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# John Dewey's Objective Semiotics: Existence, Significance, and Intelligence

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## Introduction

There is an abundance of scholarship on John Dewey. Dewey's writings are vast, so scholars try to find the crux that connects their many themes into a distinctive vision for philosophy and life. Many claim that the democratic way of life is the center of Dewey's philosophical vision.<sup>1</sup> Others claim that Dewey's response to Darwin was the impetus for a philosophical experimentalism that could envision a better life by responding to the needs in an age of modern industry.<sup>2</sup> Some claim that the crux is a dynamic and non-mechanistic naturalism that Dewey develops to critically undo the dualisms of tradition, most especially the distinction between nature and culture.<sup>3</sup> There has even been an effort to interpret each of these themes within Dewey's theory about the conditions for aesthetics in life, the life of art within an experience, and an experience of life as art.<sup>4</sup> Arguably, no strategy is more preferable than another because each is plausible. Each plausibly selects a crux that connects the many themes across an array of writings, since Dewey's philosophy is multimodal by design and shuns reductionism for pluralism. Even amidst plurality, through many modes of activity and existence, each of these themes and all of Dewey's writings have a concern for *meaning* in life and how life is a process of *meaning-making*.<sup>5</sup> And yet, meaning, for Dewey, is irreducible to verbal or written language and is made by more than propositions, but extends beyond the divide of nature and culture to potentially encompass all of life and life's processes. This expansive conception of meaning has more in common with semiotics, especially those of Charles Sanders Peirce, than any philosophy of language. And yet almost no scholar has sought to semiotically interpret Dewey's philosophy *as a whole*. Perhaps, though, Dewey's multimodal and pluralistic vision for philosophy and life also has a semiotic crux that intersects with the others in ways that are fundamentally important.

There are scholars who have dealt with semiotic themes or insights with implications for semiotics in Dewey's writings.<sup>6</sup> None have sought to semiotically interpret Dewey's philosophy as a whole, or, as a consequence, to chronologically survey Dewey's writings to determine if there is a conceivably *Deweyan* approach to semiotics that might contrast with or contribute to the more dominant approaches. There is a reason scholars may not have sought a Deweyan approach to semiotics. Dewey did not have an explicit theory of semiotics.<sup>7</sup> There is no attempt to devise a doctrine of signs in Dewey's writings. Never did Dewey try to classify the fundamental types of sign, analyze the relations of signification by which they differ, or methodically explain how the logic of signification works. This contrasts sharply with Charles Sanders Peirce. Peirce has an explicit theory of semiotics that divides the fundamental types of sign into icons, indices, and symbols by their distinct relations of signification that are at work in the logic of inference by the categories.<sup>8</sup> During his second year at Johns Hopkins, Dewey was actually Peirce's student in a class on logic. This already suggests the possibility of influence. Dewey's writings around 1883 even espouse the central thesis of Peirce's semiotics. All signs, however else their significations may differ, are triadic relations for both Peirce and Dewey. Whether and how far Peirce's logic was an influence on Dewey at Johns Hopkins will remain unclear, though, until scholars offer a more comprehensive and chronological account of the semiotic themes and insights in Dewey's philosophy as a whole. Only afterward could scholars compare and contrast Peirce and Dewey with respect to semiotics, so the best beginning is in the period when Dewey was Peirce's student. By proving that Dewey's philosophy had semiotic themes and insights from the beginning, conceiving of a Deweyan approach to semiotics would become thereby more likely.

Dewey's early writings concern problems in post-Kantian and Hegelian idealism, so the primary problem is the unity of life as a whole.<sup>9</sup> The model was most likely the rational whole of self-conscious life that Hegel found in the objective unity of pure apperception and sought to free from Kant's restriction to formal subjectivity.<sup>10</sup> However much the early writings seem to restrict consciousness to subjectivity or psychology to individuality, Dewey seeks an objective unity of a kind similar to that of Kant and especially Hegel—except the whole is a unity of *meaning* that minds objectify to consciousness by relating sensations in signs and through their unity of signification. All signs can signify an object to a mind, so objects presuppose a consciousness for whom there are meaningful relationships among sensations to signify in consciousness. And yet each mind is a part of a universal

consciousness for whom there is an objectively significant whole that every mind tries to signify by becoming conscious of itself within the whole. Dewey's early insights are accordingly about the mind's semiotic functions in an idealist theory of consciousness and a psychological theory that tries to justify objective idealism with semiotic functions of the mind.<sup>11</sup> A concern for the whole, however, often entails an inattention to details. Dewey's early writings refer to signs *and* symbols, for example, without clearly explaining their difference. Peirce also may have been an influence because both claim that signs are at work in inferences, but Dewey does not clarify the logic of inferences. Dewey instead suggestively describes how signs (or symbols) are at work in inferences by relations of transition, indication, or a reference that points toward an object that can have a significance to any mind within the whole's unity. Even if Dewey never clarifies how these relations differ, their names suggest how the whole is interwoven into a unity among objects that refer, indicate, and transition between one another and the minds that do the referring, indicating, and transitioning with sign-inferences. Dewey will eventually replace objective idealism with naturalism, so the unity of life as a whole becomes the continuum of existence and experience in a general process of inquiry, where meaning and meaning-making are objective facts of life and intelligence. How far Dewey develops the semiotic functions of mind that are first found in the early writings, though, depends upon an account of those semiotic functions in the early writings. Thus, the essay will begin with Dewey's intellectual development and how the semiotic functions of mind appear in an idealist theory of consciousness. Then the essay will end with Dewey's early theory of psychology that tries to justify objective idealism with those semiotic functions.

