peircean scheme but may include nonconceptual emotions or physical action. Interpretants are not solely examples of arbitrary conventions but have as their aim the growth of reasonableness through the future interpretants they will determine. Reasonableness, in Peirce's view, is real rather than arbitrary or nominal.

Peirce distinguished many kinds of signs on the basis of his categories of "firstness," "secondness," and "thirdness," and perhaps the most well known is his trichotomy of *iconic*, *indexical*, and *symbolic* signs. Peirce's term *symbol* most closely approximates Saussure's arbitrary sign (Saussure uses the term *symbol* in approximately the opposite sense of Peirce, however, as an example of a less arbitrary or "motivated" sign). A symbol, in Peirce's view, is given its meaning by its interpretation as a law, general rule, or convention. A symbol is what Peirce referred to as a *type*, a general regularity that will determine specific instances, called *tokens* (1931-35, 4.537). This distinction appears to resemble that of Saussure between *langue* and *parole*, except that in Peirce's view the instance is itself a general or a sign communicating information. An orchestral score, for example, is a *type* capable of determining many different kinds of performances, all of which are *tokens* of the score. Strictly speaking, Saussure would not view the performance as meaningful in itself but only as an instance of the score, where the meaning resides. Peirce's inclusion of the token (or indexical sign) as a genuine mode of sign is an attempt to give account to existential meaning. Peirce also developed a third mode of sign functioning, which he termed the *tone* of a sign, which deals with the inherent quality of the sign as significative, apart from convention and logically prior to "opposition." Thus the tone of the performance of the symphony is its qualitative uniqueness considered in itself, apart from other performances. The tone of a sign is its inherent quality and unique character, and this is the level of esthetic experience in Peirce's semiotic. Peirce attempts to account for something not dealt with in structuralist approaches, viz., how the immediate qualities of experience also can act as mediating signs which impart information (Rochberg-Halton, 1982b). In the same way, Dewey's theory of the situation is based on the concept of "a pervasive and internally integrating quality" (1960:180). Tokens point to their types, they are indexes or actualizations of the general type, but the tone of a sign is the unique, inherent character of that sign. There may be a type of painting called still life, there may be many tokens or instances of this type, but the unique realization of this type of painting is to be found in the tone or quality of those tokens.

As with Saussure, individuality has no meaning qua individuality in Peirce's scheme, for all meaning is general and all generals are signs in Peirce's view. But Peirce considers more phenomena as signs than does Saussure. Thus just as the communication of a type is a general, so also is the communication of an individual token (or *index*) a general, and so also is the communication of tone or qualitative immediacy a general. For all communication is semiosis, the sign process, in which a representation of some object is communicated to some interpretant. Although unique character or quality of feeling does occur in the immediate present, it can also act mediately as a communicative sign, which Peirce termed the *icon*. What Peirce tried to distinguish in discussions of the icon, or the tone of a sign, was a qualitative mode of communication not reducible to conventions. Still lifes make use of conventions, yet their esthetic significance depends on the unique qualities conveyed, not on the conventions. Peirce's inclusion of the qualitative within mediation illustrates why it is not only our ability to *know* (as Saussure would argue) that differentiates us from other animals but also our ability to *communicate feeling*. Great works of art give testimony to

(and even help create) the deepest expressions of human sentiment and do so through the qualities directly conveyed.

We find then in the Peircean scheme a thoroughgoing attempt to undercut the dichotomizing tendencies of modern nominalism and a comprehensive theory of signs that accounts for how not only thought but also volition and feeling are involved in meaning. Peirce rejected the idea that meaning could be found only in an "underworld" of deep structure and, quite to the contrary, saw the ultimate outcome of all semiosis as the growth and embodiment of what he termed *concrete reasonableness*, inherently of the nature of a community. His comments on the sign illustrate his views that instances are also general, and that the ultimate basis of meaning is not to be found in arbitrary conventions per se but in the correctible process of interpretation that will "live down all opposition" and which in his view can grow into a true convention (1976, 4:262):

It is of the nature of a sign to be an individual replica and to be in that replica a living general. By virtue of this, the interpretant is animated by the original replica, or by the sign it contains, with the power of representing the true character of the object. That the object has at all a character can only consist in a representation that it has so—a representation having power to live down all opposition. In these two steps, of determination and of correction, the interpretant aims at the object more than at the original replica and may be truer and fuller than the latter. The very entelechy of being lies in being representable.... A symbol is an embryonic reality endowed with power of growth into the very truth, the very entelechy of reality. This appears mystical and mysterious simply because we insist on remaining blind to what is plain, that there can be no reality which has not the life of a symbol.

