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UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA
SANTA CRUZ

**THE INDEXICALITY OF REPRESENTATION:
TOWARD A RECONCILIATION OF REPRESENTATIONAL
AND INFERENTIAL THEORIES OF MEANING**

A thesis submitted in partial satisfaction
of the requirements for the degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

in

THE HISTORY OF CONSCIOUSNESS

by

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**Abstract: The Indexicality of Representation: Toward a Reconciliation of
Representational and Inferential Theories of Meaning**

Matthew A. Smith

Philosophy has addressed questions about the meaning of language through representational and inferential semantic theories. In the work of Robert Brandom, the inferential theory is accorded explanatory priority over the representational, such that the latter can be adequately accounted for in the former's terms. This paper argues that the representational and inferential theories should be accorded equal rank in the order of explanatory priority. Not only are assertions of explanatory priority unnecessary to account for semantic value, but explanatory strategies that reduce the imagistic quality of representation to inferential articulation do not account for important phenomena that are captured by the notion of meaning as an image. Building on the semiotics of C.S. Peirce and its reception in sociolinguistics, the paper theorizes a functional interdependency of representational and inferential aspects of meaning that explains both successful and unsuccessful linguistic and conceptual/analytical practices. The theory scaffolds a semiotic account of alienation and epistemic conflict, with resonances for both philosophy and critical theory. Finally, the theory furnishes a semiotic analysis of the phenomenon of conceptual reification that occurs even in critical analyses that seek to denaturalize their object of inquiry.

Introduction

The philosophy of language has experimented with different approaches to resolving a foundational problem in semantics: what is denotation, and what is its relationship to other ways of using language? For much of the twentieth century, one framework for addressing this problem, which I will call the “representational frame,” remained unchallenged. The representational frame starts with an assertion about the use of language and ends with a claim about the appropriate concern of philosophy: language primarily describes a field of pre-linguistic objects; correlatively, the primary task of philosophy ought to be to study and perfect this function by ridding language of nonsensical expressions, ambiguities, and other deviations from the ideal of a perspicuous relation of object and word. In the middle of the twentieth century, language philosophers began to challenge the representational frame by emphasizing the embeddedness of language within a social context of use. Wittgenstein ([1953], 2009), Sellars ([1956], 1997), and Austin (1962), among others, led the exodus of philosophy from the ether of artificial language and its descent into the Piraeus of everyday speech. Once driven to consider not only representational, but also contextual features of language, philosophy was on a path toward an encounter with sociolinguistic and semiotic theories that take these contextual features as their focus.

This overture of philosophy to sociolinguistics finds expression in the inferential semantics of Robert Brandom. Building on the insights of Wittgenstein, Sellars, and Richard Rorty, Brandom’s inferential semantics culminates a series of philosophical critiques of the representational frame (1994, 2009). In Brandom’s

theory, the notion of language as a picture of the world, as Wittgenstein ([1922], 1990) had put it, dissolves into an intersubjective activity:

To treat states or performances as intentionally contentful in the sense of being conceptually articulated [i.e., as having semantic value] involves treating them as situated in a web of proprieties of inferential transitions from one content to another. Knowing one's way around the bit of the web centered on one conceptual content, being able to tell in practice which moves to it and from it are permitted or required and which forbidden, accordingly requires mastery of the proprieties of inference that govern the use of other concepts and contents as well. (1994, 90).

No longer images of pre-linguistic objects in any sense, words and sentences became markers of inferential relationships that are deployed by competent language users in a game of making commitments and claiming entitlements, where the propriety of inference is determined ultimately by the norms of the relevant linguistic community. As such, "the inferential notion of semantic content," Brandom writes, "is essentially holistic." (*Ibid.*) With Brandom, the denotative picture of the representational frame disperses into a web of inferential warrants and foreclosures.

Brandom's articulation of denotation in inferential terms provokes a demand for an account of semantics that explains both the capacity of language to invoke a network of commitments, and the persistence and plausibility, to philosophers and everyday language-users alike, of the representational frame. Despite philosophical and sociolinguistic attempts to abolish the view that language is fundamentally geared toward creating representational images of a pre-linguistic reality, that view still has pull, both intuitively and upon reflective consideration, and particularly in specific contexts of use. Should the theory of denotation be resolved in either/or fashion, such

that meaning is a matter either of inference and commitment, or of representation? Or, is it possible to generate a theory that accommodates both? If it is possible, and we allow room for both the representational and inferential theories of meaning, we might ask what is gained in terms of explanation of other phenomena that may be of philosophical and theoretical concern, as opposed to what is lost if one view is preferred to the exclusion of the other. If a reconciliation of both theories produces a relative gain in explanatory power, might that not be an argument, even a decisive one, in favor of retaining both?

In what follows, I will argue for a theory of meaning in which the representational account of meaning is functionally linked to the inferential semantics theorized by Brandom. In essential respects, the functional linkage works like this: even if the representational frame is wrong to suggest that communication can be adequately explained in terms of an exchange of images among language-users, it accounts for a cognitive requirement among language-users for a marker that facilitates talk. Granted that the success of linguistic performances cannot be explained adequately in terms of the exchange of images of a pre-linguistic reality, the practical uptake of a working theory among language-users that such an exchange takes place facilitates the transfer of inferential commitments that are the real explanator of how language-users succeed in conveying information. Therefore, even if the representational frame does not bear the explanatory weight that was imposed on it by empiricism and its philosophical heirs, the representational frame theorizes a practice that grounds and stabilizes language use; more, it describes a common set of

theoretical commitments, shared among members of the linguistic community, about what they are up to when they talk to each other. Even if, as it turns out, their working theory is wrong as an account of meaning, the uptake of the working theory supports the exchange of inferential commitments that are the real source of language's semantic value.

The inferential and representational theories of denotation operate in tandem, two halves of the same whole. Successful language-use is "representational," insofar as the theoretical pretense of exchanging images facilitates the making and unmaking of inferential commitments, and, at the same time, "inferential," in that the making and unmaking of these commitments furnishes the semantic value of linguistic activity. The view being advocated here, therefore, proposes an interdependency of these twinned aspects of language-use: no transfer of inferential commitments without the apparent exchange of images, and, without such commitments, no meaning to speak of at all. If the representational frame is a "fiction," it is nevertheless a functional fiction, because it is a fiction that enables the "real" process of communication to play out.

This view of the interdependency of representational and inferential theories of semantics is substantiated by the semiotic theory of Charles Peirce and its refinements in the field of sociolinguistics. To the account given above, the linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein adds a theoretical framework in which to articulate and understand the notion of interdependency on offer here. Silverstein's (1979, 1992, 2000) conception of first- and second-order functionality provides a model for

the manner in which the inferential and representational dimensions of language operate together while remaining distinct. Silverstein's theory also suggests a less optimistic story: that the interdependency of the pragmatic and representational frames, together with their mutual non-absorption, explains the tendency of the two frameworks to diverge. I will suggest a few implications for the application of Silverstein's theory in this area for the topics of alienation and epistemic conflict, as they are presented in the fields of political philosophy and critical theory.

The second half of the paper will demonstrate the application of the theory articulated above to an exemplary case. This portion of the paper aims, in part, to demonstrate the breadth of phenomena that the theory addresses. In particular, the theory deals not only with the conditions of successful language use, but also with linguistic and conceptual failure. With Peirce and Silverstein, the latter half of the paper will show that the divergence of the representational from the inferential—or, with Peirce, what the paper will call the “iconic” from the “indexical” aspects of a single “sign”—obscures the inferential associations among concepts, even for those analysts who attempt to expose the misleading consequences of this divergence within their own objects of analysis. Although the project of the genealogical analysis of concepts, as articulated by one of its leading exponents, the philosopher Mathieu Queloz (2021a, 2021b), incorporates some of the primary insights of the broadly pragmatic tradition in which the functional interdependency theory is based, it is insensitive to the naturalization of its own meta-normative standpoint that is entailed by its methodology. As a result of its methodologically driven incapacity to evaluate

critically its own meta-normative position, conceptual genealogy projects this position onto the object that it is concerned with critiquing. As the nature of the *explanandum* becomes a function of the *explanans*, genealogical inquiry is liable to become precisely what it denounces: a methodologically pre-determined justification of the analyst's meta-normative standpoint.

This mirror-effect ensues, it will be argued, from the divergence of the iconic from the indexical aspect of signs. That the origin of the analytical error inheres in this divergence buttresses the case for according the representational and non-representational dimensions of semantics co-eval status in accounting for semantic value. As the first part of the paper will show, language philosophy need not decide between representational and inferential semantic theories. And it should not so decide, on pain of overlooking the misleading consequences of the icon's divergence from the index that the second part of the paper will address. Thus, while embracing the pragmatist and contextualist valences of the retreat from the representational frame, the paper advocates a modulation of that retreat to accommodate the interdependency of the representational and indexical dimensions of natural language.

Fissures in the Representational Frame

Prior to the middle of the twentieth century, the mainstream currents in Anglo-American philosophy, as well as in linguistics, were focused on the problem of representation. This problem appeared in different guises in either discipline: in the philosophy of language, it appeared as the problem of decomposing language into its elemental components in order to test the relationship between language and the

extensional objects that language was thought to denote. For Russell, the ostensive gesture of pointing and giving a name bridged the epistemological gap between natural languages, their logical forms, and the pre-logical objects that they refer to; similarly, the Viennese positivists' confidence in the utility of logic in elucidating the form of mathematics was backstopped by a verifiable relation between logical form and reality. In linguistics, the paradigm of representation predominated as well, for Saussure turned the attention of the generations following him to the representational relation of the sign and the signifier.

Around the middle of the twentieth century, the representational frame began to lose its exclusive grip. The ordinary language movement inaugurated a challenge to the representational frame, famously, by “pleading for excuses” and, more generally, for attention to the use of words and sentences in their pragmatic context. With the advent of ordinary language philosophy, the representational function of language came under increasing pressure. Meaning could not be thought exclusively in terms of representation; rather, the problem of meaning had to be evaluated in tandem with what language-users were doing when wielding propositions in the context of everyday speech.

But even within speech-act theory, a representational understanding of language continued to play a central role. As remarked by Benjamin Lee, the speech-act tradition from Austin to Searle remained tethered to the representational frame. The “rhetic” component of the Austinian illocutionary act embedded the truth-functionality of Fregean “sense,” thus making the performative component of speech

a supplement to a representational core composed of the traditional way of thinking about meaning (Lee, 21). Thus, speech-act theory was unable to free itself entirely of what the later Wittgenstein called “the model of object and name” (Wittgenstein, 2009, § 293). For, as Lee points out, if Fregean senses refer to truth values, Austinian performatives embed truth-conditionality within the illocutionary act (Lee, 21, 41).

Although the paradigm of representation continued to figure in the ordinary-language tradition, the turn toward ordinary language augured a further weakening of representation through an encounter between philosophy and sociolinguistics.

Already, the pioneering linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf and his mentor Edward Sapir had demonstrated the capacity of linguistic anthropology to complicate conventional philosophical approaches to language. With their thesis of linguistic relativism, Sapir and Whorf reversed the order of explanation of the traditional, representational paradigm of the philosophy of language. Language philosophers in the Anglo-American tradition, with Russell in the lead, had insisted that language mimics, albeit imperfectly, the form of the external universe, as epitomized by Russell’s quip that subject-predicate logic is a function of standard temperature, atmospheric conditions, and the like, that enable solids to remain physically stable (Russell, 1957, 388). With their studies of the ontologies that evolved outside what they termed the Indo-European language cluster, Sapir and Whorf provided grounds for the opposite conclusion: that the “objects” of the universe do not dictate the forms of language; instead, the forms of language project the ontology in which objects appear as intelligible. Thus, anticipating Quine’s ([1960], 2013) performatively self-critical

theory of radical translation, Whorf showed that no equivalence could be drawn between underlying theories about the nature of objects in Hopi and English. Whereas English might denote a particular object in a statement, such as (in one of Whorf's examples), "cleaning a gun with a ramrod," the Hopi expression having an equivalent use involves, not substantives, but a combination of activities and qualities (Whorf, 288). If so, how could positivists be right that the grammatical form of language is a function of a universe of pre-linguistic objects, as the paradigm of representation implies? Or as the anthropologist Michael Silverstein added, how to perform the Carnapian *Aufbau*, the reduction of empirical knowledge to spatio-temporal coordinates, if, as Whorf's work tended to show, space and time are contingent upon the differing forms of language (Silverstein, 1979, 203)?