## I. Dewey's Early Idealism

Dewey offers a retrospective assessment, in "From Absolutism to Experimentalism," of his career in philosophy and his intellectual development. Dewey began at the University of Vermont in 1875. Dewey's reading of Huxley's *Physiology* was the impetus to seek in the world for a "sense of interdependence and interrelated unity" and "a life that would have the same properties as had the human organism" (Dewey, *Pragmatism, Education* 14). German Philosophy and Intuitionism also became influences on Dewey, via James Marsh and Henry Torrey. Dewey would abandon Intuitionism but study more German Philosophy with Torrey after graduating from Vermont in 1879. With Torrey's encouragement, Dewey became an applicant and then a member of

the graduate program for philosophy at Johns Hopkins University in 1882. While at Johns Hopkins, the neo-Hegelianism of George Sylvester Morris and the experimental psychology of G. Stanley Hall became the decisive influences on Dewey. Dewey found in Hall's experimental psychology the means to discover the properties of the human organism, while securing in the neo-Hegelian idealism of Morris a system to connect these properties to life and support life's interrelations within an interdependent world. Hegel's idealism especially became a means to heal the "divisions and separations . . . of self from the world, of soul from body, of nature from God" (Dewey, *Pragmatism, Education* 17). And yet, the interpretation of Hegel's idealism by Morris allowed for a commonsense belief in the objective world's existence, but as a basis for an inquiry into "the *meaning* of existence" (*Pragmatism, Education* 17). Therefore, at the onset of Dewey's career, there is an aversion to dualism and a desire to discover an objective unity among life's interrelations in an interdependent world that *meaningfully* exists for human organisms.

The desire to discover an objective unity of meaning in existence is probably why Dewey began to search for the semiotic functions in the minds of human organisms, although the search for semiotic functions most likely began with an exposure to Charles Sanders Peirce's semiotics. As mentioned above, Peirce was a professor of logic at Johns Hopkins when Dewey was a student.<sup>12</sup> While at Johns Hopkins, Peirce did research on logical algebra and probable inferences, but Peirce's students were exploring other topics at his behest. One student, Allan Marquand, did research on the semiotics of Epicurean logic that came to influence even Peirce. Dewey may have found inspiration from Peirce or Marquand, whether directly in the classroom or indirectly through conversation and the circulation of texts. Peirce would edit and publish *Studies in Logic*, a collection of texts by him and his students, in the same year that Dewey took the class on logic. This is probably the best evidence of what Peirce and his students were discussing in and out of class at Johns Hopkins around 1883. Marquand's essay contrasts Epicurean to Stoic logic with respect to their different conceptions of the sign.<sup>13</sup> While the Stoics held that words were signs of ideas in thought, the Epicureans held that words were signs of things in sensation. The evidence of sensation can reveal the objective world, for the Epicureans, so signs may lead to knowledge. A sign is an *inference* from sensory phenomena that are observable in consciousness to phenomena that are not but can become observable. Meanwhile, for the Stoics, a sign is an antecedent for an inference by a valid deduction that either *suggests* a fact previously known or *indicates* what is unknown in the consequent of a conditional. Such an inference can signify if and only if the

antecedent and consequent are both true. Epicureans reject this condition, but they instead try to justify the validity of induction for sign-inferences among classes of sensory phenomena by a plausible resemblance between their observable qualities. Whether or not Dewey read Marquand's essay, the discussions in and out of Peirce's classroom on the role of signs in the logic of inferences were probably why there was even a search for semiotic functions in the minds of human organisms.

Whether in the semiotics of Stoic or Epicurean logic, or the logic of Peirce's semiotics, a sign can signify an object to a mind by *leading* the mind *from* the sign *to* an object because an object is *inferable* from the sign.<sup>14</sup> The semiotic functions in the minds of human organisms work similarly for Dewey, but within the context of an idealist theory of consciousness. Dewey argues in 1886 that each consciousness is a process of *transition* that is *from* a knowing subject *to* an object known by having an experience of itself in a universal consciousness that guarantees the transition in the experience of every consciousness.<sup>15</sup> The transition, though, remains vague. How every consciousness and all of their experiences can relate within a universal consciousness is also unclear. Dewey, in the same year, argues that all of these relations can have a *unity of meaning* in each experience for every self-consciousness. The reconciliation of the transitional aspect of consciousness with the unity of meaning in experience for every self-consciousness is in Dewey's "Knowledge as Idealization" from 1887 (in *Early Essays*). An idea, for Dewey, is a psychical existence that entails a meaning in psychical experience. Hence, the word "idea" is equivocal and entails "either the 'idea conveyed,' its *significance*, or . . . the particular psychical existence, which occurs now and here in experience, and *stands for* the meaning" (Dewey, *Early Essays* 175). As existing, an idea is a sensation. As signifying, an idea interprets a sensation as standing for something else in experience. Thus, ideas exist in sensation and are interpretations of sensation, which signify a meaning to a mind by standing for something else in experience. Or an idea is a "sign and signification" because for "every psychical experience there is the psychical existence, and there is what the existence stands for to the mind" (Dewey, *Early Essays* 176–77). Hence, the sign, for Dewey, is a triadic relation of signification that parallels Peirce's insistence on triadicity and that even has similarities to the conception of the sign in Stoic and Epicurean logic. By *leading* the mind from an existence *to* the existence's meaning, for Dewey, the sign's signification is a *transition* toward the meaning within an experience.