In this way the Peircean view of signs leads to a very much different view of tradition and social conventions than that given by Saussure and consistently followed by structuralists and poststructuralists, who stress arbitrariness. Though Peirce admits the arbitrariness of traditions and social conventions, he also admits the role of experience, the brute factuality of the world in time, as also shaping and informing traditions. In the Peircean view traditions are neither solely arbitrary deep structures with no purpose or inherent quality of their own nor, as some symbolic interactionists might argue, reducible to the whims of individuals in specific situations. Traditions are the source of the common sense, *general habits* forged through the experiences of generations, and in practical life, far superior as the relatively unquestioned basis for orientation than the mere arbitrariness of reason. Peirce developed a view he termed "critical common-sensism," which was an attempted synthesis of the insights of the Scottish "common-sensists" and the critical philosophy of Kant and his heirs, and which allowed that traditions themselves are subject to correction and growth through criticism. What further distinguishes Peirce's "critical common-sensism" from structuralism is that *sentiment* may provide a valid form of inference in the affairs of practical life, in other words, that sentiment is intelligent.

### **Durkheim and Mead: The Structure of Collective Representations and the Process of the Generalized Other**

The next "moment" in our discussion of the foundations of symbolic interaction-

ism and structuralism is the relationship between the social theories of representation proposed by Emile Durkheim (1858-1917) and George Herbert Mead (1863-1931). Whereas Saussure and Peirce discuss the sign in its linguistic and logical contexts, Durkheim and Mead discuss the sign in its social web. Durkheim's concept of "collective representations" is frequently compared to Mead's concept of "the generalized other" (Hinkle, 1960:277-79; Parsons, 1960:144; Lewis and Smith, 1980; cf. Stone and Farberman, 1970). The two concepts do share a number of similarities, for example, the emphasis on the generality and communicability of representations or signs, the view of the self as formed in social interaction through the internalization of representations, and especially the idea that "collective representations" and "the generalized other" act as the signs through which society represents itself to itself, thus reproducing itself. Durkheim and Mead also share an emphasis on the objectivity of signs that forms a critique of their intellectual progeny. Durkheim has been criticized by Levi-Strauss and other structuralists for undervaluing the role of arbitrariness in social conventions, yet he could not accept the all-out assault on the "empirical" by recent structuralists and poststructuralists (e.g., Manning, 1978; many of the chapters in Rossi, 1982). Durkheim's concept of collective representations and general philosophy was, after all, an attempt to reconcile positivism with idealism (e.g., Durkheim, 1965:32). Though Durkheim argued that the arbitrary social conventions of a culture are not solely reducible to empirical conditions or individuals, he allowed that institutions are tempered by experience (1965:14). Similarly, a collective representation "presents guarantees of objectivity by the fact that it is collective: for it is not without sufficient reason that it has been able to generalize and maintain itself with persistence. If it were out of accord with the nature of things, it would never have been able to acquire an extended and prolonged empire over intellects ... a collective representation is necessarily submitted to a control that is repeated indefinitely; the men who accept it verify it by their own experience" (1965:486).

Durkheim did not seem to account for the fact that institutions and collective representations, like individuals, are subject to error, and that it may take centuries or more to correct false beliefs, but his point is that the accumulated experience of a people does place some limitations on the arbitrary character of conventions, so that conventions in effect have a "reality" as social facts. Similarly Mead did not share the reservations concerning objectivity expressed in recent symbolic interactionism, because his philosophy in general was an attempt to develop an objective theory of meaning—to see nature itself as general, and as giving rise to mind. In the pragmatic tradition, as mentioned previously, conventions, though largely arbitrary in character, are cultural habits determined not by their arbitrariness but by the goals they represent. Despite numerous points of agreement, Durkheim and Mead ultimately diverge for the same reasons as do Saussure and Peirce; the former seeing a priori structure, the latter seeing goal-directed sign process as the basis for meaning.

Durkheim elaborated his theory of collective representations in his last major book, *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*, where he sought the foundations of religion, which, in his view, constituted the fundamental institution of human life. His inquiry would seek fundamental *universal* conceptions, a point that reappears in Levi-Strauss and other structuralists: "At the foundation of all

systems of beliefs and of all cults there ought necessarily to be a certain number of fundamental representations or conceptions and of ritual attitudes which, in spite of the diversity of forms which they have taken, have the same objective significance and fulfill the same functions everywhere. These are the permanent elements which constitute that which is permanent and human in religion; they form all the objective contents of the idea which is expressed when one speaks of religion in general" (Durkheim, 1965:17).

Because Durkheim believed complex religions-such as those of great civilizations-were formed out of such varieties and hybrids that one could hardly distinguish "the essential from the accessory," he sought the simplest religions through which to discover the "elementary forms." In considering religious belief as reducible to universal fundamental representations he went in the opposite direction from Max Weber, who sought in his studies of the religions of China, Judaism, Christianity, and India the variety and complexity of human social life in its cultural *specificity* (see Giddens, 1979:107-108, for a critical commentary on Durkheim's method).