The weakening of the representational frame in the philosophy of language and sociolinguistics presented both fields with the need to develop an alternative account of the relation between two functions of linguistic signs. Both traditions customarily rationalized the use of signs in terms of denotation/reference—as further evidence of this, witness Austin's defense of meta-semantic statements of the form "P is true" against the charge of redundancy, on grounds that they express the traditional representational correspondence of words and world (Austin, 1950). However, the advent of linguistic relativism and ordinary language philosophy created an imperative to emancipate both traditions from the representational frame. A theory was needed that could perform a two-part maneuver: first, to supply an alternative explanation to the representational theory of meaning, given its increasingly

conspicuous deficiencies, and second, to explain *why* the representational theory of meaning, despite these deficiencies, nevertheless registers as persuasive, both within learned circles and among language-users in general.

Peirce's Theory of the Sign

The salience that such an explanatory gesture would hold for at least two fields (language philosophy and socio-linguistics) provides a point of entry into both of them for the semiotic theory developed by C.S. Peirce. Peirce was one of the last renaissance men. A geodesist, chemist, and philosopher *sui generis*, Peirce was a member of the Metaphysical Club, an interlocutor of Oliver Wendell Holmes, William James, Victoria Welby, and Chauncey Wright, and coiner of the term “pragmatism” to denote a philosophical school. A distinguishing feature of Peirce’s theory, in relation to the “representational” tradition in linguistics and the philosophy of language and its progeny, is that it began by thinking about tripartite rather than binary relations. Peirce’s triune rather than dualist semiotics may have been inspired by the natural phenomena that he frequently had in mind. The flow of lava over the surface of the earth is a sign of volcanic activity (changes in pressure, temperature, and the like) below the earth’s crust. This much, at least, could be accounted for by a binary conception of sign and signifier. But describing the phenomenon of lava flow in binary terms disserves the extent of the explanatory value of the lava flow, that is, it does not account for everything that we learn by observing it. For the volcanic activity that is explained by surface lava flows also signals the presence of another element, viz., changes in the relation of tectonic plates, which cause increased

volcanic activity, which lead to the irruption of lava on the Earth's surface. To account for the totality of these relationships, Peirce proposed a trichotomous relation, wherein (to follow this example) volcanic activity is the "interpretant" of the tectonic plate movement, which is a "sign," whose relation produces an "object," viz, the surface lava flow.

Peircean signs bring interpretants into the same relation to an object that the signs themselves bear in relation to the same object. This is understood in the philosophically famous gesture of ostension: as I point to an object, and you turn to look at it, my pointing gesture (the "sign") prompts you (the "interpretant") to stand equivalently toward the object to the relation in which I stand to same (Kockelman, 2005). Peircean signs are, in this way, conspiratorial: they recruit interpretants as co-participants in a common standpoint, attitude, or project toward an object. Signs can accomplish this by "indexing" a relation of co-presence or causation to their objects for their interpretants. In the volcano example, tectonic plate movement is a highly indexical sign, insofar as it causes volcanic activity (its interpretant), which produces lava flow as the object of the relationship. However, signs may also compose their semiotic conspiracies by "iconizing," which is to say, representing an object by sharing properties in common with it. And the iconic versus indexical feature of the sign may change as the participants in the tripartite relationship change as well. Thus, the surface lava flow, ersatz "object" in a relation with volcanic activity and tectonic plate movement, is an iconic sign for a human observer, the interpretant of that sign,

who takes it as a representation, or depiction, of the object, “volcano,” in a different semiotic trichotomy.

It is possible to identify examples of Peircean signs that appear to be predominantly iconic or indexical. A portrait, for example, can be thought of as paradigmatically iconic, insofar as it is an imagistic depiction of its subject, whereas the mercury in a thermometer might be taken as consummately indexical, insofar as it is affected by the temperature, but does not reproduce an image of the heat or cold. What we tend to call “imagery” is central to iconicity, in the way that what we might call “co-occurrence,” “contiguity,” and/or “causation” is central to indexicality. But part of the originality of Peirce’s semiotic theory was its attention to the manner in which all signs exhibit aspects of both iconicity and indexicality: the line between them varies from bright, to grey, to invisible, depending upon the relationship to other signs within which they are situated. The distinction lies on a continuum rather than between exclusive alternatives.¹ If a portrait is iconic of its subject, it may be said to be indexical of its mode of composition (oils vs. watercolors, say). If a barometer is indexical of temperature, it may iconize, in certain contexts, a concept, like “measurement.”

The critical point is that the degree to which any sign that is a component of a semiotic trichotomy displays iconic or indexical features varies as a function of its position in a given trichotomy. Whether a sign exhibits relatively iconic, or relatively

¹ Cf. Fisch, 259 (offering the “hypothesis” that “there are no absolutely pure symbols, indexes, or icons, but that these are elements or aspects that vary greatly in their relative prominence from sign”).

indexical, properties varies with the symbolic relation in which it is taken as a sign. Thus, in the volcano-and-observer example, the “sign” of surface lava flow has both iconic and indexical properties. It is iconic insofar as it shares properties in common with its object, the volcano—the flowing of lava is, most would agree, a characteristic appearance of an active volcano. But it is also indexical, in that the presence of lava flowing over the earth’s surface indicates the co-presence, the co-occurrence, and the *causal* relation, of the volcano as the source of the lava. Contrast this with the relation of volcanic activity, surface lava flow, and tectonic instability. Here, the sign falls toward the indexical end of the iconic/indexical spectrum, since tectonic activity, while bearing a causal relation to the object it indexes (surface lava flows), is not an imagistic reproduction of that object. Contrast this also with the foundational gesture of Russellian epistemology, which amounted to a gesture of egocentric indexation: the ability to point to something and say its name. But pointing, like pure deictics such as demonstrative adverbs and personal pronouns, does not “represent” anything (the finger gesturing toward an object is not a picture of the object it points to); at most, it indexes a relation of co-occurrence between the word spoken and the object named in the speaking for an interpretant (perhaps a child being taught a language).

In sum, Peircean semiotics provides a means of accounting for the capacity of signs to perform both iconic and indexical functions. The “iconic” feature encompasses those properties that the sign shares in common with what it represents (a portrait to its subject, a map to the terrain it surveys). The indexical aspect of the sign captures contextual relations between the sign and its object (mercury falling as a

sign of cold weather, the rolling of a ball as a sign of a kick). In this way, the theory provides a method of addressing the question of what a sign stands for, in the representational sense, and of what it indicates, in the contextual sense. How the non-representational turn in the philosophy of language interacts with this insight will be addressed in the following section.

Denotation, Representation, and the “Unit of Account”

Robert Brandom’s inferential semantic theory lends itself to further elaboration in Peircean terms. Drawing as heavily on Wilfred Sellars as on Kant, Brandom (1994, 2009) departs radically from the representational frame by arguing that the activity of using language to denote anything at all is a process of synthesis of norms rather than of picturing an object. The norms at issue, in Brandom’s theory, account for those linguistic phenomena that are described in the representational frame in terms of reference and predication by governing what statements may and may not be made consistently about an object for that object to remain what it “is.” The making of these statements is, itself, an indicator of a commitment by a speaking subject to endorse the logical inferences that are implied by the statement. As Brandom argues, to call something a “cat” is to commit oneself to a network of other propositions that could be uttered about the “cat” consistently with its remaining a cat, and correlatively, to commit oneself to refrain from uttering statements about the cat that would be inconsistent with its cat-ness (55). More than that, the utterance of “cat” is also a commitment to certain implicit rules that underpin the description of things in general: that gravity, atmospheric pressure, temperature, and other physical

laws behave in such a way as to make it possible to assign the name “cat” to its object.

If denotation is, in this sense, a marker of a network of inferential licenses and foreclosures about what both speaker and listener may say and assume about the thing being denoted, then, Brandom argues, speakers are themselves to be understood as the obligees, the entities that are bound, by this network of inferential commitments—“bound,” in the sense that they may be called upon by other language users to give an account of the reasons that they have described things as they have, made the statements that they have, in terms that are, themselves, intelligible to their listeners on the basis of other communicative norms. This accountability of the speaker to the listener in terms of the inferential licenses and foreclosures that her statements warrant creates, in the speaker, a social obligation to rule out as denotations those that are incompatible with the implications of her other commitments that she is prepared to endorse, and to include those as denotations that are entailed or warranted by those propositions she is committed to maintain. This is, according to Brandom, the full, discursive elaboration of Kant’s “synthetic unity of apperception:” rationality consists in maintaining a coherent network of epistemic commitments through the way in which we talk about the world in a community of other language users.

This account of language, and more specifically, of the normative content of how denotation becomes settled among speakers, departs from the purely representational concept of denotation as a process in which a language-equipped subject is faced with depicting, more or less accurately, a pre-linguistic, pre-

conceptual world. Between the iconic and indexical functions of Peircean signs, Brandom's account of the denotation of objects gives near exclusive priority to the indexical. For the "denotation" of a word or proposition, according to Brandom, is not so much a picture as it is a marker of a network of epistemic commitments, a set of conceptual warrants that requires, and also prohibits, other statements from being made without the object becoming something other than what we have said it was. Rather than an "object" in any traditional sense, that is, something that can be pictured or represented, it is a marker of inferential relationships, a series of material conditionals, in which every "q" is also a "p" in relation to another "q." In Peircean terms, therefore, "meaning" is not an icon; instead, it is an index of implications that are regulated intersubjectively by other members of the language community. To know what something means is, for Brandom, to know how things stand in inferential relations to each other.

Brandom's depiction of objects as indexes of deontic epistemic warrants captures a key philosophical insight, one that had been developing for centuries. Kant, already, had attributed an indexical role to objects in order to provide an account of how the understanding creates intelligible experience out of the "raw material of sensible sensations." (127). It does so, Kant argued, by rationalizing representations under concepts in judgments in order to cognize an object. (205). The Kantian object indexes a relation of concepts, judgments, and intuitions because the object, Kant says, is a product of that relationship. Similarly, for Frege, referents are known to be what they are by the relation among the truth-conditions of the senses

that indicate them, and as such, they are indices of the truth-values of various senses (Frege, 2010). And in Brandom, “[r]epresented objects show up as something like *units of account* for the inferential and incompatibility relations judgeable contents stand to one another.” (45) No clearer expression of an “index” than to call it an accounting unit, since the function of the Peircean index is to mark the presence of various elements without reproducing their features.

If “represented objects,” as Brandom writes, “show up” as indexical accounting units, then the representational theory of denotation is at best secondary, in order of explanatory priority, to the inferential warrants and prohibitions that the object stands for. Indeed, construing the object as a “unit of account” demonstrates “how the *representational* dimension of conceptual content can be understood as already implicit in its articulation by relations of inference and incompatibility” (44). Rather than appearing *first* to the mind as an image whose characterization must be justified *ex post* on the basis of whatever epistemic conditions sufficient and necessary, objects acquire their objectivity—that is, their capacity to be represented as anything at all—from the networks of inferences that govern their denotation. As in Kant, objects, just by being objects, are epistemically justified; if they were not, they would not be objects but a “rhapsody of perceptions,” in Kant’s uncharacteristically florid phrase. Thus, on Brandom’s (Kantian) account, representation is only achieved by inferential relations, just as, for Frege, reference is a function, or index, of truth-conditional relations. And for Peirce, the indexical aspect of the denotative sign is a function of its ability to be explained in terms of the

causal-inferential relations. For all four Kantians (including Kant himself), a priority of the normative (the indexical) over the representational (the iconic) is put to work: objects are not so much what we *see* as they are what we *say*, both *how* we say and *what* we *can* and *cannot* say, to others who are familiar with the conditions in terms of which these objects are intelligible.

The strong explanatory priority of the Peircean index over the icon in Brandom's account of language raises further questions about the relation, and relative priority, of indexation and denotation in general. If, as Brandom suggests, denotation is a form of indexation of inferential warrants, how to account for the traditional view of denotation as a word that stands for an object? Brandom has an answer to this. (2000; 157-85) Representation is the term we use to describe a linguistic practice, which is the practice of determining the equivalence of singular terms by substituting them in syntactic contexts in which their *de re* occurrence becomes explicit. This becomes important in cases of referential opacity, where the referent of singular terms is unclear due to the mis-alignment of the inferential associations ascribed to a singular term by interlocutors. By distinguishing the *de re* from *de dicto* occurrence of a singular term, interlocutors can work out what inferential associations they are committing to in using the term. And because a singular term, for Brandom, just is a network of material inferential commitments, to work out those inferential associations is to identify the represented object.