A signification is the relation of standing-for that arises from a psychical existence and terminates at a psychical experience that has meaning for

the mind, so the mind is the *union* of the relations among the three in the consciousness of significance. What immediately exists and is psychically present, at the threshold of consciousness, are groups of sensuous feelings. All are equally real, but none are available for direct perception. Only signs are directly perceivable. Through signs, the mind can indirectly perceive those feelings in consciousness by interpreting their meaning or significance: “What is perceived is, in short, significance, meaning” (Dewey, *Early Essays* 178). Directly available in perception is the significance of feelings and the interpretation of their meaning. Since an interpretation is available for direct perception, the mind’s consciousness can *transition* from what feelings signify to their significance in the consciousness that perceives. “Perceiving . . . is interpreting,” writes Dewey, “the content of perception is what is signified” (*Early Essays* 178). Or significance is necessary for perception, since perceiving is interpreting what feelings might signify to a mind that has a consciousness of meaning in an experience. If nothing had meaning, or there was no significance, then no experience is possible. If no experience is possible, there is only bare existence. Of course, existence is necessary for experience, but existence must have a meaning and become significant if experience is possible at all. Thus, meaning or significance is an *objective* condition for experience. And, since interpretation *articulates* sensuous feelings in their bare existence and *objectifies* their meaning in the content of perception, then the mind can *objectively* signify and lead consciousness to what those feelings might stand for in experience. All objects of experience have meaning, since signs and their signification are the objective condition and content of experience for the consciousness of any mind whatsoever. “The barest fragment of consciousness that can be hit upon has meaning as well as being,” writes Dewey. “Take away the meaning, and consciousness vanishes” (*Early Essays* 179). No meaning, therefore, no consciousness. Thus, signs are necessary for meaning and thereby for consciousness.

A sign is a triadic relation of signification that arises from an existence and transitions to that existence’s meaning in the experience of a mind with a consciousness of significance. What exists are physical facts, while psychical facts are significant experiences. Physical facts exist, but their existence neither has significance nor entails experience by themselves. Physical facts can become significant and entail experience, “but only as psychical, in relation to intelligence” (Dewey, *Early Essays* 179). A sign is an objective condition for and significance is the objective content in experience, but intelligence is equally necessary for signs and the objects they signify in experience. If there is no intelligence, then no experience is possible because there are neither

objects to signify nor any signs to have significance, so meaning would vanish and thus so would conscious experience. Or physical facts can have and psychical facts always are meaningful *because of* intelligence. Thus, a mind's consciousness in experience is a conscious experience of intelligence, since intelligence is the experience of signs and the consciousness of the objects they signify to a mind. What does intelligence add to physical and psychical facts for either to signify? "It is, of course, a mediate factor," Dewey writes, "due to inference" (*Early Essays* 179). The mediate factor explains *how* a mind can lead consciousness to transition in experience *from* a sign *to* an object, since a sign is *for* and an object signifies *to* intelligence, so intelligence mediates the relation between a sign and an object because an object is *inferable* from a sign in conscious experience. What exists "is a sign only as it signifies and points out a meaning" once intelligence can "interpret the various combinations of sensations as signifying this or that object" (*Early Essays* 179). A sign can signify an object to an intelligence, since sensations can combine to point out a meaning by the meditation of inference and the inferential relations that mediate between sensations for intelligence. Or intelligence can identify, compose, discriminate, associate, and compare sensations to infer something else that is objectively significant in relation to the rest of experience. Thus, signs have a transitional logic because signs are the means for intelligence to move from one object to another in inferences, so inference is the process that explains how the mind can lead consciousness to a transition in the meaning of experience. Hence, Dewey writes: "Processes are of no account to intelligence except as they lead to meaning" (*Early Essays* 179). What leads to meaning are inferences, and all inferences are about and in signs, so no processes are of account to intelligence except sign-inferences.

Dewey converges with the semiotics of Stoic and Epicurean logic, along with the logic of Peirce's semiotics, on the role of signs in inferences and the importance of sign-inferences. Some influence seems probable, however the influence came about. And yet a crucial difference is that Dewey tries to situate the semiotic functions of inference in an idealist theory about how consciousness can have knowledge. Of course, knowledge is the mediation between sensations with respect to their sign-bearing qualities in a process of inference, so the mind is led to infer a knowable object from a sensation that signifies something meaningful in relation to the rest of conscious experience. A sensation has meaning whenever the mediate element is "read into the sensation" by processes of inference, namely "of association and comparison" (Dewey, *Early Essays* 183–84). As existences, no sensations are associable or comparable in themselves, since sensations associate and are



comparable only to an intelligence that can read their meaning. A meaning is readable if intelligence introduces the relations that mediate between sensations by their comparison and association. Any association or comparison is an agreement or contrast, so a set of sensations can relate by contrasting or agreeing in meaning for an intelligence that associates and compares. The point of agreement or contrast is a quality with significance in experience for intelligence and is how minds can agree or disagree. Minds can agree that sensations have a comparable signification if the same object is inferable from their sign-bearing qualities. Minds disagree if different objects are inferable from the sign-bearing qualities in sensations that have a contrasting signification. Disagreement detracts from, but agreement tends toward, the unity of meaning. And yet, the tendency toward a unity of meaning seems to presuppose a unity of consciousness for whom there is a meaning. Each mind is a unity of meaning because every mind only ever has a consciousness of significance, which *unites* a sign with an object to any mind in experience. Any mind can experience the sign-bearing qualities in sensation, moreover, since intelligence itself adds relations to sensations. Thus, signs are the objective condition and content of experience, but intelligence is necessary for signs and thereby the conscious experience of objects that are known by sign-inferences. Thus, even in disagreements, every intelligence is virtually the same and can tend toward a unity of meaning that each already has by virtue of sharing the mind's semiotic functions. "It is theoretically possible to grasp every detail of the universe" because "the unity of the world can only mean that it ultimately possesses oneness of meaning" (Dewey, *Early Essays* 184). The whole world is conceivably *one* object with a *total* meaning in a *unitary* sign to the intelligence of an *all*-pervading mind, since semiotic functions of inference pervade all minds and render possible the conscious experience for each intelligence in a world with an objective unity of meaning. Given that meaning is consequent to the relations that intelligence itself adds, "the processes of knowledge . . . are only progressively fuller interpretations, as each introduces some ideal factor—that is, relation—neglected by the previous," such that "self-consciousness is the idealizing process of all knowledge continued till it becomes conscious of itself" (Dewey, *Early Essays* 185–86). Or in other words, the objective unity of meaning is intelligence coming to a fuller consciousness of itself as the agency that meaningfully relates sensations within a process of knowledge. The process of knowledge embraces every mind within a semiotic self-consciousness because each is a part that has a self-conscious meaning in an intelligent whole, which entails an objective unity of meaning in the conscious experience of each by the sign-inferences that all minds share.