Durkheim (1965:15, 16) described his method as similar to that of Descartes, which consisted in founding the inquiry upon a "cardinal conception," a "primitive" concept, except Durkheim based his inquiry on a "concrete reality," discovered through "historical and ethnological observation":

Every time that we undertake to explain something human, taken at a given moment in history ... it is necessary to commence by going back to its most primitive and simple form.... It was one of Descartes's principles that the first ring has a predominating place in the chain of scientific truths. But there is no question of placing at the foundations of the science of religions an idea elaborated after the Cartesian manner, that is to say, a logical concept, a pure possibility, constructed simply by force of thought. What we must find is a concrete reality, and historical and ethnological observation alone can reveal that to us. But even if this cardinal conception is obtained by a different process than that of Descartes, it remains true that it is destined to have a considerable influence on the whole series of propositions which the science establishes.

Even though observation, as opposed to introspection, is needed to discover an elementary form, it remains true for Durkheim that the elementary provides the a priori foundation of meaning, the underlying structure upon which all later developments appear as "secondary," mere "accretions" and "luxuriant vegetation" (1965:17). And as with Saussure, it is the form and not the substance that constitutes the representation. Durkheim stated that symbols not only represent social life ("clarifying the sentiment society has of itself") but also create social life and shape its sentiments. Yet the action of the symbol is caused by its social form, not by its substance, in other words, by the ideal "super-structure" considered as separate from its material embodiment.

Durkheim (1965: 260) viewed the objects of experience ultimately as mere manifestations of the idea, and the idea alone as the locus of reality. Although we live in a physical world and need to embody symbols in material forms, the importance of the symbol lies not in a particular physical object but in the intangibility of the "superstructure," or what contemporary structuralists term the "deep structure":

Thus there is one division of nature where the formula of idealism is applicable almost to the letter: this is the social kingdom. Here more than anywhere else, the idea is the reality. Even in this case, of course, idealism is not true without modification. We can never escape the duality of our nature and free ourselves completely from physical necessities: in order to express our own ideas to ourselves, it is necessary, as has been shown above, that we fix them upon material things which symbolize them. But here the part of matter is reduced to a minimum. The object serving as support for the idea is not much in comparison with the ideal superstructure, beneath which it disappears, and also, it counts for nothing in the superstructure ... for the ideas thus objectified are well founded, not in the nature of the material things upon which they settle themselves, but in the nature of society.

Durkheim illustrated his argument for the idealism of things with examples of objects that may be endowed with sacredness for arbitrary reasons or that may be subdivided with each part possessing the full sacred character of the whole. For instance, relics of a saint or fragments of a flag may be regarded as fully sacred as the whole objects from which they derive because their significance consists in being embodiments of the ideal superstructure, not in their inherent properties. We see here the same nominalistic point made by Saussure, viz., the conventional system is the locus for meaning and not particular instances. When the "object serving as support for the idea ... counts for nothing in the superstructure," when it "disappears" as Durkheim says, then we are left with an environment which is a mere *fa ade*.

Although Durkheim's discussion of the arbitrary selection and "sacredness" of objects—the representative power of society itself—is a valuable insight, it also highlights the limitations of a purely conventional account of meaning. From this perspective, the vast array of ritual artifacts and practices of the cultures of the world are not meaningful in their own right but only insofar as they carry out various cultural beliefs that ultimately have the sole purpose of representing the ideal superstructure of society. Similarly Durkheim viewed human nature as essentially dualistic, consisting of individual body and social soul, and he saw the task of collective representations as bringing the asocial aspects of individual consciousness into communion with social consciousness (1965 :262-63). In his 1913-14 lectures on pragmatism, which concentrated primarily on James, less so on Peirce, Dewey, and F. C. S. Schiller, and do not mention Mead, Durkheim goes so far as to say (1960:430):

... This pressure that truth admittedly exercises on minds is itself a symbol that must be interpreted, even if we refuse to make of truth something absolute and extra-human.

Pragmatism, which levels everything, deprives itself of the means of making this interpretation by failing to recognize the duality that exists between the mentality which results from individual experiences and that which results from collective experiences. By contrast, sociology reminds us that what is social always possesses a higher dignity than what is individual.

Durkheim maintained a Kantian-based position by claiming that otherwise asocial individuals are "synthesized" into the social through mediating collective representations, rather than seeing, as the pragmatists did, that the individual human being is already a social sign "analyzed"—or in Peirce's terminology,

*prescinded-from* the ongoing process of mediation. Human individuality is a consequence of, not a condition prior to, collective representations.

Peirce, Dewey, and Mead, although sharing Durkheim's insight that sociality is fundamental to representation, argued that the individuality of a person (and even the biological body) is a social outcome and not an *a priori* given, and that every sign (or sign act) has its own quality which is involved in the sign's significance to a greater or lesser degree, and which constitutes a genuinely different mode of signification from that of purely conventional accounts (Rochberg-Halton, 1982b). Instead of seeing the "ideal superstructure" as something apart from its physical manifestations and individual members, they all stressed, as we see in Mead's concept of "the generalized other," that a collective representation, as well as an individual person, is a *social dialogue of signs*.

