Qualitative Immediacy and the Communicative Act

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ABSTRACT

"Qualitative immediacy" (also termed "quality" in its philosophical sense and "esthetic quality") is of fundamental importance within the pragmatic conception of meaning as interpretive act, and yet it has been virtually ignored by social scientists. The concept is traced through its foundations in Peirce's philosophy, its development in Dewey's theory of esthetic experience, and its relation to the general pragmatic conception of the self. The importance of the "I" in Mead's view of the self is seen as similar to Firstness in Peirce and esthetic experience in Dewey. Those turning to qualitative approaches ought to consider qualitative immediacy as a genuine addition to our understanding of human communication.

One of the distinguishing features of American social thought is the emphasis placed on immediacy in experience. From Peirce's discussions of "Firstness"—or roughly the phenomenological present—and James' discussions of "the stream of consciousness" through contemporary symbolic interactionist discussions of the situation, there is a shared attempt to get at the directness and flow of events, to grasp the mercurial essence that is the vital source of meaning. Critics have charged that these attempts in fact miss the importance of meaning as a system of conventional rules, that in concentrating on the uniqueness of a situation the inquiry becomes bogged down in a morass of subjectivity that ignores the influence of objective norms and social structures (Lewis, 1976; Gonos, 1977). Although these criticisms may be accu-

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rate for some recent trends within symbolic interactionism, they ignore or distort the fundamental importance of qualitative immediacy within the pragmatic conception of meaning as interpretive act. Thus the "qualitative tradition" I will examine is literally a tradition concerned with "quality" in its philosophical sense. I will explore what has been termed "qualitative immediacy" or "esthetic quality" in the context of the pragmatic tradition by tracing its importance to the theories of meaning and communication of C.S. Peirce, John Dewey, and G.H. Mead.

The origins of the philosophy of pragmatism are not to be found, as it is often thought, in the work of William James, but rather in that of his lifelong colleague, Charles Sanders Peirce. It can be argued that the foundations for pragmatism can be discovered in an early series of articles Peirce wrote in the late 1860s criticizing the Cartesian quest for indubitable foundations of thought (Peirce, 5:213-357).[1] When Descartes borrowed the Augustinian notion "I think, therefore I am," as the clear and distinct idea that could provide a foundation for thought, he helped launch a view that saw direct immediate knowledge as the goal of inquiry. Through introspection one could peel away the vaguenesses and uncertainties of the world and attain the realm beyond doubt—the cogito or subjective self-consciousness. "Of thine eye I am Eyebeam," said Emerson's Sphinx in his poem, *The Sphinx*, and similarly Peirce would probably argue that the Cartesian quest to attain the pure "I" through introspection (as if the "eye" could see itself), can only end in blindness, as it did for Oedipus. The point of Peirce's early articles is that all thought or knowledge, including self-knowledge, is inferential and general, that is, it is of the nature of a sign, and it takes time to occur. Thus even in a late article, Peirce (1905) answers his own question—"What is the bearing of the Present instant upon conduct"—by replying:

> Introspection is wholly a matter of inference. One is immediately conscious of his Feelings, no doubt; but not that they are feelings of an *ego*. The *self* is only inferred. There is no time in the Present for any inference at all, least of all for inference concerning that very instant (Peirce, 5:462).

Here Peirce is arguing against immediate knowledge through "introspection" or "intuition," terms which usually suggest unmediated direct inner perception. Yet he does ac-

knowledge the pervasive influence of the present when he says, "One is immediately conscious of his Feelings." Peirce distinguishes feeling from emotion, because for him emotion is a kind of inference, interpretation, or "knowledge"—"Thirdness" as I explain later. By "feeling" Peirce means quality or "Firstness," "...an instance of that sort of element of consciousness which is all that it is positively, in itself, regardless of anything else" (Peirce, 1:306).[2] In his view, qualitative immediacy is an essential element of an experience, yet the *meaning* of any experience does not consist in its immediacy *per se*, but in its relation to past experiences through continual interpretation dependent on the future. Peirce obviously defines the present much more strictly than Mead (1932), who includes duration—a little bit of the past and future—as an element of the present. Perhaps a better term for Mead's present would be "the emergent present."