Dewey shares a triadic conception of the sign with Peirce—even though, for Dewey, the sign is more overtly psychological than Peirce is willing to allow. And yet Dewey also agrees with Peirce, as well as with the Epicureans and Stoics, that signs are inferences—except sign-inferences are a means for Dewey to justify an idealist theory about how consciousness can have knowledge of objective meaning in the semiotic unity of a self-conscious and intelligent whole. Thus, there are semiotic themes and insights in Dewey's philosophy from the very beginning and arguably distinct features of a Deweyan approach to semiotics already.<sup>16</sup> The most salient are that (1) signs are triadic relations, (2) those relations are semiotic functions of inference that all minds share, (3) all minds and their sign-inferences are interwoven into an objective unity of meaning, (4) that is the conscious experience of each, and (5) each mind can become conscious of itself as the intelligence that relates signs to their objects in experience. There is reason to suppose that a conceivably Deweyan approach to semiotics would minimally insist upon, in other words, the *objectivity* of signs and their significations to any intelligent mind with the capacity for self-consciousness in experience. A self-conscious mind with intelligence is the medium *for* whom there are signs and *to* whom their objects signify by the mind's *own inferences*. While sensations exist but always expire, the mind can preserve their meaning in signs and, through inferences, recall their meaning into the present from the past and inform the meaning of the future. Consequently, “the mind conserves permanently out of every experience the meaning of that experience and, when it sees fit, reads this conserved meaning into a given sensation, thereby completing the transfer of significance” (Dewey, *Early Essays* 188). The transfer of significance is the mediation of the past and future in the present, since a self-conscious mind can infer an object in the past or future from a sensation that signifies in the present. Any relation in time, in other words, arises from a sign and the ideal relations of a sign-inference to a self-conscious mind for whom time-relations are meaningful. “For meaning is mediate,” Dewey writes, “being through relation; it is ideal, being what is symbolized to intelligence” (*Early Essays* 188). All sensations must stand in relation to intelligence if any are to become meaningful and will become meaningful only in and through a self-conscious mind. All sensations “become experience only as interpreting intelligence projects into them something of its own being” such that “intelligence has a necessary internal component content; and it is only because it has, and because it supplies it to sense-stimuli, that there ever arises a significant experience” (*Early Essays* 189–90). Sensations are meaningful, or stimuli can become significant experience, in proportion to how far a self-conscious mind's intelligence can *objectify itself*. By objectifying itself, sensations become

signs of *intelligence* and stimuli are then objects of a self-conscious mind's *own significant experience*. Consequently, "experience grows, or gets more meaning, just in the degree in which intelligence reads more ideal content into it," which entails that a self-conscious mind "has a more varied, complex, better organized system of ideas or meanings to bring to bear upon its sensations, and thus, to transfer to these its own content of significance" (*Early Essays* 191–92). Or, in other words, sensation stimulates intelligence to objectify itself, but a self-conscious mind can appropriate and remake sensations into objects for an intelligence's significant experience. But, in doing so, the self-conscious mind reflects upon itself to better appreciate and remake sensations into signs and promote a harmony of meaning and a greater unity among their objects. To the degree that there is more harmony of meaning, a larger variety and complexity of relations, and a greater unity within experience, then there is a better development of a self-conscious mind's own inferences, but objectified in and through signs by intelligence.

## II. Dewey's Early *Psychology*

There is reason to suppose that a conceivably Deweyan approach to semiotics would entail an objective semiotics since the early writings try to explain the objectivity of meaning by the very nature of an intelligent mind with a capacity for self-consciousness. Or how every self-conscious mind seeks to objectify their intelligence in a system of signs and sign-inferences to maintain and increase the unity of meaning found in conscious experience. Traces of an objective approach to semiotics are also found in Dewey's *Psychology*, from 1887 to 1891, since Dewey tries to justify a version of objective idealism with semiotic functions of the mind. *Psychology* commences with an assessment of methods in psychology. The methods of introspection and experimentation are necessary and complementary, but both require the objective method to correct and extend their results. The objective method does so by referring their results to psychological laws found in "the objective manifestations of mind" (Dewey, *Psychology* 15). Or mind is more than a subject's psychophysiology, so the psychic states to introspect and the physiological conditions to experiment upon would never exhaust how the mind manifests itself. The mind also manifests in an activity with results, and both constitute an objectivity that embraces more than one subject. What embraces a multiplicity of subjects in their individuality and psychophysiology are the *signs* that all minds share due to their intelligence and the *signifying* activity that seeks to *objectify* intelligence and entails results that have a *social* significance for

everyone. "These results are objective," therefore, "the most fixed, certain, and universal *signs* to us of the way in which mind works" (Dewey, *Psychology* 15). The mind's universal signs work themselves out in the objective results that constitute the realm of intelligence, a realm where the mind's own activity manifests and can confront itself in results with social significance, namely language, art, science, social and political institutions, religion—the whole life of the self. The signs that constitute the realm of intelligence are universal, since "all of them [are] products of the mind or self, working itself out according to its own laws, and that, therefore, in studying them we are only studying the fundamental nature of the conscious self" (Dewey, *Psychology* 16). Thus, universal signs arise from the very nature of an intelligent mind with a capacity for self-consciousness and have an objectivity among minds in their social interactions and results, so every mind can come to a consciousness of itself and the lawful activity of intelligence by studying those universal signs. Dewey's *Psychology* continues to affirm the likelihood that a Deweyan approach to semiotics would entail an objective semiotics, but with the additional dimension that signs and their significations have an explicit objectivity in the mind's lawful activities of intelligence and the intelligent results with social significance.