Like Peirce and Dewey (Dewey, 1925; 1958), Mead argued that there is more to significance than purely conventional meaning. Mead's "conversation of gestures" (derived from Wundt), although retaining the idea that signification is a communicative dialogue, holds that the generality of gestural communication is found in the gestures themselves, i.e., in their instances or what Peirce termed their "indexicality," and that this level of signs is not limited to human intelligence. Mead's concept of "the generalized other" derives from his attempt to develop a broad theory of sociality that could include reflective intelligence as an emergent property of nature. The generalized other differs from Durkheim's collective representations because the mere existence of collective representations as structures does not make them social, rather, "collective representations" arise in and through communication-through a process of role taking (Duncan, 1962:92). Whereas Durkheim found the ideal level of the representation, apart from its manifestation, to be the true locus of sociality, the pragmatists attempted to undercut the modern dichotomies of thought and action, individual and social, by viewing mind as a social, communicative act. Mead, as a pragmatist, defined structure itself as a communicative social process of role taking, and thereby (1938:612-13):

In social conduct the individual takes the attitude of another in a co-operative process. If there are a number of persons engaged in the process, he must in some sense take the attitude of all of them. He accomplishes this in getting the attitude which each assumes in relation to the common end which each has. He finds an identical element in the attitude of each, which expresses itself in the different responses of the individuals. It is his ability to go from one of these attitudes to another in so far as each calls out the other that constitutes the structure of the system which imports the group into his experience.

The individual is an element in that communicative process which consists in the determination of a common end through internalizing the perspectives of the others who comprise the group. This communicative process, which Mead said "constitutes the structure of the system," is in fact his concept of "the generalized other." Structure is not a timeless, passive entity in this view, but an *ability*, capable of real growth and decay. And structure is not dichotomized from its manifestations but includes its "instances" and embodiments, as Mead said in a criticism of Alfred North Whitehead: "For him (Whitehead) these relations constitute the individual but do not appear as other things in its experience; the

world constitutes the thing but does not appear in the thing. In our experience the thing is there as much as we are here-our experience is in the thing as much as it is in us. Organization is being in a number of things at the same time. We attain this through participating in organized reactions of groups-the common content makes it possible to take the different attitudes and keep their relations. The organization is that of the act" (1938: 613).

Pragmatism frequently has been caricatured as a philosophy of individualism, and one can see how structuralists might object to Mead's emphasis on society as a process of individuals internalizing attitudes, but Mead's generalized other is not reducible to determinate individuals per se. For the generalized other is that sign dialogue that constitutes reflective thought, consisting in the *dialogue between* social self and social environment and internally between the interpretive spontaneity of the "I" and the organized and internalized others comprising the "me." Thought itself is an internal dialogue for Mead, as it is in James's theory of self that Mead inherited, and in Peirce's semiotic. Thus Mead could say in the previous quotation, "our experience is in the thing as much as it is in us," for it is in the communicative act as a whole (including its consequences), and not solely in an individual or social subject, that meaning is located. This is further illustrated in Mead's comments on the objective significance of situations as communicative acts (1964:245, 247):

But signification is not confined to the particular situation within which an indication is given. It acquires universal meaning. Even if the two are the only ones involved, the form in which it is given is individual-it would have the same meaning to any other who might find himself in the same position. How does this generalization arise? From the behavioristic standpoint it must take place through the individual generalizing himself in his attitude of the other.... Mind, which is a process within which this analysis and its indications take place, lies in a field of conduct between a specific individual and the environment, in which the individual is able, through the generalized attitude he assumes, to make use of symbolic gestures, i.e., terms, which are significant to all including himself.

Unlike Durkheim, Mead argued that not only other persons but also physical objects could act as true elements of the generalized other, and that the cult, instead of being reducible to an underlying elementary form or structure, acts as the means for a dialogue between a social group and its environment (1934: 154n):

Any thing-any object or set of objects, whether animate or inanimate, human or animal, or merely physical-toward which he acts, or to which he responds, socially, is an element in what for him is the generalized other....Thus, for example, the cult, in its primitive form, is merely the social embodiment of the relation between the given social group or community and its physical environment-an organized social means, adopted by the individual members of that group or community, of entering into social relations with that environment, or (in a sense) of carrying on conversations with it; and in this way that environment becomes part of the total generalized other for each of the individual members of the given social group or community.

The generalized other of a child, said Mead, is variable and "answers to the

changing play of impulse," yet even this level of the generalized other is universal in form. Whereas Durkheim argued that the varieties of religious life *mask* the underlying universal, Mead argued that varied experience and differences *refine* the universal: "Education and varied experience refine out of it (the generalized other) what is provincial, and leave 'what is true for all men at all times' " (1964: 245). The generalized other asserts increasingly universal standards as it grows, standards that impart objectivity to the given situation, and whose realization it is the task of the situation to achieve. This is not the colorless, bland, unmediated objectivity proclaimed by positivism and denounced by many structuralists and symbolic interactionists, but an objectivity whose elements (the individuals and their indications) form perspectives within it and give it the character of a mediated unity.