Two objections might be made to explaining representation as a function of inference in this way. One can grant that language users are able to perform the kind

of sorting out of inferential commitments that Brandom stresses, without conceding that this account shows that representation can be wholly explained as a process of explicating the material inferential transitions that are licensed by the use of singular terms in particular speech contexts. Rather, this concession entails that an alternative explanation of representation would have to account for it in terms of something that is logically prior to the process of sorting out inferential entailments that Brandom identifies. If, for example, the empiricist conception of representation were shown to answer to a cognitive requirement to which linguistic practices are also responsive, one could maintain that the ability of language to sort out problems of referential opacity in the manner that Brandom envisions is also a function of that logically prior cognitive necessity. This would flip the order of explanation once again: if Brandom shows that the concept of representation is a product of the availability of a linguistic practice of clarifying reference in terms of material inferences, the rearrangement of explanatory priorities under consideration here would have to show that the linguistic practice is a function of an anterior cognitive demand of which representation is also a function.

A clue as to the availability of such an explanatory alternative is present in the second objection that one might make to Brandom's account of representation, namely, that it does not address the specifically *imagistic* quality of representation. For all that representation may denominate the practice of distinguishing the "res" that is under consideration in *de re* assertions in terms of material inferences, Brandom's account does not explain why this "res," paradigmatically, is conceived of

as an image (of a “clear and distinct idea,” for example). What is it about images that lends itself to the articulation of what representation involves? What, if any, is the inferential content of such images? If inferentialism cannot account for the *imagistic* dimension of representation, this would leave room for a demonstration that the explicative practices that Brandom identifies are consequences of a condition of which representation is *also* a condition, in other words, that their explanatory relation is a co-eval rather than subordinate one.

In what follows, I argue that Peirce’s semiotics provides a theoretical framework that can account for *both* the imagistic quality of representation—the idea that, in language, “we form pictures of the world,” as the *Tractatus* put it—and the inferential articulation that Brandom theorizes, without according explanatory priority to either. The theory on offer here will have the economizing feature of not requiring that priority be accorded to either the inferential or the representational account of semantic value. Instead, the theory seeks to make the interdependency of the two intelligible in a manner that renders questions of relative priority superfluous. To discover this interdependency, the theory must look to explanatory resources outside the philosophical canon and borrow from cousins of the post-Kantian family in the field of sociolinguistics.

Silverstein’s First- and Second-Order Functionality

The linguistic anthropologist Michael Silverstein directed attention to a distinction, provoked by the research of Benjamin Lee Whorf on semantic value and grammatical form, between “what we might call an ideology of language use in a

given society,” on one hand, and “the social system of language use as we would ‘scientifically’ describe it” on the other. (Silverstein, 1979, 203). In emphasizing this distinction, and then in attempting to theorize both elements in a way that draws them together, Silverstein’s arguments echo the project of Brandom, and even more, of Wilfred Sellars, whom Brandom credits with inaugurating the inferential theory of semantics. In his 1962 essay “Philosophy and the Scientific Image of Man,” Wilfred Sellars remarked that humans encounter the world within two images that can, but need not, produce competing interpretations of what the images stand for. The “manifest image,” to Sellars, represents persons as those able intentionally to make use of linguistic norms to communicate with others. The “scientific image,” by contrast, describes the world and individuals’ behavior in it as functions of a causal order.

Like Sellars, Silverstein’s “Language Structure and Linguistic Ideology” can be seen as an effort to reconcile images manifest and scientific, or more specifically, to show the *functional interdependency* of the two. By “ideology of language use” Silverstein meant a manifest image, that is, “a set of beliefs in terms of which people rationalize the use of particular language forms to achieve socially understood purposes.” *Id.* In Anglo-American philosophical and linguistic circles, the “ideology of language use” shows up in the form of explanations that “rationalize the pragmatic system of a language, in native understanding, with an ideology of language that centers on reference-and-predication.” (208) According to this rationalization, propositional statements “seem to accomplish, to ‘do,’ some specific predicated

transformations of the social relations and other contextual understandings in the situation of speech, for example transforming the non-speech social roles of the participants.” (209)

While Silverstein had J.L. Austin specifically in mind, his “ideology of language use” corresponds in part to pragmatic theories, including Sellars’ and Brandom’s, that depict language-users as purposively availing themselves of networks of communicative norms by carrying out linguistic activity. This form of explanation coheres with Silverstein’s account of a “function(1)” of language, which is the “sense in which language is ‘functional’ inasmuch as its use seems to the natives to be potentially purposive.” (206) In contrast, “function(2)” names the set of formal features of language that index contextual features. As this minimal description implies, like the Sellarsian manifest and scientific images, there is no necessary convergence of the two domains; they could be used explanatorily in complete isolation, in the relation that art-criticism stands to optometry.

However, Silverstein sought to show their interdependence. Regarding Austin’s theory, Silverstein argued that the “phonetic,” “phatic,” and “rhetic” acts of Austinian performativity were the function(1) representation—that is, the representation of a practice in terms of purpose or intentional strategy—of function(2) grammatical relations involving interclausal hierarchy, in which a verb occurring in the dominant clause sets off a report expressed in the subordinate clause, as in the grammatical form common among direct and indirect speech types and explicitly performative statements.” An analogy between statements of these forms rationalizes

their comparison. Benjamin Whorf called this analogy a “cryptotype,” by which he meant an organizing principle for the use of lexical forms that is not transcribed in their morphemic properties, i.e., in their appearance. Thus, as Silverstein explained, a cryptotype of the forms “made the precise verbal utterance ‘thus-and-so’” and “conveyed to the listener a message corresponding to this paraphrase” applies to the use of the verb “to say” in the examples like, “I said, ‘I will go to the store,’” and “I said I would go to the store.” These two are united, analogically, with a third, explicitly performative statement “I promise (that) I will go to the store,” insofar as the third borrows from the form of the second to stand for “conveying to the addressee a message corresponding to this paraphrase.” In the case of each cryptotype, the grammatical form of the exemplary statements in each category founds the comparison between them. By analogy of their grammatical forms, the corresponding statements are situated on a continuum of locutionary-to-illocutionary acts. From this correlation, the objectivity of intentional acts arises: the elements of Austinian theory are translations of a grammatical comparison into the terms of function(1) ideology of referential and predicational use of communicative norms.

It is important to note how Silverstein’s theory applies the “scientific,” “function(2)” understanding of intentional conduct as function of grammatical forms, to explain the “manifest,” “function(1)” understanding of language user as rational actor synthesizing communicative norms. Whereas Austin proposed his theory as an explanation of how “force,” “effect,” “act,” and so on, are embodied and expressed in speech events, Silverstein argued that the phenomena that Austin sought to explain

are not the empirical objects, but the metapragmatic products, of the grammatical structure of the forms of speech considered by Austin's theory. If "force" and the like are articulations, in the intentional and referential/predicational vocabulary of function(1), of analogies among the relations between the grammatical forms of certain statements that are produced as objects of investigation for the theory as a result of the analogy, then Austinian pragmatics represents as though they were pre-existing phenomena what is generated indexically: the notions of a "force," "act," or "effect," all of which rationalize the product of a relation of grammatical and contextual features in terms of the purposive, intentional, agentive ideology² of language use.

The categories of Austinian performative theory, then, would not stand for "forces," "acts," and the like, of which grammatical form is simply a vehicle or byproduct; rather, the very conception of performative force, act, and effect, would be the consequence of a comparison enabled by the grammatical form of those statements whose (cryptotypic) relations to one another are indexed by the categories of Austinian theory. As Silverstein put this, "ideological construals/constructions of indexicality . . . turn the indexicals into seemingly natural indexical icons - emblems with consubstantial intensional content[.]"(Silverstein, 1992, 316). The property of intentionality that pragmatic theories presuppose is not the condition, but the consequence of the very theory by which they are purportedly described. What we

² I follow Silverstein in applying a non-pejorative use of the term "ideology," as standing essentially for a network of epistemic commitments that determine the degree to which any given assertion must be explained or justified by the speaker. See Silverstein, 1992.

think of as a social object is a grammatical product. According to Silverstein's reframing of Austin's theory as a function(1) (corresponding to Sellars' "manifest-image") explanation of a function(2) (Sellars' "scientific-image") grammatical process, Austin's theory is not a philosophy of speech-acts, but a rationalization of grammar in terms of purposive and deliberate behavior.

Silverstein's discussion of the metapragmatic role of the major categories of Austinian pragmatic theory sheds light on the original question, regarding the relation of iconic representation to indexical inferential articulation. Austin's categories ("illocutionary force," etc.), while *iconizing* a theory-independent social phenomenon in pragmatic vocabulary, *index* a relation (between grammatical form, context of use, and linguistic ideology) that was composed by the theory itself. According to Silverstein, the apparent "object" of Austin's explanation, that is, certain categories of verbal behavior, is non-objective: it is a product of theoretical elements drawn together for the purposes of explanation. What Austin's categories iconize, or denote, as signs, in the function(1) world of the manifest image, differs from what they index, or mark the co-occurrence of, in the function(2) world of the scientific image, which is applied here to explain the mechanics, so to speak, of the philosopher's theory.

Silverstein's analysis of Austin reveals, thus, a divergence between the iconic and indexical aspects of Austin's performative categories, considered as sign. More, his analysis reveals that the sign in question is Janus-faced: whereas the sign iconizes the phenomena it represents ("force," "act") as social fact, it does not disclose that the object of its representation is the indexical product of two relations: one between

linguistic ideology of reference and predication, and the other, of grammatical form and context. This outcome is, as should be clear by now, misleading, because it presents the output of theory as a presupposed feature of a theory-independent reality consisting of an objective domain of social practice.

The bifurcated quality of the sign, in iconizing something other than what it indexes, and in thereby presenting what it produces as its presupposed object of reference, is not an insoluble paradox. It is a semiotic effect that is anticipated by Peirce's conception of signs as standing in relations to not one, but two, objects. Peirce captured this bifurcation of the sign's relations to objects through the contrast between the "dynamical" and the "immediate" object. The "immediate" object is represented by an icon; it corresponds (paradigmatically) to the relation between a picture and its subject. The "dynamical" object is what is indicated by an index. The index is co-occurrent with its dynamical object, but not an image of it. In proportion as a given sign has both iconic and indexical qualities, it stands in relations to both immediate and dynamic objects. Accordingly, as the sign tends toward the "indexical" side of the spectrum, it indicates its co-occurrent dynamical object. As the sign veers toward the "iconic" pole, it presents a representational image of its "immediate object" more clearly, but at the expense of its capacity to manifest its indexical relation to its "dynamic object." In consequence, as Colapietro explains, this means that relatively iconic signs have a peculiarly deceptive quality:

In signs in which the indexical *aspect* is extremely attenuated and the iconic *aspect* is very prominent (e.g., a piece of music), we are likely to be absorbed into the qualitative structure of the sign itself. . .

.[W]hereas signs in which the indexical element is most central bring into prominence the relationship between the sign and its objects, there are numerous signs in which this element is attenuated” (16)

Relatively iconic signs, thus, have the quality of elucidating an immediate object while obscuring their relation to their dynamical one. As Colapietro goes on to observe, the icon’s feature of not disclosing what it indexes can mislead analysts into overlooking one of the elements that are combined in the formation of triadic symbol. (17) In more conventional terms that will be explored in the second half of this paper, this translates to a propensity, in analysts who are taken in by the immediate quality of the icon’s representation, to overlook the involvement of concepts that are implicated by their own arguments.