A conceivably Deweyan approach to semiotics would entail, at least in Dewey's early writings, an objective semiotics about the life of a self-conscious mind and the mind's universal signs that lawfully constitute the objective realm of social intelligence. If so, then there is no surprise when Dewey moves on to study how a self-conscious mind can have a knowledge about objects by signs. A study of the self-conscious mind is necessary since no object is significant unless an intelligent mind with a capacity for self-consciousness can interpret those facts to itself. Any interpretation begins in sensation, where the mind's semiotic functions reappear, since "sensation indicates existence, and this indication is particular; it *means* or *signifies* quality, and this meaning is *general*" (Dewey, *Psychology* 44). As indicative, sensation *points out* a particular existence in the present. As significant, sensation *signifies* a quality with a general meaning. Analysis abstracts a quality from a particular existence in the present. Synthesis combines indication and signification by referring the quality back to a general meaning in a present and particular existence, so both are necessary for knowledge. "The two factors which in union constitute the object of knowledge are therefore the particular and the general, the 'this' and the 'quality'" (Dewey, *Psychology* 45). The indication of *this* existence and the signification of a general meaning *in* that existence's quality entails another object for the mind to know. The result is a differentiation

among sensations that indicate and signify. Originally, though, sensation is a homogeneous continuum. The continuum has a maximum of feeling and emotional quality, but sensations that indicate and signify specific objects have a minimum of feeling and emotional quality by maximizing their semiotic function and intellectual value. What mediates the transition is the *body*, since the sensory organs already begin to discriminate and differentiate between sensations within the homogenous continuum.

The lower sensory organs receive the stimuli of sensation *in toto*, but the higher organs separate the homogenous continuum of sensation into elements. A separation into elements is possible since different qualities in sensation correspond to different parts in the body. These differences are how the mind can refer the content of sensation to a specific object in any act of perception. And yet a specific object presupposes a place or position to which the mind can refer the content of perception. Prior to perception, the different parts of the body are responsible for localizing stimuli by the sensory organs. Each sensory organ is responsive to a correspondingly different quality with a local place or position to which the mind can refer the content of sensation. "This difference is called the *local sign*," Dewey concludes, because "the mind uses a sign of the part [of the body] affected, and thus, *learns* to localize impressions" (Dewey, *Psychology* 52). The local signs in sensation are "the meeting-place, the point of coincidence of self and nature," where "nature touches the soul in such a way that it becomes itself psychical, and that the soul touches nature so as to become itself natural" (*Psychology* 43). The meeting-places between soul and nature, mind and matter, are the senses of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight. Since each sense has its own local signs, then the body already has semiotic functions to interpret the feelings that arise in sensation. The interpretation of feelings in sensation by the body's semiotic functions, moreover, brings us into a connection with the world rather than severing our relation to whatever may exist outside of ourselves. And yet the body alone is insufficient to explain how the mind can refer the content of sensation to a specific object with a local place or distinct position in any act of perception. Perceiving is a kind of knowing, but the "world which is known is not a disorderly, passing assemblage of these feelings [in sensation]" (*Psychology* 75). The world known and the knower, in other words, are more complex than, but continuous with, local signs that arise from the body and the body's semiotic functions.

The world known is more complex than, but continuous with, the local signs that arise from the body's own semiotic functions, since the knower adds relations to those local signs and combines feelings that originate in

the body into objects of knowledge for the mind. To combine feelings, the mind must become conscious of the sensation and distinguish between the sensation's occurrence and the quality in that sensation. As an occurrence, sensation is a momentary feeling that is felt by a mind. As a quality, a sensation is capable of relation and connection with other qualities. Once there is relation and connection, qualities become objects in space and time that are now knowable by any normal mind. Normally, objects present themselves to minds by their contiguous relations in space and unbroken connections in time. No mind that behaves normally "can experience any breach in continuity," so "[w]e pass naturally, by some connecting link, from one [object] to another" (Dewey, *Psychology* 76). The result is that the relations and connections among objects become a world with a knowable order, while science seeks to know the world's order by inquiring into those relations and discovering how relations can constitute a harmonious whole. Science reveals that these relations are ideal, since the transformation of sensations into a world of objects depends upon the self that knows by adding relations and idealizing the content of sensations. The self that knows and idealizes is retentive and apperceptive. The self, through apperception, can objectify the mind's relations onto sensations and, through retention, the mind can react to the apperceived relations that the self objectifies. These relations are significant and meaningful, since they are *objectifications* of the mind's *own intelligence*. "Whatever appeals to the investigations of intelligence, offers it material upon which to exert its activities, whatever responds to inquiry by producing some fruit for intelligence, we call *significant*, or possessing *meaning*" (*Psychology* 78). Whatever is orderly and has connection has meaning, because relations are significant, and significance is a *sign of intelligence's own order* connecting the sensations that have a local place or a distinct position by the body's semiotic functions.

Whatever has significance is in a relation for a mind with intelligence, so intelligence has to relate one thing to something else for the mind to find any meaningful order in the world. "To be significant is to be a sign" or, in other words, "to point to something beyond its own existence to which it is related," such that "relationship is the essence of meaning" (Dewey, *Psychology* 79). As an indication, a sensation is the immediate contact with an existence felt, so feeling is discrete and momentary but without meaning. Whereas a sign must connect the content of sensation to something else and thus relate the quality in a feeling with another, so a sign is a means for combining feelings and rendering sensations continuous with one another by their relation and connection. This relation and connection form the *significance* or *meaning* of