### **Toward the Structured Situation?**

Recently there has emerged what has been termed "poststructuralism," a pastiche of scholars whose work stems from the assumptions of French structuralism and Saussure's semiology, but who have attempted to link this style of thought with other significant intellectual movements, such as Marxism (Althusser, 1979; Godelier, 1970, 1982), or, as in the case of Jacques Lacan, with Freudianism. At their best these hybrid developments offer fresh new perspectives, but all too frequently some merely restate the basic structuralist premise that the foundation of social life resides in an "underworld" of deep structure.

The question of structure versus situation as the locus of meaning is particularly apparent in the work of "structural Marxists," such as Maurice Godelier or Jean Baudrillard. One would think that Marx's lifelong concern with developing the concept of *praxis* (Bernstein, 1971:13; con. Althusser, 1979) would link him with the pragmatists, who similarly sought to view meaning as a form of intelligible conduct, i.e., praxis, rather than with structuralists, who deny continuity between meaning and experience. Yet what structuralists find relevant in Marx is his emphasis that what is before our eyes is the veil of maya, an illusion obscuring the real workings of the "invisible" deep structure: "For Marx, as for Levi-Strauss, a structure is *not* a reality that is *directly* visible, and so directly observable, but a *level of reality* that exists *beyond* the visible relations between men, and the functioning of which constitutes the underlying logic of the system, the subadjacent order by which the apparent order is to be explained" (Godelier, 1982:262-63).

Marx's idea that the product of labor is the objectification of the laborer, and that specific historical conditions may distort that relationship of objectification, producing alienation and the fetishizing of commodities, is denied by Godelier, who says instead that the fetishizing of commodities is "the effect *in* and *for* consciousnesses of the disguising of social relations *in* and *behind* their appearances" (1982:268). In other words it is the "true, underlying logic of the system" that is essential, not the objectifying process of praxis. Indeed Godelier says that the aim of science is theoretical knowledge of the deep structure (1982:267) and in so doing merely replaces the dichotomies of empty idealism and blind materialism Marx himself was trying to overcome as is clear in the following:

"Their resolution is therefore by no means merely a problem of knowledge, but a *real* problem of life, which *philosophy* could not solve precisely because it conceived this problem as *merely* a theoretical one" (Marx, 1972:75).

Jean Baudrillard's program in his *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign* (1981) is to press beyond Marx, by showing how the critique of the commodity form in Marx needs to be reconceived in a more pervasive critique of the sign, because in his view all objects are fundamentally the outcome of a "generalized code of signs": "one forgets that what we are dealing with first is signs: a generalized code of signs, a totally arbitrary code of differences, *and that it is on this basis, and not at all on account of their use values or their innate 'virtues,' that objects exercise their fascination*" (p. 91). Baudrillard puts the concept of code to work in his provocative studies of consumption, the signatures of paintings, the "potlatch" quality of art auctions, and the system of interior design. Although tending to agree with Marx's criticism that the exchange of goods constitutes a general sign system of values rather than utilitarian facts, Baudrillard claims that Marx should have pressed his criticisms further, and that if he had, he would have seen, as a kind of born-again semiologist, that even use values and needs derive from the generalized sign code rather than provide the material basis of it. System, and not nature, therefore, constitutes the sole source of meaning. Yet although Marx may be criticized for being influenced by the very utilitarianism he was arguing against, it is not clear as Baudrillard would have it that Marx only saw nature in its modern mechanical sense. In many ways Marx's theory of meaning is broader than Baudrillard's and other structural Marxists precisely because he included nature, in Aristotle's sense of the perfection of being, within the realm of meaning (Rochberg-Halton in press). In seeing nature as purely mechanical and asocial, hence inadequate to account for the systematic essence of meaning as code, Baudrillard (and other structuralists, such as Marshall Sahlins, 1976a, 1976b) merely sits on one side of a dichotomy created by the very utilitarian world view he criticizes, thereby linked with his sociobiological and functionalist opposites.

The fundamental idea of these varieties of structuralism is that meaning derives from an underlying system or structure. Surely this is a useful insight, yet the tendency to rigidly dichotomize meaning from experience need not be a necessary consequence. In the structural Marxism of Godelier and Baudrillard (see also Althusser, 1979; Gimenez, 1982) meaning does not include praxis. Structural Marxism therefore appears not to be a furthering of Marx's thought but what might be termed *the fetishization of structure*, in which Marx's "human sensuous activity, praxis" evaporates into meaninglessness. Like religion and money, structure is the sole currency of meaning and is surgically removed from the flesh and blood of life and treated as a totally independent existence.