Although quality is logically (though not necessarily temporally) prior to actuality, we never encounter "pure" examples of it *apart from* its embodiment. Instead we can think about or infer the quality by "bracketing off," as phenomenologists say, the questions of its existence and relation to other things. But qualitative immediacy is not primarily a knowledge affair, it is something we experience directly in the present as feeling. Peirce gives some examples which illustrate the *sui generis* nature of qualitative immediacy:

> The poetic mood approaches the state in which the present appears as it is present....The present is just what it is regardless of the absent, regardless of past and future....Imagine, if you please, a consciousness in which there is no comparison, no relation, no recognized multiplicity (since parts would be other than the whole), no change, no imagination of any modification of what is positively there, no reflexion—nothing but a simple positive character. Such a consciousness might be just an odour, say a smell of attar; or it might be the hearing of a piercing eternal whistle. In short, any simple and positive quality of feeling would be something which our description fits that it is such as it is quite regardless of anything else. The quality of feeling is the true psychical representative of the first category of the immediate as it is in its immediacy, of the present in its direct positive presentness (Peirce 5:44).

Because Peirce's philosophy is fundamentally in opposition to the idea of unmediated knowledge of the present, the last thing he would want to say is that we "know" qualities of immediacy. Instead, qualitative immediacy is something that

can be *felt*, as a feeling, but not *known* in the present (Peirce, 1:310). Dewey also, as will be discussed later, emphasized that qualities are felt, or in his words, "had," rather than known.

The importance of qualitative immediacy in Peirce's view is that it contains possibilities for experience. Its mode of being is not absolutely determined by its existential embodiment ("upon the fact that some material thing possesses it"), nor by a knowing mind. Peirce argues that potentality is itself genuine, and that a common mistake of nominalists lies in, "...holding that the potential, or possible, is nothing but what the actual makes it to be" (Peirce, 1:422). Thus in trying to delineate a mode of being concerned with potentiality, with what "might happen," Peirce tried to account for the importance of immediacy in experience, as well as showing how essential it is to novelty, uniqueness, to the creative aspect of human experience and the world at large.

Qualitative immediacy has its importance within the interpretive sign process or mediation—that is, "Thirdness"—as well. In this regard it should be mentioned that Peirce distinguishes three elemental categories of all phenomena: Firstness, or quality as described here; Secondness, or the actuality of existence—"otherness," struggle, dyadic reaction; and Thirdness, or mediation, representation, interpretation—what is usually thought of as knowledge or thought. All inferences are instances of Thirdness. Firstness is involved in Secondness, and both are involved in Thirdness. Peirce tried to show how the signs constituting language and thought are never absolutely "clear and distinct," *á la* Descartes, but rather that an essential feature of all communication is what he defined as *vagueness*, which is the involvement of qualitative possibility within the communicative sign process:

> A sign is objectively *vague*, in so far as, leaving its interpretation more or less indeterminate, it reserves for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination.... No communication of one person to another can be entirely definite, i.e., non-vague...wherever degree or any other possibility of continuous variation subsists, absolute precision is impossible. Much else must be vague, because no man's interpretation of words is based on exactly the same experience as any other man's. Even in our most intellectual conceptions, the more we strive to be precise, the more unattainable precision seems. It should never be forgotten that our own thinking is carried on as a dialogue, and though mostly in a lesser degree, is subject to almost every imperfection of language (Peirce, 5:505-506).

Vagueness seems to be the very thing that positivism tried to destroy and yet, in the way Peirce describes it, vagueness can provide a very useful methodological tool for obtaining *objectivity* in empirical social research. By reserving "for some other possible sign or experience the function of completing the determination," the researcher can design questions that impose the burden of defining the scope of the situation or problem on the respondent, rather than on the *a priori* assumptions of the researcher.

Perhaps the most important aspect of Peirce's formulation of pragmatism for sociology is that all meaning is a communicative *act* oriented toward ultimate ends, a continuous sign process (Rochberg-Halton, 1982). More precisely, each and every sign, in his definition, constitutes a communicative act. Peirce defines a sign as:

> . . . something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity. It addresses somebody, that is, creates in the mind of that person an equivalent sign, or perhaps a more developed sign. That sign which it creates I call the *interpretant* of the first sign. This sign stands for something, its *object* (Peirce, 2:228)

A sign then consists of the triadic representation of some object (in the broader grammatical sense) to an interpreting sign—or interpretant, and thus intrinsically involves communication. Because it also takes time to occur, a sign is by this definition a sign-process, a communicative act. And because the interpretant is itself a sign, it also "addresses" another interpretant, in a continuing process of interpretation and communication. In Peirce's simplest threefold division of signs, he distinguishes *symbolic signs*, which convey meaning through convention or rule, for example, linguistic symbols; *indexical signs*, which convey information by being physically afffected by their objects, for example, weathervanes indicate the direction of the wind by being pushed by it; and *iconic signs*, which convey information by qualitatively embodying the object, for example, a painting "represents" itself in its own qualities. The fact that there are conventions for landscape painting are not the determining factor in the experience of seeing a given landscape from the iconic perspective. What is important are the qualities of the painting itself—or even how conventions of landscape painting might be directly embodied in the qualities of the painting.