Accordingly, where the divergence of the icon from the index has become intelligible, its intelligibility should not be misunderstood as obvious. More likely, the divergence has been made conspicuous only through deliberate theoretical effort. The last statements holds, for example, of another illustration given by Silverstein (1979), that of the relation between the solidaristic and honorific forms of direct address that occur across a wide variety of languages. Around the time of the French Revolution, the divergence of the iconic and indexical forms of address became a topic of public discussion, as the practice of *tutoyer* and *vuvoyer* was interrogated, not as a token of simple politeness, but as an index of social hierarchy. A similar phenomenon is underway in the deconstruction of gendered pronouns: the divergence of the icon from the index is discerned in proportion as the gendered pronoun is no longer taken, iconically, to represent a metaphysical (biological) object “sex,” but a host of

extraneous social norms that have questionable title to perpetuation. In both instances, those seeking to accomplish one or another form of social renovation did so by exposing the bifurcated quality of the relevant sign, that is, by explicating the indexical implications of the icon's representation. In inferential terms, this translates to exposing the conceptual entanglement of one assertion with another.

If the divergence of the index from the icon need not remain impenetrable, and interrogating the indexical origins of iconic signs is not an occult practice, its obscurity is penetrable only through deliberate theoretical effort. The analyst cannot simply take for granted that what occurs in the manifest/function(1)/representational image elucidates or depicts the scientific/function(2)/indexical aspect of the *explanandum*. As we will see, even analysts who proceed with the utmost caution as to some dimensions of this problem still miss its occurrence in others.³ The difficulty lies partly in understanding why some icons are more successful than others in obscuring their indexical aspects. The more difficult problem lies in making intelligible what is indexed by the judgments that we form, metapragmatically, about our pragmatic practices; this was the focus of Silverstein's analysis of Austin, and is a theme that will be returned to later.

What is immediately important about Silverstein's theory is that it that it shows grammatical and intentional dimensions of linguistic practice to be functionally interdependent in a way that accords co-eval explanatory status to both. Neither of Silverstein's two functions claims explanatory priority over the other; in

³ Cf. Colapietro, 17.

fact, it is only insofar as the iconic/intentional and indexical/grammatical functions remain conceptually distinct that they can operate in tandem in Silverstein's theory. This contrasts with the mode of explanation in Brandom, where the iconic/representational dimension is subordinate, in terms of explanatory priority, to the indexical/inferential dimension, such that the former is reducible to the terms of the latter. Taking a cue from Silverstein, the next section will argue that a coordinating rather than subordinating relation obtains between the representational and inferential theories of semantic value, such that the relation between the two theories should be explained as an interdependency of co-eval elements rather than through a reductive strategy of explaining one in the other's terms.

The Thesis of Interdependency

This coordinating rather than subordinating explanatory strategy begins to emerge when a case made famous by Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* is considered from the perspective of Silverstein's theory of first- and second-order functionality. Considering how to explain a language game in which language users refer to sensations, such as pain, that they alone can experience, Wittgenstein ventured an analogy to a community whose members use the word "beetle" to refer to the contents of a box, one box per member. Only, no-one has ever seen the content of anyone else's box, and therefore none has any idea whether her "beetle" is the same as anyone else's. How to explain, Wittgenstein asked, that the word "beetle" has use in this language game, i.e., that all participants use the word "beetle" as though they were all denoting a common referent? The explanation cannot be that the physical

object of reference anchors the use of the term according to the “model of object and name.” (§ 293). False analogies between the naming-an-object game and the description-of-beetle/pain are rejected. Since no-one ever gets a look at anyone’s beetle but their own, the perceptual predicate for an analogy between this game and the practice of “naming” publicly visible objects is missing. The use of “beetle” (or of words denoting other private experiences) in this game, by all users of the language, *as if* they were denoting a common, public object, is a “fiction,” Wittgenstein concludes, but for all that it is “a *grammatical* fiction.” (§ 307). In what sense might this fiction be “grammatical?”

The term “grammatical,” in Wittgenstein’s usage in this passage, might be interpreted in a broadly structural sense, as identifying a practice that does not do what its practitioners believe it does, but that nevertheless accomplishes something *else* that enables them to do what they are, in fact, going on about doing intentionally. According to a Silversteinian read of Wittgenstein’s beetle-box case, the fiction of reference in the case of the beetle-in-the-box game is “grammatical” in this “structural” sense, similar to Silverstein’s function(1). Just as language-users in the beetle-box game base the practice of reference and predication on an analogy to the “model of object and name,” so did Silverstein show that pragmatic theories of language use *create* the “objects” to which they purportedly “refer” by rationalizing a function(2) analogy between the formal properties of a definite range of sentence tokens in terms of a referential-and-predicational ideology that comports with an intentional/deliberate model of action. In both cases, the referential practices iconize

“objects” that do not pre-exist the language practice itself; at the same time, the icon does not disclose the analogy that it indexes (for Wittgenstein, the analogy of ostensive definition to descriptions of pain-behavior; for Silverstein, the analogy of grammatical structures that generate the categories of Austin’s “phatic” and “rhetic” acts).

Returning to Brandom’s theory of referential objects as “units of account,” the indexed relation is that of a network of inferential licenses and foreclosures implied by the terms “beetle,” “pain,” or, in speech-act theory, the pragmatic concept of “illocutionary force.” Although the practice of reference is, in both cases, a “fiction” as Wittgenstein calls it, it is also a “grammatical” fiction, in the sense that the divergence between the iconic and indexical aspects of the sign allows the linguistic practice to be rationalized in the terms of the function(1)/manifest image of reference. The icon is a fiction, but a *functional* fiction no less, because the network of epistemic commitments indexed by the sentence-token in which “beetle,” “pain,” and “illocutionary force” are used, is far too complex for the cognitive capabilities of language users to deal in terms of the indexation directly.

The fiction involved is *grammatical*, or “structural,” in both of two possible senses. In one sense, if the fiction were not a fiction, that is, if all language-users were doing when using language was actually to swap pictures of denotata with each other, the indexical role of normative commitment that Brandom describes could drop out of the picture; language would be entirely extensional, and would leave no room for inference to play a role in language-use. But the fiction is “grammatical” in a further

sense, namely, that if language-users did not have the fiction, if they trafficked directly in inferential commitments, they would have to be capable of deliberately processing and cognizing all of the commitments that any particular description implies/entails/prohibits whenever they denote anything. They would be extreme linguistic neurotics, and their conversations would be interminably long. Language *requires* the fiction that its users are swapping representations of objects in order for the real grammar (swapping indexes) to work. In this way, the fiction is not a fiction—it's grammatical, an explanator of the way things work in practice.

The functional interdependency of the representational icon and inferential index works as follows. The representational icon (e.g., “beetle”) satisfies a cognitive demand among language users for a simple token to satisfy the supposition, engrained in and reproduced by actual linguistic practice, that there is a common “something” that is referred to when we speak. This cognitive demand materializes at the collective level in the form of what Silverstein (1979) called the “folk ideology of reference and predication.” Paradigmatically, the mode of reference according to this folk ideology is in the mode of “picturing,” more or less along the lines of the Russellian/Tractarian pictorial theory of semantic value. In Peircean terms, this picturing is performed by the iconic aspect of the sign. However, much in the way that the icon does not reliably depict the object that it indexes, the pictorial icon of representational semantics does not account for the semantic value of these linguistic performances; rather, as Brandom argues, it is the network of inferential commitments that is *indexed* by the sign that supplies conceptual content. The iconic

(representational) and indexical (inferential) functions operate in tandem to account for language's success in conveying conceptual content. Inferential indexes supply semantic value, and imagistic icons provide a form in which these indexes are exchanged that is cognitively manageable to language users. Because the relationship of the iconic and indexical functions is co-operative, it is interdependent, and because it contributes to the efficacy of language as we know it, it is functional. Hence, the relationship is a functional interdependency, in which the *distinctiveness* of the functions performed by the iconic and indexical aspects of signs enables both to operate successfully, and for communication to work successfully on the whole, as assured by their irreducibility to one another's terms. "Irreducible" because, as with any sign, the iconic aspect is not assimilable to the indexical aspect. Here, that distinction materializes in the sign's bifurcated role: the cognitive economy of the icon cannot be accomplished by the inferential complexity of the index, any more than the representational simplicity of the icon can convey the indexed web of inferential commitments that accounts for conceptual content.

The functional interdependency delineated here suggests that language use runs on a kind of constructive, collective mythology.⁴ It is only because, and to the extent that, language users have confidence in the iconic practice of denotation that they are able to index inferential networks that are far too complex to articulate in

⁴ Quine (1961) had in mind something similar in calling "physical objects," as the substratum of referring acts, "comparable, epistemologically, to the gods of Homer," in that the iconic representation of a pre-linguistic real satisfies a demand among language users for a common cosmology, in relation to which any and all may take a comparable stance.

actual linguistic performances, or, indeed, to conceptualize in all their dimensions, even reflectively. The folk-ideological notion that the icon is what conveys semantic value is, like Wittgenstein's beetle, a "fiction," but it is a "fiction" that (functionally) enables the exchange of inferential commitments indexed by it to play out, by providing language users with a cognitively manageable unit through which to mark the inferences associated with it. Wittgenstein's beetle-box example illustrates the process by which a comparison is constructed, in language, between two phenomena that cannot be compared: no putting two "beetles" beside one another, and no way for people to feel each other's pain (cliché aside). Similarly, with Whorf, Silverstein (2000) described a "fashion of speaking" at work in the evolution of language, in which "the working of analogic forces . . . make[s] plausible for speakers . . . the projective misrecognition of the grammatical structure in the lexation targeted for analogic change." (100) Silverstein's "projective misrecognition" is Wittgenstein's "beetle" and Peirce's "icon:" it is the constitution of an object that serves as an apparent predicate for the very act of representation/denotation that denotes it. The linguist Michel Pêcheux (1982) described this process as the "von Munchausen" effect, named after the legendary baron who lifted himself and his horse out of water by pulling on his own hair. But the appearance of auto-generativity does not require bootstrap self-levitation or creation *ex nihilo*; rather, as Wittgenstein and Silverstein found, the constitution of beetles and "pain" alike as a common, public object of reference, is the product of a comparison "between the forms of expression in different regions of our language." (PI § 90). The comparison, although wrong taken

in a literal sense (we are *not* able to see each other's beetles, feel each other's pain) is sustained by its functionality: its capacity to satisfy the ontological presuppositions and cognitive demands of the function(1) ideology of reference and predication, while, at the same time, indexing the un-iconizably complex network of material inferential transitions. Successful language use requires that language users are wrong, in a particularly useful way, about what they are doing. By (falsely) rationalizing their practices as exchanges of representational icons, they are enabled to exchange the complex networks of inferential commitments that those icons index.

The functional interdependency theory postulates that the folk-ideological practice of denotation-via-iconicity enables the linguistic exchange of inferential networks, which are themselves constituted by analogic processes. The precise form of the analogy likely varies among denotations; however, all are, as Brandom has argued, normatively constituted. The norms that go into associating various assertions as compatible or incompatible with others-- the compatibility of "the cat is on the mat" with "the mat is under the cat," for example-- are built, fundamentally, around the assimilation of statements with one another. The functional interdependency theory suggests that the coherence of the comparison—the analogy—among statements that comprise the network of propositions that are committed to, and excluded by, any given referring act, requires the denotative icon in order for that coherence to be communicated among language users. Unlike the inference-first explanatory strategy adopted by Brandom, however, the functional interdependency theory does not claim that the inferential network (the index) *precedes* or *produces*

the denotation (the icon) that communicates it, or vice-versa; indeed, it does not imply that an order of priority can be established. On the contrary, if the two are functionally interdependent, anteriority cannot be ascribed to either one. And this outcome would be perfectly consistent with Peirce's semiotic theory, which maintains that *both* the iconic and indexical aspects of semiosis are properties of *the same sign*; therefore, to ask whether the denotational icon precedes the inferential index or vice versa is absurd.

Peirce and Silverstein, therefore, give reasonable grounds for a modulation of the anti-representationalism associated with Ryle ([1949], 2009), the later Wittgenstein, and continued by Brandom. Rather than seek to show that representation is a function of inference and explainable in the other's terms, semantic theory must attend to what is distinctive about the contribution that representation makes to linguistic practice in comparison to inferential articulation. Peirce's theory of the sign as bearer of both iconic and indexical aspects accounts for the value contributed to linguistic practice by the imagistic quality of representation. While representation depends upon inference for conceptual content, inference depends upon the cognitively manageable token supplied by the representational image for conceptual content to be communicated. The first-order functional role of representation sustains the second-order functional exchange of epistemic commitments, of inferential warrants and entitlements, that cannot be conceptualized, rationalized, processed, or transferred *without* the performance of the first-order function. Language users cannot communicate directly by means of the exchange of

complex inferential networks; cognitively, they require a marker which stands as a shorthand reference for the complex inferential network that is what they meant.

