

CHAPTER 1

The Study of Meaningful Perception as a Foundation for the Study of Autistic Perception

The security that they justifiably feel in making inferences about the individual will vary, of course, depending on such factors as the amount of previous information they possess about him, but no amount of such past evidence can entirely obviate the necessity of acting on the basis of inference.

—Erving Goffman

The undistorted and true mastery of meaning has become the grail of sociology, although it is tacitly acknowledged to be beyond rational reach.

—Paul Rock

The process of drawing informal inferences in everyday life is the subject matter of most social psychologies. This may seem like a sweeping generalization, but it is precisely the thematic premise of a book entitled *Social Cognition, Inference, and Attribution* (1979) written by psychologists Robert S. Wyer Jr. and Donal E. Carlston. Wyer and Carlston claim that the existing state of social psychology can be characterized as an attempt to define the specific types of inference that are drawn with respect to particular social situations.

Meaningful perception and the drawing of inferences are at the heart of every social-psychological theory. This holds true for both sociological and psychological approaches. Whereas the various theories of social psychology are one-pointed and for the most part dedicated to qualifying the relation between particular types of inferencing in response to specific social situations, Wyer and Carlston argue that a general framework for understanding human inferencing processes is becoming more and more necessary.

Such a framework would be capable of establishing the general rubric of logical inferences within which all social-psychological theories can be adjudicated. In their book, they do not claim to offer such a framework. However, they do review the current social-psychological treatment of inferencing and suggest a series of postulates and hypotheses that may be derived from existing theory. Because their book is an overview of the field, it contains much information; with some of it I agree, and with some of it I disagree. For example, they dedicate a chapter to the place of formal syllogistic reasoning in everyday meaningful perception. I believe we have to go beyond formal logic to understand the informal logic of everyday reasoning. However, I am aligned with Wyer and Carlston regarding their claims that inferencing processes lie at the heart of most social psychologies, and that we need to solidify our understanding of this basis in inferencing processes whereby individuals organize their meaningful perception in everyday life.

THE CONCEPT OF SOCIAL INFERENCING IN SOCIAL-PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORY

There is a sizable literature in social psychology and cognitive science addressing experiments in which subjects are presented with a problem-solving situation that is usually (1) a logical puzzle that needs to be solved, or (2) a problematic social situation that may or may not elicit particular types of response. Indeed, Wyer and Carlson have dedicated their book to reviewing this literature and demonstrating that experiments in which subjects are placed in a social scenario, either inside or outside the laboratory, have revealed a wealth of information regarding how individuals tend to formulate social inferences in response to various situations. Thus, we can say that the study of social inferencing processes regarding situation-specific demands forms the crux of many social-psychological experiments and research projects.

Let us take a brief look around the world of social psychology without attempting to overemphasize or underemphasize the sociological or psychological camps. If we looked at sociological social psychology first, for example, and then looked at psychological social psychology, we would engender the sense of a bifurcation of academic pursuits. It is much more important to this

project that we go back and forth among the various social psychologies to engender an appreciation for the similarities and overlaps among the various subfields. Indeed, the greatest intersection among all the social psychologies is to be found in the critical importance placed on social inferencing processes.

Psychologists have addressed stereotyping and halo effects as particular types of generalized social inferencing processes. These inferences through which individuals make judgments about others are the topic of study in implicit personality theory (Rosenberg and Sedlak 1972; Schneider 1973). Stereotyping has also been studied sociologically as a means whereby media events can constrain the kinds of inferences individuals make about others (McGuire 1985).

Social psychologists have coalesced a large literature dedicated to pinpointing the kinds of inferences individuals make about themselves and others regarding the reasons people do the things they do. In attribution theory, psychologists describe individuals as making situational or dispositional inferences regarding the attributes that explain behavior of self and others. Attribution is a cognitive process that entails linking an event to its causes (Howard 1991). These attributions, again, are specific kinds of inferences that provide meaningful explanations for the behavior of self and others (Bem 1972; Jones and Davis 1965; Kelley 1967; Heider 1958).

Another school of social-psychological theory addresses how individual perceptions influence the extent to which one person likes another. These theories of impression formation have also addressed how individuals evaluate behavior as a function of their perceived similarity to others. Impression formation theories in psychology view the way individuals feel about the behavior of others in terms of social inferencing processes based on existing social experience (Byrne 1969, 1971; Wyer 1969; Gollob 1968, 1974a, 1974b). In fact, impression formation was further developed by sociologist David Heise such that his impression formation equations play a pivotal role in affect-control theory. Later, we will discuss how affect-control theory treats social inferencing in conversational events in terms of explicitly emotional dynamics.

In sociology, expectation states theory studies the kinds of inferences individuals draw when they are in a group situation and are asked to solve a task together as a group. The inferences individuals make regarding the organization of these problem-solving

tasks are largely contingent on their social perceptions of the others in the group. On the basis of social cues, individuals decide early on who will play a leadership role, for example, in a given decision-making process. Berger (1972) located individual inferences of justice and equity within the stable frame of reference that social experience imparts to each social event. Individuals accumulate experience in relation to specific social statuses and characteristics, and infer expectations for equity and justice of social relationships on the basis of these transsituational belief systems. Also, expectation states theory examines how individuals draw inferences regarding levels of task competence for each other. Status characteristics are described as valued attributes from which individuals may infer task competence of one another. Performance expectations comprise the level of competence expected of an individual over a number of situations (see Berger 1958, 1991; Meeker 1981; Berger and Zelditch 1985).