Iconic signs, in this threefold division of signs (Peirce actually developed more detailed divisions of signs which need not be discussed here), are *signs of qualitative immediacy*, and as such, signify the qualitative possibility or pervasive quality of the communicative act. Although Peirce wrote very little on esthetic experience, he seems to have taken a position very similar to Dewey's theory of esthetic experience discussed in the next section of this article:

> . . . it seems to me that while in esthetic enjoyment we attend to the totality of feeling—and especially to the total resultant Quality of Feeling presented in the work of art we are contemplating—yet it is a sort of intellectual sympathy, a sense that here is a Feeling that one can comprehend, a reasonable Feeling. I do not succeed in saying exactly *what* it is, but it is a consciousness belonging to the category of Representation, though representing something in the Category of Quality of Feeling (Peirce, 5:113).

By "Category of Quality of Feeling" Peirce means that the esthetic experience essentially involves a sign of Firstness, or iconicity in his simplest threefold division of signs. Peirce also discussed the communication of qualitative immediacy in his theory of signs as the *tone* of a sign (Peirce, 4:537; 8:363), a distinction that has not been used much to date. It forms the first level of a threefold distinction between *tone*, *token*, and *type*. The esthetic element of experience, as Dewey would later elaborate, involves the communication of qualitative signs, whose meaning is the quality conveyed regardless of what conventions may be used to express that quality.

Therefore, although an act always possesses its own inherent quality or character, the meaning always addresses a future interpretation. Thus the pragmatic meaning of any act is the possible conceivable effects it might have on future conduct, not just the actual behaviors or mechanical motions produced in the act. Although Peirce, who was primarily a logician, did not write much on esthetic experience, Dewey dealt with it extensively in his later philosophy. So to get a better understanding of qualitative immediacy in esthetic experience we should turn to Dewey.

QUALITATIVE IMMEDIACY AND ESTHETIC EXPERIENCE IN DEWEY

Qualitative immediacy is one of the essential—and one of the most overlooked—features of John Dewey's theory of experience. Despite the fact that Dewey's theory of

communication figured prominently in the Park and Burgess introductory sociology text, most sociologists seem to be aware of the "instrumentalist" and "pragmatist" Dewey, one who emphasizes meanings and actions as aimed toward utilitarian goals. And as one sociologist recently said, Dewey is often seen as portraying an image of man as "...an unsocialized calculating man of the jungle" (Lewis, 1976:357). But these are simply caricatures of Dewey's thought as he himself showed in responding to early criticisms:

> No misconception of the instrumental logic has been more persistent than the belief that it makes knowledge merely a means to a practical end, or to the satisfaction of practical needs—practical being taken to signify some quite definite utilities of a material or bread and butter type.... But I again affirm that the term "pragmatic" means only the rule of referring all thinking, all reflective considerations, to *consequences* for final meaning and test. Nothing is said about the nature of the consequences; they may be aesthetic, or moral, or political, or religious in quality—anything you please (Dewey, 1916:330).

Philosophical pragmatism is thus the opposite of modern everyday usage of "pragmatic" as expediency. Despite some important differences between Dewey's and Peirce's versions of pragmatism—which were largely resolved as Dewey became increasingly influenced by Peirce in his later life—both shared a view of human conduct as oriented toward ends through self-control, rather than as ultimately motivated by origins or mechanistic determinants. And both saw the ultimate end of human action not merely as a utilitarian adaption or rationalistic knowledge, but as the growth and embodiment of intelligence, in Peirce's words, "concrete reasonableness." They attempted to show how the *summum bonum* is not some abstract unattainable ideal, but a living presence in all human conduct. Their perspectives complemented each other as Richard Bernstein (1971:200ff.) has pointed out.