sensations and feelings, which is more than their mere existence. The addition of something more is intelligence. Thus, intelligence is the medium, signs are the means, and meaning is the result of the connecting links and continuous relations between sensations by the objects known in normal experience. Given that meaning is consequent to signs, while signs are products of intelligence, then the mind can apperceive signs and their meanings by reflecting upon itself and the objects of intelligence's own significant experience. Dewey writes: "Apperception is that activity of mind in which the *significance* of mental *events* is brought out, through becoming explicitly conscious of the relations involved" (*Psychology* 81). The mind can apperceive relations because relations are signs, and signs are the apperceiving mind's own relating activity among objects in a world of intelligent order. An intelligent order arises since the mind adjusts itself to sensation in the present by interpreting the present in relation to the past or toward the future, so a present sensation can acquire an ideal content by becoming a sign of an object in the past or future, but both are meaningful only to a mind for whom past and future are apperceivable relations with a significance in the present. *All* the relating activities of an apperceiving mind are instances in a process of idealization, since every object is knowable only in time, while idealization is a process of adjustment between the mind and sensations by means of signs. "Adjustment is the process by which the self so connects itself with the presented datum that this becomes a sign, or symbolic—points to something beyond its own new existence, and hence, has meaning" (Dewey, *Psychology* 125–26). Thus, the world of time is objectively significant, since time is an objective order of intelligence, so intelligence must adjust to sensation by objectifying a mind's *own* past and *own* future for a sensation in the present to signify by pointing beyond itself toward any object in the past or future.

The body's own semiotic functions are not themselves objective, but they prepare for objects by localizing feelings that signal a place or position near a sensory organ. Once intelligence adds relations onto those sensations, especially relations of time, then an objective order appears along with signs that point toward the mind's own past and own future. For *every* normal mind must signify objects in time, since objects are only knowable in time, but what is known is simply the temporal order that intelligence itself objectifies. "All knowledge is thus, in a certain sense, self-knowledge" since "[k]nowing is . . . the process by which self renders sensations significant by reading itself into them" (Dewey, *Psychology* 126). By coming to know objects *in time*, the mind also comes to know the *signs* that objects in time *presuppose*. Thus the mind must come to *apperceive itself* as the *source of* signs, their objects, and

the objectively significant order of time. Hence, the process of knowledge is a progression of self-development in and through signs, so self-development is a progression with objective significance for intelligence. This process has a psychological order since the progression moves from “the external and least representative state, and advances to the *internal* and most *symbolic*” or from sensations that “stand for comparatively little” to those that mostly “stand for or represent” (*Psychology* 137). Thus, the progression is “a process of increasing *idealization* from the less to the more significant” and, since “significance consists in relations,” then “the growth of knowledge is measured by the *extent of the relations concerned*” (*Psychology* 137–38). Each stage is responsible for a more expansive set of meaningful relations and thus a broader range of signs with an increasing objectification of a self-conscious mind’s intelligence. The stages in this process are each an aspect of the mind’s lawful activity of intelligence and possess the universal signs that every mind must have if there is any objective realm of intelligence with any social significance at all. And the mind can come to know such an objectively significant order because those signs belong to intelligence itself, so the mind can apperceive them at each and every stage in the process. The stages in this objectively significant process are perception, memory, imagination, thinking, and intuition or self-consciousness. The process begins with the local signs in the body that are objectified in perception and become universal signs in memory, imagination, and thinking. The process continues until the mind has symbols, which differ from signs only in signifying objects that have comparatively little content from sensation. Then, at the final stage of intuition, the mind can symbolize the whole process of intelligence to itself. Thus, intuition is the stage where the mind becomes conscious of the semiotic functions that constitute intelligence and the objective realm of social intelligence. The object of this intuition, for Dewey, is equivalent to the symbol of God.

No stage is a separate faculty, for Dewey, but each is an active phase in the continuous process of transforming sensations into signs and harmonizing their objects “for the unified maximum of meaning” (Dewey, *Psychology* 138). The stage of perception is the most external but least significant, since any act of perception is of a present and particular existence or a sensation that stands for comparatively little. Whatever stands for comparatively little belongs to the sense of touch, smell, taste, hearing, and sight. Prior to perception, the sense organs are responsible for local signs in the body, although, within perception, the mind unifies localizing stimuli into a particular and definite object. “Perception may be defined,” therefore, “as the act in which the *presented* sensuous data are made symbols or signs of all other sensations”



(*Psychology* 141). Localizing stimuli are presented to the mind by the sensory organs in the body, so there are many touchings, smells, tastes, sounds, and so on. Then each becomes a sign of every other one, and all become the particular and definite object that is sensuously tactile, olfactory, acoustic, and so on. A mind can, in other words, perceive an object once intelligence unites the local stimuli from the body into a sign with an identity of meaning that differs from other objects. But since an identity of meaning is an identity for intelligence because only intelligence has an interest in how objects are similar or different with respect to meaning, then this identity and unification of meaning is a sign of intelligence. Thus, an “object is, in short, the objectified interpreting activity of intelligence” (*Psychology* 142). However, since local stimuli remain distinct and differ by the parts of the body they affect, the bodily parts “prevent their fusion, and intelligence then interprets these local signs, through their association with muscular sensations, into spatial order” (*Psychology* 142). By their association with the muscular sensations, these local stimuli are known to coexist and thus become signs of a simultaneous existence in a particular and definite object of perception that is separate from others within a spatial order. Thus, perception is the active process of signifying the simultaneity of spatially ordered sensations in particular and definite objects. Even space, then, is a sign of intelligence, an objectification of a mind’s intelligence onto sensations that arise from the body’s own semiotic functions, and thus an objectively significant order. Perception, though, is only an active phase in a continuing process and a self-developing progression with objective significance.