Pierre Bourdieu has attempted to develop a less constricted position by turning to the concept of *habitus* as that which mediates "the system of objective regularities" and "the system of directly observable conducts" (1968, 1977). Though retaining the basic structuralist premiss that all knowledge is conceptual and systematic, and that even "experience is a system" (1968:683), Bourdieu criticizes both the purely situational approach as a false "realism of the element" and the purely structural approach as a "false realism of the structure": "With-

out falling back into a naive subjectivism or 'personalism,' one must remember that, ultimately, objective relations do not exist and do not really realize themselves except in and through the *system of dispositions* of the agents, produced by the internalization of objective conditions" (1968:705). Bourdieu's concern with meaning as habit, with the realization of structures through agents, themselves produced by "the internalization of objective conditions," marks an implicit turning to precisely the central issues considered by the classic American pragmatists.

In his book *Vertical Classification: A Study in Structuralism and the Sociology of Knowledge* (1981), Barry Schwartz uses the core structuralist concept of binary opposition to its best advantage by examining systems of vertical classification. Yet Schwartz also criticizes structuralism for ignoring the specificity and context of meaning: "The problem with all structuralist approaches to the semiotics of knowledge is this: in reducing knowledge to an understanding of relationships rather than things, they fail to explain why certain media are used to encode specific kinds of information. Defining the relation between the signifier and signified as 'arbitrary,' structuralists close off rather than stimulate inquiry. They ignore the role of the medium in human conception" (p. 124). Schwartz's inclusion of empirical methods within his larger study also shows that a more flexible structuralist framework is possible.

Another structuralist study that has concerned itself with the *actualization* of codes is S. N. Eisenstadt's (1982) "Symbolic Structures and Social Dynamics." There Eisenstadt takes a basically structuralist orientation toward social organization, stating: "This analysis has indicated that, as in other spheres of symbolic patterning of human experience, it is the 'schemata' of the respective and not the 'objective' contents of the objects of such experience that provides the decisive principles of cognitive and evaluative organization of human behavior, of the hidden structure or contexts of such behavior" (p. 172). Yet he also says that the schemata are not purely cognitive, "prelogical," or logical but are "closely combined with the more existential dimension of human life and social organization" (p. 172). Eisenstadt argues that the "instanciation" (i.e., embodiment or institutionalization) of social codes introduces elements of openness, choice, and uncertainty. Though *code* remains key, he argues from within a structuralist position that *situation* and concrete interaction give it variability and color and must be included within the analysis of any level of human activity. In dealing with the central problem of the relation of hidden structure to the actual workings of institutions, Eisenstadt implicitly turns to the vocabulary of symbolic interactionism, stressing the situational character of interpretation and the importance of the reconstruction of meaning: "The various symbols of collective and personal identity which are constructed in the process of institutionalization of such models and patterns of codes--even if they are taken out of the reservoir of traditional symbols--are rarely simply given. They are continuously being reconstituted and reconstructed" (p. 165). Eisenstadt clearly sees the limitations of a model that must stop short of action and the significance of specific situations, a model that does not allow for the reconstruction of meaning (a key term in Dewey's philosophy, and in Eisenstadt's usage strikingly similar to the symbolic interactionist concept of "negotiated order," Strauss et al., 1963; Glaser and Strauss,

1965). Yet one might argue that by taking his insights further he might see that a more fundamental correction to the idea of deep structure realized in variable and reconstructed surface "institutionalizations" is needed.

One should not assume, however, that all structuralism needs to do to correct its limitations is to incorporate the insights of symbolic interactionism. Critics of symbolic interactionism have argued that it places too much weight on subjectivist transitory phenomena at the expense of enduring patterns of meaning (Meltzer, Petras, and Reynolds, 1977), and that it ignores social structure (Cosser, 1976; Lewis, 1976; Stryker, 1980). In a recent article George Gonos (1977) attempts to show that Erving Goffman should be considered a structuralist rather than a symbolic interactionist because of his concern with "frame." Ganas attacks symbolic interactionism as an approach dedicated to the exotic and trivial (pp. 857-58), as individualistic (p. 864), as unable to deal with the continuity of structures (pp. 859-60), and as ultimately subjectivist. Gonos claims to use methodological hyperbole (a strange method for an article concerned with the objectivity of meaning in symbolic interactionist and structuralist approaches), and the argument suffers from excessive caricature and an inability to see that Mead, regardless of the directions his followers later took, attempted to develop an objective theory of meaning. Yet it does underscore some of the problems in the symbolic interactionist view of the objectivity of the situation, for example, in "A Theory of the Definition of the Situation" (1967), Stebbins defines the meaning of a situation as consisting in its definition, which is a process of reflection. Any changes in meanings or goals are found in the definition and "not rooted in the experience or information per se" (p. 162). The consequence of Stebbins's definition is a return to precisely the kind of mentalism the pragmatists sought to avoid, a separation of the self from the medium of signs in which it exists (cf. p. 157; Perinbanayagam, 1974:523-24) and a reversal of the pragmatic view of thought as a form of internal conduct to one of a person projecting subjective meanings onto conduct. As mentioned, others have criticized the symbolic interactionist tendency to overemphasize the subjective choice of the person in a given situation at the expense of the objective preconditions and consequences of actions taken, but, according to Maines (1977), those symbolic interactionists using the concepts of "negotiated order" and "structural process," such as Strauss and Glaser, avoid this tendency.