Peirce was primarily a logician and scientist, yet he came to develop a view that saw truth as dependent upon goodness (that is, logic upon ethics), and goodness in turn dependent upon beauty (that is, ethics upon esthetics), the qualitative or esthetic ideal of the intrinsically admirable. In contrast to Peirce's image of man as scientific inquirer, Dewey's

perspective emphasizes man as craftsman, capable of building and cultivating the purposes of life. Dewey (1938) also dealt with the logic of inquiry, and the moral influence of philosophy (Dewey, 1946), yet one of his most important contributions is his discussion of the role of qualitative immediacy in situations, and especially the nature of esthetic experience.

Dewey first elaborated his theory of qualitative immediacy in *Experience and Nature* (1925). He described, for example, how qualities became infused with intelligence or mind in the course of human evolution, and how this does not make man simply an evolved *homo sapiens*, an abstract knower, but also a being capable of *communicating* the felt qualities of his or her existence:

> As life is a character of events in a peculiar condition of organization, and "feeling" is a quality of life-forms marked by complexly mobile and discriminating responses, so "mind" is an added property assumed by a feeling creature, when it reaches that organized interaction with other living creatures which is language, communication. . . . This state of things in which qualitatively different feelings are not just had but are significant of objective differences, is mind. Feelings are no longer just felt. They have and they make *sense*; record and prophesy (Dewey, 1925:258).

Whereas the experience or act of thinking does have its own inherent quality, it differs from experiences that are acknowledged to be esthetic, such as art, "but only in its materials." This is because the prominent signs in thinking are *symbolic*, while the prominent signs in esthetic experience are *iconic*, using Peirce's simple threefold division mentioned earlier. Dewey develops this idea further in his *Art as Experience*:

> The material of fine arts consists of qualities; that of experience having intellectual conclusion are signs or symbols having no intrinsic quality of their own, but standing for things that may in another experience be qualitatively experienced. The difference is enormous. . . . Nevertheless, the experience itself (of thinking) has a satisfying emotional quality because it possesses internal integration and fulfillment reached through ordered and organized movement. This artistic structure may be immediately felt. In so far, it is esthetic. . . no intellectual activity is an integral event (is *an* experience), unless it is rounded out with this quality. Without it thinking is inconclusive (Dewey, 1958:38).

So even though intellectual experience is quite different from esthetic experience, there is still an element of the esthetic involved in it. The esthetic element is what constitutes that neglected realm of human thought celebrated by William Blake, the *Imagination*, which in his view dreamed us into existence.

In Dewey's perspective, "esthetic" refers specifically to quality rather than being a synonum for "artistic." He does distinguish art as "a process of doing or making" from the esthetic as the complementary perceiving and enjoying perspective, denoting "the consumer's rather than the producer's standpoint" (Dewey, 1958:47). But the esthetic is not simply the enjoyment of art, as commonly thought. Instead it is what gives unity to *all* experience: ". . . no experience of whatever sort is a unity unless it has esthetic quality; (Dewey, 1958:40). The esthetic is the partner of the instrumental in the communicative act; it is the *consummation* or completion of the experience:

> Discourse itself is both instrumental and consummatory. Communication is an exchange which procures something wanted; it involves a claim, appeal, order, direction or request. . . . Communication is also an immediate enhancement of life, enjoyed for its own sake. . . . Language is always a form of action and in its instrumental use is always a means of concerted action for an end, while at the same time it finds in itself all the goods of its possible consequences. For there is no mode of action as fulfilling and as rewarding as is concerted consensus of action. It brings with it the sense of sharing and merging in a whole (Dewey, 1925;183-184).

Esthetic esperience, or the perception (*aisthetikós* = perceptive) of the inherent qualities of the object, act, or situation, does involve prior habits of convention or interpretation—the instrumental—but does not, strictly speaking, depend on these for its meaning. The reason for this is that from the esthetic perspective, the inherent quality itself is the subject of the experience, and not the experiencer. True, if there is to be an esthetic experience there must be an experiencer with a potential for realizing the esthetic quality. But the esthetic meaning is possessed by the quality of the total transaction, not just by the experiencer. Mead also expressed this idea in an article on "The Nature of Aesthetic Experience" published in 1926, a year after Dewey's *Experience and Nature,* which Mead claimed was an influence on him:

> The beatitude that permeates the common striving of men after an infinite God of their salvation belongs to the cathedral. The delight which follows upon successful adjustment of one's body to the varied . . . elements of a landscape flows over into the landscape itself . . . . In the aesthetic appreciation of the works of great artists, what we are doing is capturing values of enjoyment there, which fill out and interpret our own interests in living and doing. They have permanent value because they are the language of delight into which men can translate the meaning of their own existence (Mead, 1938:454, 457).