What is distinctive about the representational frame, the “icon” of denotation, is its capacity to satisfy the demands of that first-order function.

Iconicity and Conceptual/Semantic Failure

If the functional interdependency of the iconic and indexical aspects of linguistic performances can account, in the manner described, for the success of linguistic practices, the interdependency also accounts for important instances of linguistic (and conceptual) failure. These will be taken up in what follows. Because, as with beetles and pain, the icons that language users represent in meaningful propositions do not show the indexes that they concurrently mark, a question arises about what happens when the spread between the iconic and indexical aspects widens, such that the indexical aspect of the sign is not what is displayed or elucidated by its iconic aspect. Silverstein (2000) explores this question in his account of Whorf’s theory of the origin of time concepts, on the one hand, and of Benedict Anderson’s reconstruction of the emergence of nationalist ideology, on the other.

In a series of essays, Whorf had traced the origin of the modern concept of time to the convergence of two linguistic features: the use of mensurating terms in relation to substantive and partitive nouns, and the function of grammatical tense, in these languages, in indexing a constant flow of empty, linear time. The mensurating terms occur in the application of unit-terms to nouns that are not self-individuating. Thus, in English as in other languages, we can talk of “lumps of sugar” without being

able to talk of “sugars,” and we can talk of “trees” without being able to talk of “units of tree.” The substantive/partitive distinction among nouns is a cryptotype marked by its reactance (its interaction) with mensurating terms. The cryptotype permits certain analogies and disanalogies between other substantive or partitive nouns that, other than the cryptotype, have nothing in common: “grains of sand,” “liters of water,” “acres of land,” and “units of time” all become, by association with the cryptotype, members of a class of concepts. But, “time,” when one reviews this last arrangement, is dissimilar to the others in that it is not a tangible substance; however, the comparison enabled by the cryptotype makes the analogy between time and other “formless substances” like water and land seem plausible. Partly due to this grammatical analogy, Whorf argued, Newtonian time takes hold as a “formless substance,” like water, sand, or land. Metaphysics follows grammatical patterns that operate unawares upon the conceptual practices of language-speakers.

In addition to the role of mensurating terms, Silverstein interprets Whorf as having identified the indexical role of verb tense as a further grammatical support for the objectivity of Newtonian time. Verb tenses indexically mark a presupposed stratification of linear time, leading from a measurable moment of the past to an equally measurable moment of the future. While the tenses mark the linear progression of time, Whorf pointed out, they do not tie that progression to any concrete event; rather, they index the passage of time emptily, with no necessary reference to specific occurrences. Prior to the advent of Newtonian time, verb tenses may have indexed time differently: one could say that one “had” done something

before one “did” something while indexing the relation of two events, without invoking a notion of time as an empty linear expanse knitting the two events together, let alone in a manner capable of being represented abstractly through mensurating partitives linked to a formless substantive called “time,” such as “three minutes [partitive] of time [formless substantive].” But the very indexicality of verb tense--the fact that, as an indexical, it has no stable referential function--makes its indexicality susceptible to reassignment, just as the deictic “here” marks a different location when spoken by someone in Toronto compared with someone in Beijing. With the advent of Newtonian time and the dissemination, beginning circa 1271 in Europe, of mechanical clocks that measure time in “empty,” regular hours, rather than in “full” evental time, verb tense could be indexed to the proliferating practice of marking the co-occurrence of the passage of time in empty units measured by mechanical clocks. The modern concept of time, in Whorf’s account, emerged from this interaction of grammatical category with social practice through what Silverstein calls a “complex, analogically driven process,” in which

culturally specific concepts, and particularly culturally specific verbalizable concepts, emerge from the dialectic of grammatically anchored linguistic discourse and institutionally centered social practice By a kind of projective imagination, native speakers in such cultural universes ‘discover’ that what is coded by expressions for these concepts are the essences of which ‘reality’ is composed.
(108)

Thus, the indexicality of verb tense, combined with the cryptotypic association of time with other nouns denoting formless substances, interacts with social practice (here, the measurement of time with mechanical clocks) to constitute a metaphysical

object of reference—a feature of reality—for the subjects of the Newtonian temporal regime.

Silverstein took up Whorf's account of the grammatical supports for the objectivity of Newtonian time and extended it to Benedict Anderson's portrayal of the origins of nationalist ideology in the print culture of the early modern period. In *Imagined Communities*, Anderson argues that the origins of nationalist ideology are rooted in the dissemination of print culture among the literate bourgeoisie. Silverstein shows that Whorf's analysis of the grammatical foundations of the perceived reality of abstract time applies analogously to Anderson's account of nationalism. Where Whorf demonstrated that the modern conceptualization of abstract time is rooted and reinforced by the interplay of the deixis of verb tense and the reactance of partitive and substantive nouns, Silverstein argued that, in Anderson's account, the deixis of the "we" pronoun operates in the literary sources Anderson surveys to unite narrator, reader, and the narrated event together in a single spatio-temporal moment that is constitutive of the nationalist imaginary. (115).

Whether in the case of Wittgenstein's functionally fictional beetles, or of the dialectics of verb-tense and timekeeping practices and of pronominal deixis and print culture, there are, as Silverstein writes, "two perspectives on the problem of how language . . . mediates between thought and thing. One is . . . a complex, emergent, partly analogically driven conceptual orientation that is absolutely 'real' to the people in whom it emerges." The other perspective consists in "what grammatical-categorical analysis reveals to systematic investigations[.]" The troubling thing about the

outcome of such investigations, however, is that they are normally “opaque to the typical . . . language-user.” (125) In other words, the function(1) rationalization of practices in terms of the grammar of reference and predication—the practice of “denoting” a world of objects bearing names—does not elucidate the function(2) analogic process that the grammatical investigation uncovers. For this very reason, there is the potential for the iconic, manifest-image representation to mislead as to its indexical origins; that is, for the function(1) rationalization to be applied without regard to its function(2) determinants. As Kockelman (2005) points out, “[t]his tendency to treat immediate objects [icons] as dynamic objects [indexes] is related to *fetishism* more generally.” (24)

If we follow the account of reference in Silverstein/Whorf, the conclusion is that this “[t]his tendency to treat immediate objects [icons] as dynamic objects [indexes],” as Kockelman called it, is a function of the necessary conditions for the functionality of language in general: because the fiction of iconization is grammatical, that is, because the iconic sign is functionally inseparable from the exchange of what would otherwise be conceptually unmanageable networks of inferential commitments, there is no getting rid of it. Language users rationalize what they do in terms of representation because they cannot conceptualize the extent of inferentiality embedded in their actual practices. The iconic aspect of the sign contributes to the way language operates a kind of hermeneutic short-cut: speaker need not offer listener a litany of inferences and entailments of his calling yon creature a “cat,” that is, he need not articulate the index, precisely because (and to the extent that) he can

deal with the simple icon “cat” as object of the representational frame. He need not “back into” reference by articulating a series of entailments, as one might do when playing the “I spy” game with a child, or by using quantified variables with a logician. He can perform reference by invoking the icon, that is, by playing the naming game.

That attention must be given, in this way, *both* to the representational aspect of inferential indexation, *and* to the indexical aspect of inferential representation, becomes prominent when attempting to explain some of the more pernicious types of linguistic malfunction: that is, the phenomenon of “fetishism” remarked by Kockelman (2005). Without accounting for both the iconic as well as the indexical aspects of meaning, it is difficult to see how new semantic wine can be repacked in old lexemic bottles. For facts, such as that words gain new associations, that sentences come to stand for new “propositional content” while remaining lexemically identical, and that texts can be “read differently,” are unremarkable. But divergences such as these are unintelligible if there are no separable elements of signs, be they dichotomous, trichotomous, or otherwise. To the extent that networks of epistemic warrants can be packaged into representational icons, the possibility increases that the iconic aspect of the sign will diverge from the epistemic warrants that it indexes, since, as Silverstein and Peirce have shown, there is no *necessary* relation between the icon’s representation and the index’s inferences.

Hence the propensity of language to give rise to a metaphysics whose reality occurs to its subjects/users as unimpeachable rationally, and yet, surreal intuitively.

The icon can't be doubted, one might say—it is the same as it was yesterday. And yet, it *seems* misplaced. Now we are on speculative grounds. But this “*seems*” might be taken to express the estrangement, or better, *enstrangement*—the making-strange, that occurs when the representational/iconic and inferential/indexical aspects of the sign diverge. The surreal quality of the given, the “alienation” that was until fairly recently a topic of sustained philosophical inquiry, owes itself, perhaps, to the perception of the widening separation of the icon from the index. The “uncanny” of Heideggerian existentialism, “nausea” in Left Bank literature, and their various adaptations are, perhaps, phenomenological articulations of this semiotic and semantic divergence, both of which, when translated into Brandom's terms, have an epistemological character to them. If denotation names a process of invoking epistemic warrants iconically, and those epistemic warrants are issued socially, then the intuition of dissonance between what is warranted and what is represented is a kind of break from the socially licensed network of inferences. And if that socially licensed network of inferences is considered the truth-functional expression of power, then we can begin to see how the critique of reference presented so far converges with the projects of Derrida and of the later Foucault. Deconstruction, discourse analysis, inferential semantics, metapragmatics, and existentialism converge, perhaps, at the point where the icon diverges from the index. If this is so, then all the more reason to keep Peirce's “stereoscopic” view, with due regard for the coordinate role of the iconic and indexical aspects of the sign, in full view.

From Normative Critique to Meta-Normative Quietism

The non-transparency of the index to the icon, that is, the icon's property of not reliably elucidating its own indexical origins, has claimed its share of otherwise acute theorists who have made the mistake of anticipating that the icon will assist in making its function(2) relations intelligible.⁵ The victim of this misstep is liable to a reproach given by one of Shakespeare's characters: he becomes "the argument of his own scorn" by reproducing within his own criticism the object of his critique (Shakespeare, [1612], 1993, act 2. sc. iii). How the relation of the index to the icon produces this consequence is, itself, a demonstration of the importance of attending to both the representational and the inference-indexing functions(1-2) of language. Silverstein (2000) recognized this phenomenon in Anderson's *Imagined Communities*. As this section will argue, it recurs in recent philosophical work on conceptual genealogy. Its semiotic architecture will be revealed in the next.

According to Silverstein, Anderson replicated at the level of his own critical apparatus the process of naturalization that he set upon critiquing. Silverstein faults Anderson for "mistak[ing] the dialectically produced trope of 'we'-ness for the reality. He seems not to see that the dialectical workings of political processes that construct the sharable space of realist reportage in standardized language are the facts to be characterized and explained." (126). While de-naturalizing nationalist ideology by showing its dependency on linguistic practice, Anderson naturalizes the relation between nationalism and language: "the emblemized trope of 'we-ness,'"

⁵ E.g., Colapietro, 17.

Silverstein concludes, “seems to have taken in Anderson, who buys the trope as a transparently imagined ‘reality.’” (128-29). “Nationalism” is deconstructed as a function of language at the expense of bypassing the functional determinants of the language-nationalism nexus. By naturalizing the nexus between language and nationhood, *Imagined Communities* ends by reproducing the object of its critique of (ideological) naturalization at the meta-critical level. (125-29). “[R]itual occasions of textuality,” Silverstein writes, “draw Anderson’s attention to language as the very emblem of nationality. Yet his argument is really about the ‘we’-voicing of objective realist reportage” (128).

In Silverstein’s critique of Anderson, the emblematicity (iconicity) of language practices as signs of national identity becomes irresistible, even to an analyst who undertook the deconstruction of national identity as his intended critical project. That this is so underscores the capacity of the Peircean sign to mislead: in the case of *Imagined Communities*, the iconic character of language as proxy for nationality obscures its indexical origins in grammar and tropology. The consequence of the icon’s deception is particularly baneful for analysts who wish to undertake any sort de-naturing critique, for the analyst who falls for it will reproduce the naturalization he wishes to criticize at the level of his own critical apparatus.