A major controversy in symbolic interactionism has emerged recently concerning the objectivity of meaning. Much criticism has been directed at Herbert Blumer by the Illinois school of sociologists for his alleged subjectivizing of Mead's theory of meaning (Huber, 1973a, 1973b; Lewis, 1976, 1977; Lewis and Smith, 1980; McPhail and Rexroat, 1979, 1980; for counter criticism see Blumer, 1973, 1977, 1980; Johnson and Shifflet, 1981). Both Blumer and his critics share an almost mythic attachment to Mead as the central representative of pragmatism, and one hopes that the current questioning of roots will at least open up the relatively untapped ideas of Peirce and Dewey for contemporary social thought. In looking at Blumer's formulations of symbolic interactionism, however, there does seem to be room for criticism of his interpretation of Mead. Blumer attacks reductionism in social theory, arguing that societies and human beings cannot be explained alone by "social factors" (which would include structuralism) or by "psychological factors," rather, human societies are "com-

posed of individuals who have selves" (1969:83), and that "group action takes the form of a fitting together of individual lines of action" (1969:82). Blumer's language is excessively individualistic, making it sound as if one can be an individual apart from a self, as if society is a mere aggregate of individual choices rather than itself a kind of larger self that can determine "individual lines of action" (the point made so well by structuralists). One could argue that in Mead's view society is the generalized other, a self in its own right, and that the individual self is a microcosm of society, the internalized generalized other. Blumer constantly discusses the role of choice and conscious interpretation in conduct, and perhaps this can be seen as a turning away from the pragmatists' central concept of *habit*. Nevertheless, he reveals an understanding of the way habitual conventions or "structure" enter into the situation (1969:86, 88) :

Usually, most of the situations encountered by people in a given society are defined or "structured" by them in the same way. Through previous interaction they develop and acquire common understandings or definitions of how to act in this or that situation. . . . Social organization enters into action only to the extent to which it shapes situations in which people act, and to the extent to which it supplies fixed sets of symbols which people use in interpreting their situations.

Criticisms of Blumer from University of Illinois sociologists have centered on his conceptions of objectivity and his alleged misinterpretations of Mead. Joan Huber (1973a, 1973b) charged that Blumer and the pragmatists were not capable of scientific objectivity because they do not rely on a priori theorizing. In his reply Blumer noted that "the likelihood of introducing unwitting bias is much less when the problem is developed through a close, flexible and reflective examination of the empirical world than when the problem is formed by using a model not derived through such intimate, empirical examination" (1973:798). In other words Blumer, like the pragmatists, stressed that scientific inquiry is a self-corrective process, and that objectivity is assured by observation and correction rather than by an a priori foundational approach. McPhail and Rexroat (1979, 1980) attack Blumer for his emphasis on "sensitizing concepts" as marking the beginning stage of inquiry, but in so doing reveal an ignorance of Peirce's theory of "abduction" or hypothesis formation, Dewey's "problem finding," or the problematic situation in Mead, in other words, the discovery of the problem itself as the first stage of the inquiry. Lewis (1976, 1977) has developed the idea that Blumer has fundamentally misinterpreted Mead, and that Blumer's subjectivism is much closer to an alleged nominalistic pragmatism of James and Dewey (whom Lewis sees as biological individualists).

Lewis's ideas concerning the objectivity of meaning in the pragmatic tradition are placed in a larger context in his recent book (Lewis and Smith, 1980). Lewis and Smith claim that there are two pragmatisms—a realistic one characterized by Peirce and Mead and a nominalistic one (which Lewis and Smith claim has no value) illustrated by James and Dewey. They argue that Chicago sociology, including Blumer, was under the influence of the nominalistic pragmatism, and that Mead exercised little influence during his lifetime. The argument is based on an ahistorical, a priori "metatheoretical" realism-nominalism distinction that claims to be based on Peirce's discussions of realism and nominalism (though one could argue that Peirce's method of pragmatism is antithetical to Lewis and

Smith's method of a priori metatheory). Pragmatism, as originally formulated by Peirce, is clearly a variety of realism, a renovated version of the scholastic realism of John Duns Scotus rather than the modern nominalistic forms of "naive realism" that claim the basis for reason is to be found in particulars outside of reason (see Rochberg-Halton and McMurtrey, 1982). The introduction of the realistic roots of pragmatism to the sociological community marks an important turn in the questioning of the roots of symbolic interactionism, yet one in my opinion marred by Lewis and Smith's nominalistic interpretation of realism. Perhaps the clearest example of their positivistic and nominalistic interpretation of Mead (which would reduce the context of situation to an epiphenomenon, "in name only") is found in their remarks (1980:130) that

Ultimately, the meaning of a significant symbol must be grounded in the nonhuman world of pure resistance. We previously discussed the same point in connection with Peirce's theory of signs. The ultimate meanings of concepts must be located in some nonmental and nonlinguistic reality if we are to escape the infinite regress of verbal definitions of definitions of definitions, *ad infinitum*. . . . Mental objects must be referred to worlds that are not mental.