Subsequent to but continuous with perception is memory. Memory is an active process of construction since the objects of memory do not exist, but can subsist by the construction of a mental image by intelligence. A mental image is an ideal type of content of the mind that objectifies the constructive activity of intelligence. The intelligent construction of an image has an origin in perception since past experiences once perceivable become mental images of what was perceivable. Perception involves past experiences, but these are submerged in the content of the object that is presently perceived. Memory must separate the past experiences submerged in a present perception so that the content of past perception can stand forth as a mental image that “symbolizes certain relations of time [in] the course of experience” (Dewey, *Psychology* 157). A mental image can stand out and symbolize because past associations in experience are submerged in perception that memory can separate, recollect, and recognize. Or a past perception may occur before or after another in experience, so memory can recollect a succession of images

and recognize relations of time by separating each from the other and symbolizing what has come before and might occur after within a course of experience. Thus, remembrance is the recognition of time by the relating activity of intelligence, since what comes before and might occur after is always in relation to an intelligence for which images symbolize past associations between perceptions. Just as coexisting and simultaneous sensations can become signs of space, so, too, associable and successive perceptions “are fitted to serve as signs of temporal relations” (*Psychology* 157). Thus, a succession of images from a prior association between perceptions can become signs of objects in time for any intelligence that can recollect temporal relations in memory. Thus, remembrance is the mind’s objectification of a temporally ordered succession among signs in a course of experience, so the memory of time is an objectively significant process for intelligence.

Subsequent to but continuous with memory is imagination because both imagination and memory have images in common. The difference is the memory’s images are signs of sensible things and perceptible events in past experience, while imagination frees those images from any perceptual or sensible residue and thus from any concrete experience. By freeing images from the sensible and perceptual determinations of space and time, the imagination can construct an image that is completely ideal and signifies a novel but unexperienced object for the mind’s creativity. The highest form of the imagination is, therefore, creative. The creative imagination is a process of “penetration into the hidden meaning of things,” invisible to the other phases of knowledge, by having a “direct perception of meaning,—of ideal worth in sensuous forms; or the discovery of the sensuous forms which are most significant” (Dewey, *Psychology* 171). The creative imagination can reveal the hidden meaning of things by directly perceiving the value of each sensuous form in relation to an image of the whole and assessing their universal significance. The creative imagination is, in other words, the idealizing activity of knowledge itself but freed from the particularities of sensation and perception. Freed from any and all particularities, the creative imagination can focus purely on the *meaning* of things or their function as *signs* in relation to the whole’s *significance*. Consequently, creative imagination is also a *universalizing* activity of intelligence because “the creative function of imagination everywhere is to seize upon the permanent meaning of facts,” embodying them in signs of sensible objects in order to “enkindle feeling and awaken a like organ of penetration in whoever may come upon the embodiment” (Dewey, *Psychology* 173). What enkindles feeling, or stimulates a search for meaning, is art and artistic embodiments, which result from both the creative imagination’s

idealizing and universalizing activity and humanity's common interests. The basis for this activity and those interests is the "fundamental unity between man and man and between man and nature" such that "all products of the creative imagination are unconscious testimonies to the unity of spirit that binds mind to man and man to nature in one organic whole" (Dewey, *Psychology* 174). Given that this whole is an organic whole of *significance*, then the creative imagination is a spontaneous but unconscious objectification of signs in their organic unity and thus is an imaginative whole with objective significance for intelligence. This imaginative whole with objective significance, moreover, finds a conscious embodiment in art and artistic objects and results with social significance for humanity.

Subsequent to but continuous with imagination is thinking because both thinking and imagination are ideal activities about universal objects and their significance. Thinking is always a knowledge of universal elements by the qualities common to things in a class. A class quality is what is most meaningful about a thing and is how thinking can have a knowledge about things, since "[m]eaning is always universal" (Dewey, *Psychology* 177). Meaning is the ideal element common to things, so that each thing is knowable by the quality that everything in a class meaningfully shares. Everything in a class meaningfully shares a quality that explains the membership and the relations among the members. The relation is a function for thinking to unite things in a class and a means for thinking to signify each thing as a member of a class with the relevant qualities. Alternatively, qualities are the *lawful* relations of meaning that define the function of class membership. When an image serves this function, then the image becomes a concept for thinking. "A concept is an image having the function of symbolizing some law or principle in accordance with which a thing or a number of things may be constructed," writes Dewey, "on the basis of this single principle is a class" (*Psychology* 179). All concepts are images with symbolic functions, while thinking is a process of symbolizing. By symbolizing, a concept can stand for a mental action that moves from things in their particularity to a class of things on the basis of their meaning by a law or principle that prescribes the relations between them. What prescribes the relations among things in a class, however, is the mind of an intelligent self, because intelligence is responsible for adding relations to things in experience. The law or principle for the production of classes is, thus, the lawful activity of the mind, so mental action is nothing but the movement of intelligence in signifying or symbolizing itself in the production of classes as objects of knowledge. Or the mind objectifies the order of intelligence by signifying things and comes to know itself by symbolizing the classes that the mind itself constructs.

This construction also requires language since only through language can concepts express the meaning of things and refer back to their particularity. Dewey says: "Language is objective testimony to the twofold activity of mind, in its *meaning*, in its *symbolism*, its ideal quality, it is universal; in its *existence*, its real quality, it is particular" (*Psychology* 186). The role of language is to connect the indicative and significant aspects of the mind's lawful activity, such that thinking "stands for, represents, symbolizes, all objects possessing . . . significance" (*Psychology* 185). Then an object becomes a sign *of judgment*, since judgment is a connection of indication and signification by a mind that relates both within a unity of meaning. The unity of meaning between indication and signification is necessary for every phase in the process of knowledge, so judgment is necessary to objectify the mind's intelligence at each phase, and thus thinking is objectively significant in the process of knowledge and throughout the progress of self-development.