Again, the locus of the esthetic experience is neither exclusively subjective nor objective, but is in the "pervasive quality" of the act (Bernstein, 1967:94-96; Rochberg-Halton, 1979a, 1979b).

The experiencer "has" or "feels" the qualities of the esthetic transaction, rather than only indirectly "knowing" them. The difference here is perhaps like that between a person immediately enjoying a painting, and an art critic reflectively analyzing and comparing the qualities of the painting. The former activity is esthetic, the latter intellectual or critical. This is the difference between prizing and appraising, between valuing and valuation, between the immediately possessed and the reflectively understood (Dewey, 1939). Poetry may make use of conventional linguistic symbols, and even be expressed in conventional linguistic form, yet it is the unique qualities expressed that give the poem its esthetic significance.

In *Art as Experience* Dewey also discussed the role of esthetic quality in the communicative act by returning to the literal meaning of the term *perception*—to feel or take in. There Dewey distinguishes between *recognition,* in which an object's meaning is solely dependent on previous habits of interpretation, and *perception,* in which an object's meaning includes its unique qualities as well as a person's culturally conditioned habits of interpretation (Rochberg-Halton, 1979a, 1979b; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). Recognition is "arrested perception," in which all meaning occurs within the bubble of received cultural convention, and where the qualities of the object have no effect on its interpretation. For this reason recognition is an-esthetic, because there is no "feeling" in Dewey's and Peirce's sense of this term. What is important about the perceptive experience is that a person can learn something new, can have *an* ex-

perience. Through esthetic experience we open ourselves to the spontaneities, the serendipities, the qualities of the surrounding world and make them our own.

The lack of attention given to esthetic quality is another of the effects of the Cartesian world in which we live. Social scientists tend to ignore esthetic quality as if it were solely a matter of convention, or else physiology. As parodied by Alfred North Whitehead, this spectre of the nominalistic "ghost in the machine" would have us believe that:[3]

> The occurrences of nature are in some ways apprehended by minds which are associated with living bodies. . . . But the mind in apprehending also experiences sensations which, properly speaking, are qualities of the mind alone. These sensations are projected by the mind so as to clothe appropriate bodies in external nature. Thus the bodies are perceived as with qualities that do not belong to them, qualities which in fact are purely the offspring of the mind. Thus nature gets credit which in truth should be reserved for ourselves: the rose for its scent: the nightingale for his song: and the sun for his radiance. . . . Nature is a dull affair, soundless, scentless, colorless; merely the hurrying of material, endlessly, meaninglessly (quoted in Bernstein, 1967:89-90).

In Dewey's pragmatic view, however, esthetic quality is neither wholly "within" the person nor the thing, rather it "belongs" as much to the thing as it does to the person, and can only be realized within the transaction.

Esthetic quality does have important consequences for the cultivation of the self, as both Dewey and Mead argued. And James Mark Balkwin, a colleague of the pragmatists, and the source of inspiration for Jean Piaget's theories of cognitive development, proposed a detailed theory of esthetic development that has been lost in the field of cognitive developmental psychology because of Piaget's emphasis on the cognitive and "logical" (see Parsons, 1980). But in the perspective outlined here it could be argued that esthetic quality is the most prominent feature of the infant's world. A feeling of warmth or irritation can be the infant's entire universe at this early stage of development. The infant, however, cannot yet be said to possess a self, for it has not yet learned to develop habits of self-control. When the self does begin to develop it has its own esthetic quality, or what traditionally has been called "character," which is always

open to further cultivation. Esthetic quality or qualitative immediacy thus may be one of the most important constituents of the self, because it makes genuinely new developments of the self possible. Turning to the pragmatic tradition we see that qualitative immediacy is regarded as an essential feature of the self.

IMMEDIACY, INDIVIDUALITY, AND THE SELF

Dewey and Mead, like Peirce, emphasize the communicative act as the locus of social life. And like Peirce they both see the communicative act itself as fully social and objective, even when it occurs within a single person. Dewey said, for example, concerning the modern emphasis on individuality and private experience:

> The modern discovery of inner experience . . . implies a new worth and sense of dignity in human individuality, a sense that an individual is not a mere property of nature, set in place according to a scheme independent of him, as an article is put in its place in a cabinet, but that he adds something, that he makes a contribution. . . . But here also distortion entered in. Failure to recognize that this world of inner experience is dependent upon an extension of language which is a social product and operation led to the subjectivistic, solipsistic, and egotistic strain in modern thought (Dewey, 1925:172-173).