Lewis and Smith do not realize that although Peirce and Mead agree that the physical is *involved in* the symbolic (e.g., "indexicality" or the "conversation of gestures"), the symbolic is not reducible to a nonsymbolic foundation. In contrast to Lewis and Smith, Peirce's argument for reality *is* based on an "infinite regress": all hypotheses must be capable of explanation because science does not admit the inexplicable. "Pure resistance" explains nothing qua pure resistance, hence cannot provide an acceptable hypothesis for the foundation of meaning. Moreover, the positivistic idea that meaning is based in individual reaction with an object is ultimately subjective, because it is based on a single person's experience rather than on a normative conception of an unbounded community of inquirers capable of continuous inquiry and eventual agreement in the long run. The Lewis and Smith programmatic "metatheoretical" method leads them to serious distortions, pro and con, of pragmatists and Chicago sociologists, and their positivistic interpretations have been criticized in a number of reviews and articles (Johnson and Shifflet, 1981; Johnson, in press; Batiuk, 1982; Rochberg-Halton, 1982a, 1983; Campbell, 1982; Mills, 1982). What will be needed to counter both mentalistic subjectivism and positivistic subjectivism in symbolic interactionism is a rediscovery of the pragmatists' idea that the most fully objective is the most fully mediated—that objectivity is the achievement, not the a priori foundation, of the sign process of inquiry.

### The Context of Meaning

The turn toward "meaning" in recent sociological theory can be seen as both a rejection of reductionism and an attempt to develop a more comprehensive understanding of the nature of society. Structuralists have argued for the general sign system as the source of meaning as opposed to specific enactments of the system; symbolic interactionists have claimed that only through specific interpretive situations can we appreciate the essence of meaning. Yet structures completely separate from content are empty; formless interactions blind. Para-

doxically, some recent criticisms from within structuralism have attempted to deal with the situational level as a corrective to what is perceived as an inflexible reduction to the general, whereas "objectivist" symbolic interactionists have tried to reformulate the "deep structural" foundations of symbolic interactionism as a corrective to what is perceived as a flaccid reduction to the particular. These developments suggest a growing need for a comprehensive theory of signs and society.

Structuralism has claimed that action and speech are not of themselves meaningful, and symbolic interactionism has tended to side with the choices of social individuals to define meanings of situations, and in doing so both have underestimated the role of *community* as the objective public realm that is the compelling source and aim of signs. In denigrating the concepts of action and public sphere as mere meaningless instances or illusions, structuralism destroys the possibility of politics and puts in its stead a hidden underworld of deep structure, insusceptible to correction and cultivation through the life of the community. For its part symbolic interactionism has frequently stressed the arbitrariness of the individual to create meanings at the expense of the real aims of the community in which all situations are involved. Though the "native's" perspective in a given situation is a valid perspective in its own right, it is still subordinate to the interpretation of that situation by the "unlimited community."

Although Saussure and Durkheim stressed the social nature of language and signs, both were limited by the dichotomizing tendencies of nominalism into viewing individual speech and individual cognition as asocial, and these dichotomizing tendencies have continued in later structuralists and poststructuralists. Mead, though stressing, with Peirce and Dewey, the thoroughly social nature of speech and cognition, developed an objective theory of meaning but not an explicit and comprehensive theory of signs. It was Peirce, the founder of pragmatism and semiotic, who articulated the broadest theory of signs, one that accounts both for system (considered as correctible habit) and for the uniqueness of the situation (i.e., all signs or "sign situations" possess their own inherent *quality*, as *iconic signs*), which is not "subjective" but is involved in the social meaning of the sign. Peirce also included existential signs (*indexical signs*) as yet another mode of semiosis reducible neither to deep structure nor to the subjective interpretation of the situation, and which *compels* the interpretation. A person may think himself or herself well, for example, but if a temperature reading taken from an accurate thermometer reveals a very high fever, that person is compelled to reinterpret his or her situation. Similarly, though there may be a cultural convention of thermometers, the actual instance of a given reading communicates meaningful information and is determined by the kinetic interaction of person and thermometer, not solely by cultural convention. The sign registered on the thermometer is an indexical sign of the actual situation.

In Peirce's semiotic each and every sign is social, and the sign process of interpretation is a critical process of self-correction, guided by an unbounded community of "inquirers." Peirce's semiotic is framed in a logical context, where questions such as the reality of the hardness of untested diamonds are in the foreground, and needs to be "translated" into the context of social theory, where the objects of inquiry—human beings and institutions—unlike diamonds are intelligent forms capable of self-induced change. Though it has not yet been

incorporated into social theory, Peirce's semiotic offers a genuinely new alternative to existing theory and provides a radical critique of the guiding ideas of modern culture as a whole. Perhaps the concern with meaning that characterizes contemporary social theory signifies a readiness to go beyond the dichotomizing tendencies of modern thought.

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