Even in Dewey's earliest essays, the connections in judgment are due to a factor that mediates between elements and thus is responsible for the inferences that form a process of reasoning. The connections in judgment entail the mediation between indication and signification, which allows the mind to move *from* what is sensuously present *to* something else in experience. This is how the mind *infers* an object from an indicating sensation and thus uses that sensation to *signify* an object. Then the object is signified in a judgment for intelligence. Thus the relations of importance are about signs, the signs that occur in judgments, the judgments that occur in sign-inferences, and the sign-inferences that form the process of reasoning for an intelligent mind. The process of reasoning is simply the act of an intelligent mind that recognizes all of these relations, which have been present at each phase of knowledge and every stage in the progression of self-development. The self develops and knowledge proceeds only insofar as sign-inferences mediate between signs and the objects they signify, which is how signs and their significations relate in judgments, and how judgments can connect perceptions into a greater unity of meaning. A greater unity of meaning entails more harmony among signs and their objects in proportion to how far the mind can objectify the order of intelligence by adding more relations to perceptions with the mind's own sign-inferences. By reasoning with sign-inferences, the mind must have the capacity to become conscious of itself as the intelligence for whom there are signs that signify objects and their relations in perception at each phase of the knowledge process. Otherwise, there is no meaningful unity or intelligent order in experience, so neither experience nor consciousness would remain a possibility. Thus, there is a union between perception and reasoning at every phase of the knowledge

process via semiotic functions in the body and mind. The semiotic functions that originate in bodily perceptions and are continuous with the process of reasoning, in other words, afford the mind an opportunity to have an *intuition* or *self-consciousness* about itself in relation to the whole of knowledge. This is because the whole of knowledge is a process of self-knowledge by semiotic functions that all minds share by virtue of their intelligence, so even the intuitive act of self-consciousness is a semiotic function. Consequently, knowledge of “ultimate reality . . . can only symbolize itself” because in “intuition we grasp what is self-related” (Dewey, *Psychology* 206). The intuitive act of self-consciousness is a symbol for the world within the process of self-knowledge. First, intuition must symbolize the unity of the world. Second, intuition must symbolize the unity of knowledge as a whole. Third, intuition can finally symbolize God or “the unity of the self and the world,” which is “perfectly realized intelligence” (*Psychology* 212). The perfect realization of intelligence is the self-conscious mind’s own objectively significant order in the world as a whole and the whole is the symbol of God known in intuition. At each phase in Dewey’s *Psychology*, there are semiotic functions that entail an objective order of signs and the unity of their significations that all self-conscious minds share by virtue of their intelligence. Thus, there is reason to suppose that a conceivably Deweyan approach to semiotics would entail an objective semiotics. Now the question is whether and how far this objective approach to semiotics might change, once Dewey replaces objective idealism with naturalism and what this naturalism could entail for an objective semiotics.

## NOTES

1. For example, see Pappas.
2. For example, see Eldridge.
3. For example, see Johnson.
4. For example, see Alexander.
5. For example, see Garrison.
6. Most scholars focus on philosophical themes in Dewey’s writings that are relevant to semiotics (Kruse; Affi; Innis, “Peirce and Dewey”; Eicher-Catt), others on semiotizable themes in Dewey’s philosophy (Gaskill; Stables; Elliot; Mackey; Innis, “Between Philosophy”), or otherwise articulate semiotic insights found in Dewey’s philosophy from writings at a certain period of time (Stango). No scholar, though, has done a chronological survey of the semiotic insights in Dewey’s writings, and none have begun with Dewey’s early philosophy.
7. Deely (*Four Ages* 508–09) claims: “By comparison with Peirce, not only Dewey but all the other names in American philosophy, with the possible exception of Josiah Royce . . . and, in more limited respects, William James . . . are strictly second-rate.” The other American philosophers are second-tier due to their ignorance of medieval semiotics, for

Deely, whereas Peirce's genius lay in rediscovering semiotics in the Latins. Ironically, if the essay's analysis is correct, Dewey's early writings are remarkably similar to Deely's own emphasis on the concept of objective reality in semiotics (see, for example, Deely, *Purely Objective*). Also, scholars are beginning to uncover the semiotic insights in the other American philosophers, such as William James (see Pfeifer) and especially Josiah Royce (see Dillabough, "Josiah Royce's Absolute Semiotics"), which complement Peirce's own. Perhaps, in other words, Deely's judgment was premature, and there is a historical basis for semiotic ideas in American philosophy other than the individual genius of Peirce.

8. Dillabough, "On the Genealogy."

9. For an examination of Dewey's relationship to Hegel, see Good.

10. For a sense of what model Dewey was probably trying to salvage, see Hegel's remarks on Kant's pure apperception in *Science of Logic* 514–25.

11. The term "semiosic" intends to convey processes of sign-activity or sign-interpretation rather than an explicit theory about sign-activity and interpretation or a "semiotics." Dewey's early writings evidence a concern about the semiosic functions of the mind but do not have a semiotics. Also see Deely, *Semiotic Animal* 99.

12. The influence of Peirce's logic upon Dewey is unclear. Dewey's early interest was in philosophical logic, so there was some dissatisfaction with Peirce's class. When the class was nearly over, Dewey wrote a letter to W. T. Harris complaining about Peirce's mathematical approach to logic and restriction of logic to scientific methodology. Even if there was some dissatisfaction, this does not rule out the possibility of influence from other aspects of Peirce's logic or from Peirce's other students in logic. Dewey would later express an appreciation for Peirce's work in logic and even make Peirce's logic the basis of his own, so perhaps there was an unacknowledged influence all along, however subtle. For a brief discussion on Dewey's studies with Peirce at Johns Hopkins, see Dykhuizen 30–31. For an overview of Dewey's graduate years, see Dykhuizen 28–43.

13. "The Logic of the Epicureans" by Marquand (in Peirce, *Studies in Logic* 1–11).

14. Except, for Peirce, the inference is a consequence of the sign-relation in illation; so, signs need not necessarily entail an *interpreter* (or a human organism) but only an *interpretant* (or any semiosic agent). See Dillabough, "On the Genealogy."

15. See especially Dewey, *Early Essays* 123–32, 141–52.

16. These features are worthy to compare with Peirce's writings from the series about cognition, see especially Peirce, *Essential Peirce* 11–55.

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