Thus even individuality in Dewey's and Mead's views is fully socialized. There is no "real me" who lies beneath the social *persona* or mask. The *persona* is not simply the veil of illusion, obscuring the really real beneath it; it constitutes the very social fabric of the self itself.

In the pragmatic view the self is not based on some underlying "cardinal conception" as Cartesians might claim, but instead is a living, feeling, communicative sign-process oriented toward goals through self-control. The self is created and grows only by a process of internalizing the surrounding social world through the communicative medium of gestures, artifacts, and language. Intelligent human communication always involves community, which Mead termed "the generalized other," because even our own thought is an internal dialogue with representations of community, for example, language itself. In Peirce's words:

> . . . a person is not absolutely an individual. His thoughts are what he is "saying to himself," that is, saying to that other self that is just coming into life in the flow of time. When one reasons, it is that critical self that one is trying to persuade; and all thought whatsoever is a sign, and is mostly of the nature of language. The second thing to remember is that the man's circle of society (however widely or narrowly this phrase may be understood), is a sort of loosely compacted person, in some respects of higher rank than the person of an individual organism (Peirce, 5:421).

"The man's circle of society," which acts as a "sort of loosely compacted person" for Peirce, is similar to Mead's concept of the generalized other—that set of attitudes of interpretation which become internalized in the creation of the self through the process of role taking. It is also possible to interpret Peirce's statement in terms of the dialectic of the "I" and the "me" discussed by Mead, who acquired it, with changes, from William James. When Peirce says that a person's thoughts are what he is "saying to himself" and that it is "that critical self that one is trying to persuade," he is emphasizing the dialogical nature of thought. The interpreting thought, or interpretant, or "critical self", can be directly translated into Mead's terminology as "the generalized other," or "the me." That which is addressing the me is the first element of a sign, remembering that in Peirce's triadic definition a sign consists of sign, its object, and its interpretant. This element is the "I." That which is "discussed" is the object of the sign, or object of the "I" "me" dialogue. In Peirce's semiotic another definition of a sign is that it is:

> . . . a First which stands in such a genuine triadic relation to a Second, called its *Object,* as to be capable of determining a Third, called its *Interpretant,* to assume the same triadic relation to its Object in which it stands itself to the same Object (Peirce, 2:274).

In other words, that which addresses the interpretant is of the category Firstness, or qualitative immediacy. The sign as a triadic whole is Thirdness, but it *involves* this Firstness. The upshot of the argument then is that the "I" is the element of qualitative immediacy within the communicative act. The many commentators on Mead's "I" miss the essential point he is trying to make—that the emergent present is what

introduces novelty, the unpredictable and unexpected, into the self, and that reflection is always an interpretation of what is already past. The present is the "I," the reflective interpretation, the "me."[4]

It should be added that Mead seems to reverse James' formulation of the "I" and "me" in some ways, which seem to me to overcome the inherent dualism in James. James expresses the distinction in "The Consciousness of Self," in his masterwork, *The Principles of Psychology:*

> We may sum up by saying that personality implies the incessant presence of two elements, an objective person, known by a passing subjective Thought and recognized as continuing in time. *Hereafter let us use the words ME and I for the empirical person and the judging Thought. . . . If the passing thought be the directly verifiable existent which no school has hitherto doubted it to be, then that thought itself is the thinker,* and psychology need not look beyond (James, 1890:371, 401).

James suggests here that the "I" is the direct knower in the stream of consciousness rather than the interpreting "me" or reflective mediation, thus falling prey, it seems to me, to a variant of Cartesian dualism. Dewey criticized this tendency to dualism in James, in an article called, "The Vanishing Subject in the Psychology of James" (Dewey 1946:396-409).

There may seem to be some similarity between James' "judging Thought" and Mead's use of the "I" as "response." Lewis has argued convincingly that Mead speaks of the "I" as response, but Lewis seems to think of the response as the immediate action produced, or even the physiological functioning of the unconscious moment—in other words, *quantitative immediacy* rather than qualitative immediacy as described here. Lewis (1979:278-281) does offer an interpretation of the "I" as "imagery" which has some similarities to the interpretation given here, but in seeing imagery or inherent quality as reducible to the "neurological conditions" that determine the behavioristic response of the "I," he makes it seem as if qualitative immediacy could not be dealt with by the pragmatic tradition. But I would suggest that Mead's use of "response" is similar to Dewey's discussion of the consummatory phase of the act described earlier—that is, the esthetic—which Mead (1938:23-25) himself discusses.