The effect of the icon’s deception in producing this critical/meta-critical *pas de deux* is on display in the relatively recent (re)turn in philosophy toward genealogical analysis of concepts. In his *Practical Origin of Concepts*, the philosopher Mathieu Queloz seeks to explain the origin and perpetuation of concepts

in functional terms. Concepts, such as “truthfulness” and “knowledge,” in the form in which they occur today, can be explained in terms of their functional relationship to certain fundamental needs. Taking as his chief examples the work of Edward Craig (1999), Bernard Williams (2002), and Miranda Fricker (2007), Queloz endeavors to show that, while the functional origins of concepts are obscured in proportion as the concepts become engrained features of the cultural landscape, those origins can, nevertheless, be uncovered by studying their development as a response to fundamental needs and practices satisfying them. Thus, in the case of “knowledge,” Queloz (2021a) argues, with Craig, that the concept arose in proportion as the behavior of individual human agents became coordinated around a demand for the same kind of information and around the same indicia of what sort of person could provide it. As a generic need (for good information of the same kind) came to be satisfied by a generic kind of practice (searching for a certain kind of informant), the concept “knowledge” emerged, Queloz envisions, in order to designate the class of information produced by the coordination of generic need with generic information-seeking practices. Similarly, in the case of “truthfulness,” Queloz argues, with Williams, that a generic need to correct information asymmetries came to be satisfied by obtaining information from certain kinds of sources—those exhibiting the combined traits of “accuracy” (being right) and “sincerity” (not lying). As obtaining information from sources possessed of those traits came to be understood by the relevant community as indexed to the correction of the asymmetry that was disadvantageous, Queloz argues, a norm of “truthfulness” arose, as a shorthand for

the characteristics that came to be desirable due to their utility in disseminating reliable information.

Through this method, Queloz pursues a de-reifying mission along the lines of Anderson's critique of nationalist ideology. The latter is a function of language practices, Anderson argues, in the way that, according to Queloz, seemingly immutable and *a priori* concepts are derivative products of the relation between "needs" and certain practices subserving them. Queloz's anti-reification project goes a step further, even, by showing that the very naturalization of concepts such as "truthfulness" and "knowledge" in terms such that they become valued intrinsically serves a functional purpose: "truthfulness" and "knowledge" arise from the relation of practices and needs and, in turn, are instrumental in continuing to satisfy variations of those needs because they are valued intrinsically. The virtues of "accuracy" and "sincerity" become socially endemic as they are valued without consequential justification, and as they become socially endemic, they facilitate the ongoing correction of asymmetrical information distribution by eliminating incentives to misbehave by taking advantage of other peoples' honesty. As this process of social naturalization proceeds, the origins of the relevant practices in their functional expressions become obscured; thus, while concepts such as "truthfulness" and "knowledge" are derivatives of a functional relation, their functionality is "self-effacing," in Queloz's phrase, and replaced by valuing the concepts and associated practices intrinsically.

Queloz's program provides a functionalist account of the origination of concepts in a trichotomy of need, practice, and concept. It takes into consideration the functionality of the concept's naturalization within the community that observes it. His account of what he calls "self-effacing functionality" furnishes Anderson with argumentative ammunition against Silverstein's critique. After all, as Queloz might point out to Silverstein, the language-nationality nexus acquires a rank among the real objects of the universe to the extent it influences further practices based on it. Anderson's analysis in *Imagined Communities* addresses this nexus at the moment that it has acquired such influence. Anderson can't be faulted for recognizing what is simply the case: the association between language and nationality is no less real today, for all its origins in contingent pairings of social practices and linguistic phenomena. Functional fictions are no less functional for being fictional, but they *are* less fictional to the extent they are functional.

Nonetheless, if Silverstein's critique of Anderson is read more broadly as a warning about a certain kind of methodological error, it is not impeachable on the same terms, and indeed, it applies as squarely to Queloz as to Anderson. For Silverstein can be read as saying essentially this: even analysts concerned with providing a genetic explanation of apparently transcendental aspects of social life can be taken in by the very transcendental qualities that they are set upon deconstructing. This appears to have happened with Queloz.

For all its rigor, on reading Queloz's genealogical work, one cannot disavow the feeling of witnessing the consummation of a self-fulfilling prophecy. Why that

disquieting feeling arises becomes clear only on close consideration of the method Queloz advocates, which he spells out both in *Practical Origins* and in an article recommending genealogical analysis as a vehicle for taking a critical standpoint upon endemic social practices (Queloz, 2021b). The genealogical analyst acquires this standpoint by drawing a relation between four factors, which Queloz calls “needs,” “reasons for concept-use,” “reasons for concept-application,” and “reasons to draw certain consequences in thought and action” (766). These factors stand in a causal/inferential chain in regard to each other: “needs yield reasons for concept-use, concept-use yields reasons for concept-application, and concept-application yields reasons to draw certain consequences in deliberation.” (*Ibid*). In other words, “needs” determine what “concepts” are adopted, the nature of the concepts that are adopted determines the rules for the application of those concepts, and the application of concepts yields actions and further thoughts. *Ibid*. To apply this model to Queloz’s example from Bernard Williams, this would mean that a “need” to correct information asymmetry yields the concept of truthfulness, and the application of the concept of truthfulness yields further thoughts and actions (say, a judgment that person X was untruthful and should be censured for it). By following this approach, Queloz argues, the genealogical analyst can reach both descriptive and normative conclusions: she can “try to determine what the *point* of a given conceptual practice is, whether it has a point *for us*, and whether it derives this point from needs we *endorse*.” *Ibid*.

There is, however, an aporia in Queloz’s method, and it is responsible for the impression that a self-fulfilling projection is at work. As Queloz acknowledges, the connection between the first two elements of analysis—that is, the “need” and the “reason for concept-use”—is forged by a highly aggressive set of anthropological assumptions. The need-concept nexus is taken care of by what Queloz calls “the facts about the kinds of creatures we are and the kinds of environments we live in that render certain concepts *worth having*.” (2021b, 766). Or, as he puts it in *Practical Origins*, genealogy proceeds by “render[ing] plausible a hypothesis about why creatures like us would go in for an idealized, prototypical model” of present conceptual practices. (2021a, 50) What is the source of insight into such “facts” about “creatures like us,” creatures that, apparently, are sufficiently similar to “us” to make genealogy applicable to them? Because the genealogical method begins with an idealization, the insight can’t be derived from any sort of Geertzian attention to the details of different societies; rather, it must come from the genealogical analyst’s conclusions about what these facts are.

Before proceeding further, it is worth taking a moment to synthesize the above with what Queloz has said of the genealogical method in his meta-philosophical work (2021a). In its essential dimensions, the method, as stated in both publications, amounts to the following procedure (Queloz, 2021a, 230-31): First, the analyst identifies a target concept whose genealogical origin is under consideration. Second,

the analyst identifies the fundamental needs that the concept appears to serve.⁶ Third, the analyst projects that “fundamental need” historically to consider what concepts the satisfaction of this need on a collective social level will give rise to. Finally, the analyst compares the result of this process, the comparator concept, to the target concept. If the comparator concept resembles the target concept, the present concept is considered to be legitimated by its origination in ineliminable need. If not, the present concept is delegitimized, insofar as it is shown not to be justified by any such need, but to be the outcome of contingent social factors that are exposed in the process of analysis and, being exposed, susceptible to critical reflection.

As Queloz acknowledges, the approach is built on an assumption that the analyst can identify needs that are similar between the idealized model in which the evolution of the conceptual genealogy plays out, and those that afflict “the actual group” that possesses the target concept that is being genealogically evaluated (Queloz, 2021a, 230). However, the similarity of fundamental “needs” affecting both the genealogical evolutionary model and the actual concepts is guaranteed, Queloz thinks, by the postulate that they are “close analogues” of each other. (230). This analogy is undergirded by none other than the robust anthropological assumptions that Queloz identified at the outset, namely, that these needs are prescribed by “facts about human beings and their environment that stand a good chance of obtaining

⁶ In articulating the genealogical method in *Practical Origins*, Queloz puts a “proto-practice” first in terms of the order of explanation; however, it is clear that this “proto-practice” can only be selected *in view of* the analyst’s conception of what a “fundamental need” amounts to. Even in selecting a prototype practice, the analyst does so on the basis of whatever need he conceives as giving rise to it. See 2021a at 51 (“the interplay of certain needs . . . generates a basic problem to which the proto-practice forms a salient solution”).

anyway, independently of the particulars of a given situation, because they are basic structural facts about the human situation,” picked out in idealized conditions. (231).

The difficulties with this methodology are twofold. First, when the analyst identifies a “fundamental need” that he believes to be served by the target concept, on what basis does he identify such need as fundamental? The “need” identified is itself a function of the analyst’s milieu: the analyst’s conclusions about what are “the facts about the kinds of creatures we are and the kinds of environments we live in that render certain concepts *worth having*” are taken from the analyst’s present socio-historical position. (2021b, 766). That they are so derived is mandated by the analyst’s commitment to “thin” description. This becomes acutely problematic for the integrity of the methodology once that “need” is projected transhistorically and made into the causal driver of the emergence of the comparator concept. If the comparator concept is a function of transhistorically-projected need, and transhistorically-projected need is a function of the target concept, then what result can we expect, than that the comparator concept will resemble any target concept that is correlated with the analyst’s present conception of need? And if the degree of that similarity is given normative significance, the model is wired to produce confirmatory outcomes for the analyst’s normative position—that is, his beliefs about what counts as adequate justification, and his beliefs about what is justified.

No surprise, then, that when Queloz begins by selecting as his transhistorical need, “a conception of agents on which they care about being unobstructed by others in doing what they want,” (240), he ends by concluding that the project of genealogy

has both *explained* and *justified* liberal democracy as “a local manifestation of a near-universal predicament” that “simultaneously presents the fact that we brought ourselves into this situation *as an achievement*.” (Queloz, 2021a, 241). Despite Queloz’s protest that the need he has identified is *not* a projection of “liberal concerns into the starting point,”(240) it is difficult to imagine a statement of a fundamental need that would be more highly approved of by Mill and by Bentham. When such a classic articulation of the anthropological assumptions that undergird the ideal of “negative liberty” is taken as the driver of genealogical explanation (Berlin, 1958), the similarity of the comparator concept to contemporary concepts that are also functions of that ideal is foreordained by the method itself.

In this case, genealogical analysis amounts to a demonstration that our present conceptual practices can be articulated and “justified” in terms of our present concepts of what “needs” are ineliminable. This might be little more than what American jurists call “harmless error,” were it not for the fact that Queloz insists that his genealogical method should instill *confidence* in our current conceptual practices. (2021a, *passim*). To draw confidence from this procedure is to mistake a tautology for an argument. To be sure, we may find our habit of valuing “truthfulness” to be justified by the method, whereas we may find this or that act of “shaming” someone *not* justified, but whether we do or not will be a factor of our concept of what constitutes a transhistorically basic need. But the identification of such a basic need and what type of practice will subserve it is itself a function of the very normative standpoint—the analyst’s own—that genealogical analysis is claimed to be useful for

evaluating. For instance, to say, as Queloz does, that a concern among “agents” with “being unobstructed by others in doing what they want” is a universal need, is already to take a normative attitude, one that is derived from the ideological presuppositions of classical liberalism. To make that “need” a “universal” explainer, one that will determine which of its conceptual by-products are justified, is a formula for self-justification.

My second criticism expands upon the first in a manner that addresses a potential rebuttal of it. A genealogist may well object that the transhistorically projected need is not the *only* causal driver of the comparator concept; rather, as Queloz argues, intermediating practices arise to address the projected need, and it is the *relation* of that need and the practices, instead of the practices alone, that produces the comparator. But this avails nothing. For, to borrow from Sellars, this is a case in which the properties of an object of explanation have been “implicitly defined” by the theory itself. ([1956], 1997, ¶ 61(3)). Like the proverbial hammer that puts its holder in mind of the objects she might pound with it, a concept of a “fundamental need,” such as the correction of asymmetrical information distribution, or being unobstructed from doing what one wants, puts the analyst in mind of the sort of social configurations that would satisfy it. Given the analyst’s commitment to idealized explanation, the model the analyst uses to identify practices that may satisfy the need will be the analyst’s conception of how those practices serve such a need in the analyst’s contemporary context. The very type of practice that the analyst imagines as serving the projected need, in other words, is, like the need itself, a

function of the analyst's present viewpoint, viz., what kinds of practices he imagines subserve the identified need.