The importance of the "I" in Mead's view of the self is in many respects similar to Firstness—feeling or quality—in Peirce and esthetic experience in Dewey. It is the element that enables emergence, novelty, originality, uniqueness, creative impulse, and free expression (both good and bad) to enter into the self-process and endow it with vitality and growth. In Mead's words (1934:178) the "I" is something, "that is never entirely calculable." It is always somewhat different from what is expected by the "me," the conventional and habitual (Mead, 1934:209), and is in this sense novel. Mead says in various passages:

> That movement into the future is the step, so to speak, of the ego, of the "I." It is something that is not given in the "me". . . . The "I" gives the sense of freedom, of initiative. . . . However carefully we plan the future it always is different from that which we can previse, and this something that we are continually bringing in and adding to is what we identify with the self that comes into the level of our experience only in the completion of the act. . . . Now it is this living act which never gets directly into reflective experience. It is only after the act has taken place that we can catch it in our memory and place it in terms of that which we have done. It is that "I" which we may be said to be continually trying to realize, and to realize through the actual conduct itself (Mead, 1934:177, 203).

Many interpreters have taken this placing of the "I" outside of the conventional to mean that it is some kind of *unmediated* knowledge, transcendental ego, or direct perception, but it seems clear from the remarks quoted here that the "I" is the *immediate* rather than the *unmediated.* More precisely it is the *immediate* phase of *mediation,* rather than something outside of or prior to the mediation process. The "I" cannot be separated from the inferential sign process that constitutes the self, rather it is that process of mediation or interpretation considered in its immediacy. It is not simply reducible to mediation since it does carry its own potential as qualitative immediacy. But just as importantly, *it has no separate existence of its own.* For this separate "I", the "private I" if you will, is the fiction of modern individualism.

Mead himself (1934:209) discussed how modern art often seemed to be a demand for the unconventional and unmediated, or even the destruction of all mediation, in a quest for pure novelty, the pure "I". He did not live long enough to see the Cartesian blindness produced by certain

late modernists—empty canvasses, silent music, and very blank verse—but he certainly would have agreed that the quest to grasp the pure "I" could only amount to the plucking out of creative vision rather than its realization. The modernist emphasis on the pure originality, novelty, and uniqueness of the "private I" is as one-sided, from the pragmatic perspective, as that of many pre-literate peoples whose self is determined almost exclusively by the "me," and for whom individuality means to be an "enemy of society" (Turner, 1975:27). But even there, the "I" may be personified by a single individual such as the king or village headman, who is relatively freer from everyday constraints and norms to express choice, initiative, caprice, and novelty. Or the "I" may be embodied in the role of the medicine man or shaman, whose liminal position makes him the embodiment of the exploratory "I," the diviner of things to come (Turner, 1967:ch. 6).

Thus the importance of qualitative immediacy in the pragmatists' conceptions of the self is that it gives due to the uniqueness and creative potentiality of the person, and at the same time includes these qualities as social constituents of the self, rather than as a-social attributes of individualism, unconditioned by the communicative act. The meaning of uniqueness, individuality, and originality always resides in and for the discourse of the common good, the cultivation of the community both within and outside the individual person.

IS THERE ROOM FOR QUALITY WITHIN CONTEMPORARY SOCIAL THEORY?

By now it is generally acknowledged that a turn toward more "qualitative" or "interpretive" approaches is being taken within the social sciences (Geertz, 1973, 1980; Bernstein, 1976; Smith, 1978). The limitations of purely quantitative approaches that to a great extent have dominated mid-century sociology and psychology have become increasingly apparent and many sociologists have attempted to reach out for conceptual frameworks that can adequately deal with the human communication of meaning. But too often it can be argued that these frameworks are only "conceptual" or "cognitive," and as such, merely a continuation of the modern emphasis on epistemology over ontology, "knowing"

over "having" or "feeling." There does not seem to be much room for qualitative immediacy as discussed here to be considered an essential element of communication.

Perhaps phenomenology attempts to concentrate on this qualitative element of experience, but at least as proposed by Husserl, it conceives of qualities as Cartesian "objects of knowledge." Symbolic interactionism, the self-claimed child of pragmatism, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of the communicative act, would seem to illustrate the approaches described here, but at least as defined by its definer, Herbert Blumer, it does not seem to allow for inherent and immediate qualities as constituents of all experience and as elements of the communicative act:

> An object—that is to say, anything that an individual indicates to himself—is different from a stimulus; instead of having an intrinsic character which acts on the individual and which can be identified apart from the individual, its character is conferred on it by the individual (Blumer, 1967:141; 1969:4ff).