Now we are on familiar territory once again. For if, like the projected need, the practice subserving that need is *also* a function of the analyst's normative position, then *both* the intermediating explanatory factor ("practice") and the originating explanatory factor ("need") are functions of that normative position, and *both* those factors will tend to produce a narrative about the emergence of concepts that will resemble the analyst's normative standpoint, that is, the evaluative standpoint that the analyst brings to bear on the product of the genealogical analysis. The upshot is that genealogical analysis will perform critical work only in regard to atavistic conceptual practices: those that are incompatible with the analyst's present conception of "need," and that are, therefore, susceptible to criticism without running through all the perambulations of genealogical analysis. *The analyst's* conception of need is, by the analysis, installed at a supra-normative level; it is untouchable, indeed, reified in order to satisfy the requirement of the model for a transhistorical need and a prototypical practice subserving it. What Queloz calls "Left Wittgensteinianism" is, therefore, indistinguishable from what he calls its "Right" counterpart at the meta-normative level: it is an explication of an attitude that the analyst already knows he has.

One cannot be too skeptical of methodologies that take aggressive anthropological assumptions as their start-point. But Queloz's method falls squarely into the trap. By taking a conception of "need" as its primary explanator, without

regard to the contingency of that explanator on the analyst's own meta-normative habitus, genealogical analysis projects its own normative presuppositions into the premises of its argument, and then claims that its standpoint can be justified by finding it reflected in the conclusions. The irony is that this outcome is produced, as in Silverstein's criticism of Anderson, in the midst of a de-naturing critique, one that frequently stresses the need to avoid the very sort of argumentative circularity to which it falls victim. How could Queloz, like Anderson, have gone so far in becoming "the argument of his own scorn?"

The Semiosis of Conceptual Genealogy

Peirce's semiotic approach helps explain why this is. Recall that three basic elements of Peircean semiotics are the sign, the interpretant, and the object. In Peirce's lexicon, any combination of these elements constitutes a "symbol." The term "symbol" is chosen by Peirce through no accident; he means it to denote what might be called the highest form of discursive activity. The form is the "highest" because it involves all elements of the semiotic relationship: not merely iconizing, but also indexing, and not merely reproducing, but also *interpreting*. Symbols are not monads; in fact, the opposite—they interact with one another, like different plays put on by the same company of actors in the same theater season, to form different symbolic (conceptual, meaning-bearing) relations out of the same elements cast in different roles.

Queloz's approach consists of three symbolic aspects. The first two symbols correspond to the pragmatic relationships that Queloz wrote his book to address. They

are, in fact, mirror-images of each other: the first is the forward-replay of the origin story that Queloz tells, and the second is the conceptual reverse-engineering, as Queloz calls it, that he uses to reconstruct that story. The third symbol is metapragmatic, and will be dealt with last.

In the first symbol, needs are indexical signs that give rise to practices, as their interpretants, which produce the related concepts as the objects to which both need and practice refer.⁷ In Queloz's account of Craig, for example, the information-need indexes, or gives rise to, information-seeking practices as interpretants of that need, and this relation produces the generic concept "knowledge" as both need and practice become standardized across the relevant linguistic community, such that the relation between them can be referred to in the abstract. Analogously, the need to correct asymmetrical information distribution indexes the cultivation of sincerity and accuracy among possible informants, which gives rise to the concept "truthfulness" as the same correlation becomes standardized. For simplicity, the drawing below will represent both as a relation of "needs," "practices," and "concepts."

⁷ For an account of why it is appropriate to characterize the relation between sign and interpretant as "producing" the object to which both mutually refer, see Kockelman (2005), p. 242 (discussing the object's role as a "correspondence-preserving projection" of the sign-interpretant relation).

First Symbol: The “Forward Replay”

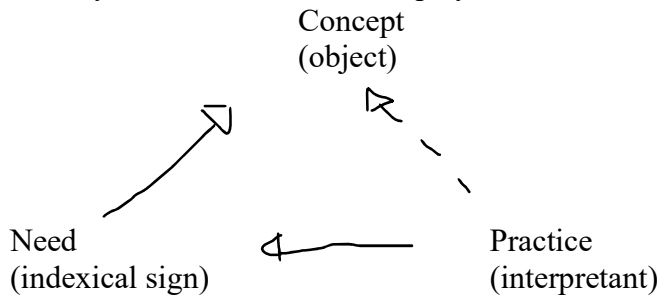


Figure 1: Concepts are produced from the relation of practices and needs⁸

The second symbol describes Queloz’s analytical approach of “reverse engineering.” The methodological wager that animates this approach is that an analyst can reverse the semiotic relation modeled by Symbol 1 to arrive at a perspicuous account of *what* particular needs inform *what* particular practices, so as to give rise to the concepts that the analyst possesses. The second symbol, thus, would reshuffle the same actors in different roles. Thus, the “concept,” ersatz object, is cast in the role of the interpretant of the relation that produced it. “Knowledge,” in Craig (1999), is the interpretant that knits together, or rationalizes, the relation between the generic “good informant” and the generic need for information that the informant satisfies. “Truthfulness,” in Williams (2007), is the rationalization of the relation between Williams’ “sincerity” and “accuracy” virtues and the prototypical need to correct information asymmetries.

⁸ Following a convention in Koekelman (2005), the dotted line in the above diagrams is meant to denote the relation between interpretant and object that is constituted by the interpretant to replicate the relation between the object and the sign.

Second Symbol: The “Reverse-Engineer”

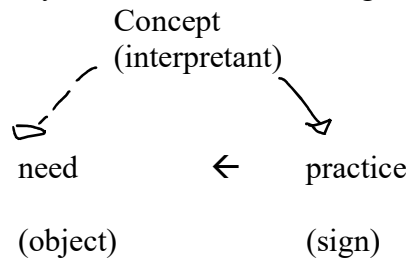


Figure 2: Needs are derived from the relation of practices and associated concepts

Queloz’s gambit is that, by reversing the relation between needs and practices that is said to give rise to concepts, one can work backward by taking concepts as interpretants of practices to find out what needs those practices and concepts subserve. By performing this rewind of the concept-evolutionary tape, the analyst can excavate the needs that are said to animate present concepts, and then decide whether to keep or jettison them.

But there is a problem with this method, and the problem is revealed by attention to the semiotic fine print. One cannot simply reverse the relation between the elements of a symbol without introducing the elements of *another* symbol. Take, for example, the basic symbolic relation of ostension. I form a symbol by turning toward you and pointing at a desk. In this symbol, I am the sign that enables you, as interpretant, to compose (rationalize) a relation between my gesture and the desk that I am pointing at. Suppose, however, we are to attempt to reconstruct this symbolic relationship, by moving from the desk (original object) to you (original interpretant) to me (original sign). There is no way to do this without introducing a further element. In other words, if our friend Mary were to enter the room, Mary could not

know just from staring at the desk that I must have caused you to look at it. Rather, she would have to interpret the relation of the desk to the relation between you and me in light of some further element or item of information: for instance, that I am still standing there with my finger extended as you look at the desk, or the that she heard me say “look at the desk” from the other room, or her knowledge that I have an incorrigible habit of pointing out desks to people, etc.

The position filled by “Mary” in this example is that of a second interpretant in a second Peircean symbol. It shows that, in order to recompose the relation between me (the sign), you (the icon), and the desk (the object), some further information is required in order to interpret that first series of relationships. If Mary takes the relation between you and me as a sign that communicates “point to the desk,” she does so in light of the additional information that my gesture of pointing to the desk means, conventionally, “look at the desk.” A *second* symbol is involved, another interpretant, in the reconstruction of any triune symbolic relation, like the relation between sign (need), interpretant (practice), and object (concept) in genealogical analysis.

The salient question, then, is this: what is the further element that enables the conceptual genealogist to reconfigure the positions of the constituents of the first symbolic third into the second? Queloiz is explicit: it is “need” itself! Need meta-pragmatically rationalizes (interprets) the pragmatic relation between concepts and the original relation between “further” needs and practices that produces those concepts. Thus, instead of the simple “reverse-engineering” operation that Queloiz

describes his analysis as performing, that is, the symbol that is described in Figure 2, the genealogical method involves a metapragmatic symbol, as is necessary to reconfigure the relation of the symbolic elements present in the first and second symbols. That metapragmatic symbol looks like this:

Meta-Pragmatic Symbol Comprising Original Pragmatic Symbol:

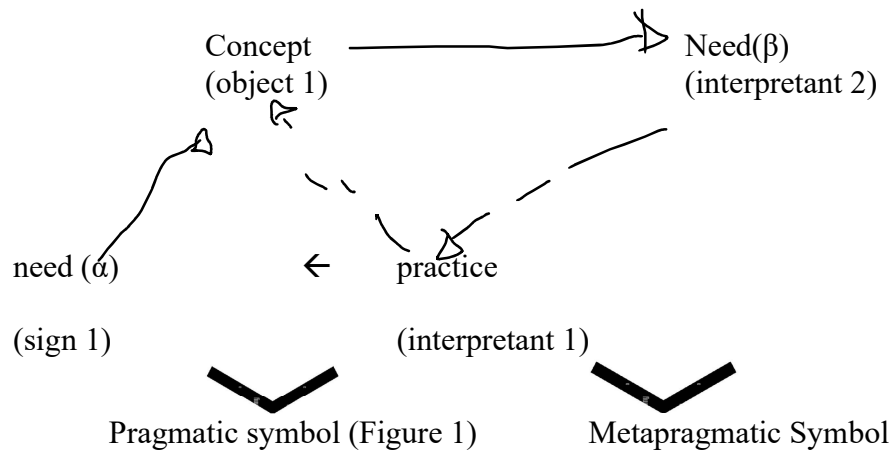


Figure 3: The need-practice relation from Figure 1 is interpreted as the sign of a concept in light of Need(β), the interpretant of the second (metapragmatic) symbol.

The second symbol interprets the relation of need and practice, the sign and interpretant of the first symbol, as the sign of a second, metapragmatic, symbol, which stands for the concept that is the target of genealogical evaluation. This pragmatic/metapragmatic symbol demonstrates the challenge for conceptual genealogy, viz., to ensure that Need(β), in the above diagram, which plays the analytical role for the pragmatic genealogist of interpreting the relation between concepts and their original, pragmatic relation of needs and practices, *is not the same need* as Need(α), the “need” that gave rise to the practice that gave rise to the concept. If Need(α) and Need(β) are in fact the same, then Figure 3 is tautological: the

metapragmatic *explanans* is identical to the pragmatic *explanandum*. In that case, all genealogical analysis proves is that if the analyst's present conception of needs is taken to be transhistorically constant, then the method will reliably produce a model of the generation of present conceptual practices, because the conception of "need" that is subserved by our present concepts is the same as the need that is taken to have original causal force in generating the concept under consideration.

What the model above calls attention to is that the conceptual genealogist must worry, not only about what "need" he identifies as transhistorically constant between the target and control concepts of the model, but *also* about *what present-day "need"* drives his conception of what the transhistorical "need" will be. Is his readiness to identify a particular formulation as a transhistorical "need" really independent of those needs that have given rise to the present-day concept that he is set on interrogating? Or is the formulation that he decides upon itself a function of the same present-day "needs" that give rise to the target concept? If the latter, then, in the manner described by the previous section, the supposedly independent variable that is meant to be afforded by the identification of a transhistorical need is not independent, rather, it is an expression of the conditions that sustain the concept that is the target of the analysis.

Queloz's critique of Williams provides an example. Queloz faults Williams for taking a need for "liberty" as a basic, transhistorical human demand. (2021a, 239-40). If that "need" is taken as the *explanans* (Need(α)) for the production of the concept of liberal democracy (object 1) and its attendant institutions, Queloz argues,

then the argument of the genealogical method would be circular: the development of liberal democracy would be vindicated by taking one of its own ideological presuppositions as a transhistorical constant. In terms of the meta-pragmatic symbol, this would be to make Need(α) an interdependent, rather than independent, variable of Need(β), that is, the terms in which *the analyst* rationalizes the present-day conceptual practice are yoked to those in which the origination of the conceptual practice is explained. After all, as Queloz points out about “liberty,” it “is itself a *liberal* concept,” and “to justify the liberal order in terms of a coeval conception of the agent that only liberals accept is mere self-congratulation.” (239). In other words, Williams erred insofar as he took the present-day rationalization of liberal democracy to be identical to its originating need.

But the same holds for Queloz’s proposed revision of Williams’ argument. To project as a transhistorical determinant of the development of concepts a need “for agents [to be] unobstructed by others in doing what they want,” (240) is simply to substitute one argument of liberalism for another. Indeed, the concept of individuals, first, as “individuals,” and second, as chiefly “agents” who are preoccupied with being freed from social constraint is the strong anthropological assumption that undergirds the very notion of “liberty” that Queloz criticized in Williams. In other words, the admittedly “liberal concept” of a determinative demand for “liberty” is justified, in liberal ideology, by invoking the very anthropological assumption that Queloz thinks provides an independent criterion. To be sure, to cite “liberty” as a form of need that independently justifies liberal democracy would be an ideological

canard, but what, in liberal argumentation, rationalizes the relation between “liberty” and liberal governance? The very naturalistic assumptions about humans as characterized by their interest in the non-interference principle that Queloz offers instead. Thus, Queloz has not escaped the same trap into which he tosses Williams: the “need” in terms of which the contemporary instantiation of a concept is rationalized is linked to the transhistorical need which is made the driver of the evolution of the concept. A methodology that was supposed to serve as vehicle for a de-reifying criticism of present-day concepts becomes a vehicle for the transhistorical projection of the analyst’s normative standpoint.

That this confusion transpires in the genealogical method is, I suggest, a function of what I characterized earlier as the bifurcation of the Peircean sign. It is only because one and the same sign—here, the “concept” that is the object of both the pragmatic and metapragmatic symbols—has *both* iconic *and* indexical properties that its indexical origins can remain obscure, even to those analysts who are concerned with deconstructing ideas in terms of their practical origins. It seems that the problem lies in the disparity between the *immediacy* of the icon as opposed to the *mediacy* of the index. For, as Silverstein (2000) noted about Anderson, the “emblematicity” of the iconic relation of language and nationality kept the latter from noticing that this apparently binary relation is mediated by a second symbol, namely, that composed of the relation between deixis and the journalistic narrative voice. Similarly, the emblematicity of the nexus between liberal democracy and its animating suppositions about “liberty” obscures to Queloz the mediation of the relation between liberal

democracy and liberty by the very anthropological assumptions that he identifies as a supposedly independent variable. For the value of “liberty” as a justification for liberal democracy is its role in interpreting the anthropological vision that “we” are agentive beings that are concerned with freeing ourselves from social interference. Liberalism is justified in terms of liberty, which is justified as an expression of the strong anthropological assumptions Queloz articulates as though they were independent of liberal ideology.

This kind of mistake is possible because the iconic aspect of the sign does not reliably elucidate its indexical origins. The ideological architecture of liberal democracy iconizes “liberty,” but indexes its underlying anthropological presuppositions. The conspicuousness of the icon distracts from the mediacy of the index, making it appear as though a direct, binary relation of democracy-liberty appertains, when in fact, a more complex trichotomy of democracy-liberty-anthropology is required to advance the argument of liberalism. But the mediation of the anthropological argument by the iconicity of the democracy-liberty tie seems to have obscured, to Queloz, its involvement in the argument represented by the full symbol. Similarly, the iconicity of the language-nationalism nexus, said Silverstein, misled Anderson into naturalizing the relationship between them by failing to recognize the involvement of a third semiotic element, the indexation of personal pronoun deixis with the narrative voicing of print culture, that *produces* the iconic nexus that Anderson reifies.

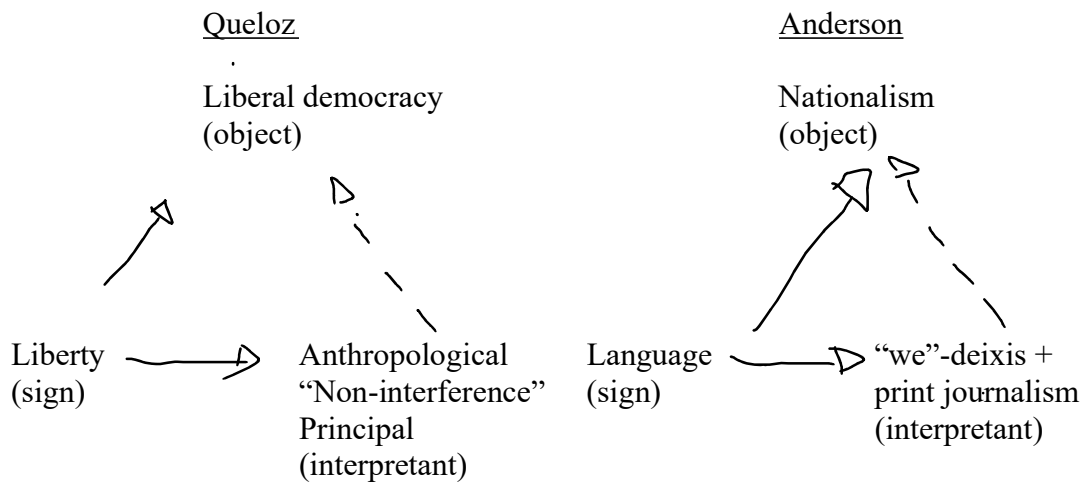


Figure 4: Symbolic Arguments Involved in Queloz and Anderson

The first figure above describes how the “non-interference principle” that is asserted, in liberal ideology, to be an anthropological constant, supplies the interpretant that rationalizes the connection of “liberty” as an organizing principle of social practice with its instantiation in the institutional forms of liberal democracy. The second figure above describes how the combination of “we”-deixis and print journalism supply the interpretant that rationalizes the relation, in Silverstein (2000), between language and nationalism. Notice that in both cases, the analyst has made the error of taking the iconic (sign-object) relation at the left-hand side of the triangle as the sufficient explanation of the object: Anderson, in narrativizing language as an emblem of national identity (2000, 128-29), and Queloz, in taking the value of “liberty” as what he calls a “liberal concept” that stands *by itself* in relation to its object, “liberal democracy” (2021a, 239). Both neglect the role of the interpretant: language affiliation does not come to stand proxy for nationality without the mediation of pronoun deixis and print culture, and the ideal of “liberty” does not

alone justify adherence to the liberal democratic ideology without the mediating argument that human nature demands such a practice. Because the iconic relation tended to obscure the connection to its index in both cases, both theorists could be misled in their conclusions. Specifically, in the case of Queloz, the conclusion that the anthropological assumption he volunteers as an independent explainer of the origination of concepts is not also a “liberal concept,” no less than “liberty” itself, when it is no less enmeshed than “liberty” in the symbolic arguments that supply the ideological justifications for liberal democracy; indeed, it rationalizes the relation between “liberty” and liberal democratic institutions.

Queloz and Anderson both are taken in by the immediacy of the relation of the icon and its object, at the expense of neglecting the interpretant that composes the relation between them. The consequence is that both end up reifying one concept in the name of de-naturalizing another, by neglecting the involvement of a third. That they do so is a vindication of the functional interdependency theory of semantic value that was articulated in the first part of this paper. For it is precisely the non-transparency of the index to the icon that makes it possible for the iconic element to present conceptual content that differs from its inferential correlates. Semantic theories that fail to attend to the distinctiveness of the icon, in comparison to the inferential networks that are indexed by one and the same sign, cannot capture either the imagistic quality of representation’s contribution to the successful performance of linguistic practices, as detailed above, or its misleading consequences in cases where the representation has the effect of obscuring its indexical (inferential) associations.

Both images and inferences, in other words, have a vital role to play in understanding our linguistic and conceptual practices. Only by attending to both can we expect to reap the benefits while avoiding the pitfalls of Peirce's imagistically and inferentially bifurcated sign.

Conclusion

The philosophy of language and linguistic theory have, since at least the middle of the last century, grappled with the problem of how to reconcile two modes of explanation. The purely representational mode began to give way, under pressure from the ordinary language movement, to a contextual mode, which emphasized the use of terms to perform non-denotational functions. Even within the contextual mode, however, representation supplied the foundation for the performative aspects of language use. With Wittgenstein, Sellars, and most recently, Robert Brandom, the philosophy of language discovered that even the representational component of the theory of meaning is indexical of other functions.

The recognition of the indexicality of representation provokes a need to explain representation in terms of contextuality, and contextuality in terms of representation. Sociolinguistics, in its absorption of the semiotic theory of C.S. Peirce, has developed a substantial reserve of concepts that may be used to accomplish this reconciliation of the representational and contextual aspects of language, in both its denotative and its pragmatic and metapragmatic functions.

In the theory of functional interdependency advocated here, the representational and iconic aspects of signs work in tandem with their inferential

features. The functional interdependency of iconic and indexical aspects accounts for the manner in which both the representational and the inferential semantic theories form part of the total picture. Language users convey meaning to one another through an exchange of representational icons that index a network of inferential commitments. While the semantic value of this practice comes not from the representational image, but from the inferences it indexes mediately, the possibility of this practice for the users of the language is owed to the *immediacy* of the representation. Language users rationalize their linguistic practice in terms of the relatively immediate relation of a sign to its object, but that relation imparts semantic value by marking the existence of a network of inferential licenses and foreclosures. The apparent incompatibility of representational and inferential theories of meaning is resolved in their functional interdependency: whereas the inferential theory accounts for the semantic value of linguistic performances, the representational theory accounts for the intelligibility of language practices to the users of the language themselves whenever language is functioning ordinarily. Language practitioners are capable of explaining the intentional content of their statements in terms of inferences; this is one technique for answering the question, “what do you mean?” But, due to the capacity of the sign to *both* iconize an immediate relation *and* index a more complex network of inferences, language users are able to avoid having to provide such complex inferential articulations in the mine-run of cases. The representational icon provides conceptually manageable content for the ordinary process of communication, whereas the inferential index provides the semantic value

of these linguistic performances. The theory, therefore, explains why language-users do not *need* to explain their inferences in order to convey meaning whenever language is “working properly.” By the iconic aspect of language, we are capable of indexing inferences *without* representing them.

The theory is relatively robust in terms of its explanatory power, for it illuminates conditions of both successful and unsuccessful linguistic and conceptual/analytical practices. It shows how the unsuccessful cases, those instances of linguistic “breakdown,” are functions of the same explanators that account for why, in the ordinary case, language runs well. For it is precisely the non-transparency of the index to the icon, that is, of the capacity of the paradigmatic semantic elements of language *not* to “show” everything that they “say,” that makes it possible for the iconic element to present conceptual content that differs from its inferential correlates. “Meaning,” in these cases, is fractured into a spectrum of competing valences: the icon points one way, whereas the indexed inferences point in any possible number of other directions.

Accordingly, the theory addresses two types of linguistic and conceptual failure. First, it proposes a semiotic and linguistic framework in which to make intelligible phenomena such as alienation, fetishism, and epistemic conflict, by describing how these may be understood as permutations of a single semiotic development, namely, the divergence of the iconic from the indexical aspects of signs. Second, the theory elucidates the theoretical challenge that inheres in mounting de-naturalizing or de-reifying critiques, namely, that the obscurity of the indexical

origins of the target of de-reification, in comparison to the transparency of its iconic properties, may lead analysts to reproduce the phenomenon of naturalization within their own analysis. The theory cautions, therefore, that analysts interested in performing de-naturalizing critiques must remain aware of *both* semiotic symbols that are in operation when they perform their analysis. Not only must they consider the interaction of the symbolic elements that are present in their objects of analysis, but they must also remain aware of how the configuration of those elements is effectuated by their own meta-normative position. While the insight is not new that even the most scrupulous analysts inevitably bias the outcome of their analyses in one way or another, what *is* new, in this discussion, is the articulation of how the semiotic framework provides a vocabulary in which to make the effects of meta-normative bias intelligible. More, the symbolic representation of meta-normative bias furnishes an instrument for analyzing such bias more precisely than we could do without it. In that respect, the theory advocated here serves the Peircean and pragmatic aspiration that, as one historian of pragmatism puts it, “despite our inability to inquire into the world’s character without relying on antecedently accepted beliefs and practices, we nonetheless have (a very limited) access to the world as it is independently of human purposes.” (Misak, 12). Whatever capacity for critical self-transcendence we may have, we may realize it only to the extent that we recognize its symbolic mediations.

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