The problem with symbolic interactionism is given in its title: it is a view of meaning and experience as *symbolic,* which does not include the *iconic* or qualitative signs as contributing in their own right to the communicative process. Perhaps the inclusion of qualitative immediacy could clarify symbolic interactionist discussions of why a "situation" should be considered unique by showing that uniqueness is qualitative rather than subjective.

Piaget's "cognitive developmental" psychology is an excellent example of an influential conceptualistic and rationalistic theory that has no room for qualitative immediacy. But the paradox is that Piaget's theory, as mentioned earlier, is founded on that of James Mark Baldwin, a colleague of the pragmatists, who developed a theory of "esthetic development" within his general "genetic epistemology" (Parsons, 1980). An esthetically based theory might provide a wholly different view of human development.

I have tried to make use of these pragmatic approaches to qualitative immediacy within the communicative act in my own empirical research on the meaning of household possessions (Rochberg-Halton, 1979a, 1979b; Csikszentmihalyi and Rochberg-Halton, 1981). In describing how things acquire meaning it became important to distinguish different modes

of meaning or modes of transaction with things. The dominant conceptualist and structuralist views of culture as a "system of symbols and meanings," mediated solely by conventional norms did not seem to account for the active process often described by respondents, nor for the importance of the intrinsic quality of the thing as an element of the communicative act. Dewey's description of esthetic experience and Peirce's "iconicity" seemed to provide a broader perspective for interpretation than the purely "conventional" accounts.

We so often think of pragmatism as the voice of American practicality, yet it should be clear by now that the very ground of pragmatism is qualitative immediacy, a concept that undercuts both the positivistic "atoms" and solitary "cogitos" of modern social thought. Presently, however, the concept of qualitative immediacy remains for the most part an unexplored possibility. But perhaps it is time for those turning to qualitative approaches to consider qualitative immediacy, the long dormant vital source of the pragmatic tradition, as a welcome addition to our understanding of the nature of human being.

NOTES

[1]References to the *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce* appear as volume number and paragraph; for example, 5:135.

[2]This definition of feeling comes very close to the kind of study proposed in philosophical phenomenology (Husserl, 1973; Merleau-Ponty, 1962; Schutz, 1970), and indeed, the analysis of qualitative immediacy considered as "phaneron," formed the basis of Peirce's own brand of phenomenology, which he developed independently of Husserl and originally termed "phaneroscopy" to avoid confusing it with Hegel's phenomenology. The purpose of phaneroscopy is to ascertain the elemental categories present to mind. Peirce's "epoché" is more radical than Husserl's, however, in that it also excludes any notion of "transcendental subjectivity" as pertaining to the "phaneron" *(See Rosensohn, 1974, for a discussion of Peirce's phenomenology).*

[3]John Locke's discussion of primary and secondary qualities illustrates the perspective Whitehead had in mind:

> What I have said concerning colours and smells may be understood also of tastes and sounds, and other like sensible qualities; which, whatever reality we by mistake attribute to them, are in truth nothing in the objects themselves, but powers to produce various sensations in us; and depend on those primary qualities, viz. bulk, figure, texture, and motion of parts. . . .They are, in the bodies we denominate from them, only a power to produce those sensations in us: and what is sweet, blue, or warm in idea, is but the certain bulk, figure, and motion of the insensible parts, in the bodies themselves, which we call so. (Vol. 1, Book II, ch. 8, par. 14, 15).

[4]One reading of Jorge Luis Borge's short story, "Borges and I," is that it is a literary realization of the I and me dialogue of the self. Borges himself claims that James made a strong impression on him (interview, The University of Chicago, April 1, 1980). Even if James is not one of the sources for the piece, Borges' dialogue of pronouns does illustrate the I and me distinction, as illustrated in the following excerpts:

> The other one, the one called Borges, is the one things happen to. . . It would be an exaggeration to say that ours is a hostile relationship; I live, let myself go on living, so that Borges may contrive his literature, and this literature justifies me. . . . Besides, I am destined to perish, definitively, and only some instant of myself can survive in him. . . I shall remain in Borges, not in myself (if it is true that I am someone), but I recognize myself less in his books than in many others or in the laborious strumming of a guitar. . . I do not know which of us has written this page.

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