In psychology, expectancy theory predicts that behavior, and the intent to engage in behavior, are factors in decision-making processes. Individuals make certain inferences about the relation between self and others to help organize the development and expected input of self and others in decision-making processes (Wyer 1969; Wyer and Carlston 1979; Nemeth 1972). Research in expectancy theory has focused on perceptions of social power and how those perceptions mitigate interaction among actors. Research has also revealed a tendency for interactants to manifest self-fulfilling prophecies in interaction based on various inferences of social factors brought into interaction: expectancy confirmations. More recently, expectancy theorists have begun to focus their interests on the way behavioral motivations are related to expectancy confirmations, and the way motivations are mitigated by subsequent behavior and social thinking (Copeland 1993, 1994).

Social comparison processes have long been studied by psychologists to see how individuals use information about others and the environment to draw inferences in the process of seeking and making judgments. These processes actually comprise a number of theories, including cognitive dissonance theory (Festinger 1954, 1957), theories of social helping behavior (Latane 1966), comparison level theory (Thibaut and Kelley 1959), and many others (e.g., Sherif and Hovland 1961; Schacter and Singer 1961).

In cognitive psychology, a line of theorizing promoted by R. P. Abelson begins with implicational molecule theory (Abelson and

Reich 1969) and proceeds on through script theory (Abelson 1976; Schank and Abelson 1977). In implicational molecule theory, the performances and inferences of individuals in social events are seen as being interrelated by psychological implication. In script theory, this theory is enlarged to account for the notion that scripts of action are entailed in perception of social events. Scripts are comprised of vignettes, which Abelson qualifies as pictures with captions. The vignettes that comprise a script actually narrate a story of unfolding social events. Thus, the inferencing processes of individuals are largely entailed in their perception of social events, which are processed in relation to existing experience.

In sociology, equity theory pertains to social inferences regarding equality and justice in social exchange situations (Walster, Walster, and Berscheid 1978). Issues of distributive justice have figured prominently in equity theories. Morton Deutsch (1975) argued that equity is only one aspect of perceived justice. George C. Homans (1974) elaborated the importance of the proportionality principle in social exchanges, as well as the rule of distributive justice. Thus, there are many kinds of social inferences involved in our perceptions of justice and equity. These themes can also be traced to the types of inferences individuals make in order to justify deviance (Merton 1949; Sykes and Matza 1957). The concept of accounts showcases the way individuals present logical inferences in conversation for the purpose of excusing or justifying their behavior (Scott and Lyman 1968, 1970).

Exchange theory has developed through a line of work in sociology that can be traced, for example, from Homans (1958), through Peter Blau (1964), to R. M. Emerson (1972) and Karen Cook (1987), to name a few. This line of theory emphasizes individual perceptions of power and fairness as shaping judgments and social inferences they surmise regarding interactive experience. This line of theorizing is also fundamental to rational choice theory (Coleman 1990, 1991), which treats interaction as an economic game and seeks to understand the rules of the game and how these rules shape the perpetuation of the game. These approaches tend to anchor social inferencing processes in microeconomic terms (e.g., diminishing marginal utility). Here social inferences are treated as being aligned qualitatively with the same values as our capitalist economic system: the microeconomics of social inferencing in everyday life.

The work of Daniel Kahneman and colleagues (e.g., Kahneman 1973; Tversky and Kahneman 1973; Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982; Kahneman and Miller 1986) has also been cited frequently in the literature of the various social psychologies. An important notion here is that framing effects constrain and contextualize the social inferences made by individuals in everyday life (Kahneman, Slovic, and Tversky 1982). The logic of everyday reasoning is addressed from various standpoints. For example, there is an emphasis on how uncommon relations between categories may serve to overstate social inferences regarding the frequency of certain events taking place (Tversky and Kahneman 1973).

Furthermore, in this line of work individuals are seen as using only the most easily or recently accessed information at their disposal in a given situation in order to formulate premises from which they proceed to draw social inferences. Individuals may also tend to assume these logical inferences are generalizable to an entire population. This reflects Johnson-Laird's mental models approach from cognitive science by depicting individuals as creating scenarios to explain inconsistency in events. The argument specifically claims to move beyond formal logic. Moreover, the implicit ability of individuals to intuitively entertain falsifications of premises also goes beyond the "search till one drops" criterion for truth in formal logic (Kahneman and Miller 1986).

One underlying premise of these social-psychological theories about social inferencing processes is that individuals tend to behave in rather predictable ways, even though their social inferencing processes do not necessarily reflect formal syllogistic reasoning. This is because individual perception reflects the organization of social events, and individuals tend to align their inferences with their perceived stability of social events. For example, the just world hypothesis states that individuals often tend to infer that people usually get what is coming to them, so to speak. If we do live in a somewhat rational and stable world, then the things that happen to people can be inferred to be deserved, for better or for worse. Individuals make these inferences whether they are true or not, and they do this because it seems to be logical to them to draw these types of inference.

In other words, social-psychological theories depict individuals as performing various kinds of situation-specific inferencing in an attempt to meaningfully frame their everyday experience. On the basis of existing social norms, social psychologists can predict

a wide variety of social inferencing processes relevant to situation-specific demands. Yet, according to Wyer and Carlson, the more we know about the crucial role of everyday social inferencing, the more we want to be able to establish a general framework within which we can understand the fundamental dynamics involved in relating logical inferences to the subjective organization of everyday meaningful perception.

Social psychology, whether in sociology or psychology, has focused historically on very specific and particular dynamics of social inferencing processes because this has been perceived as the most judicious way to systematically study social inferencing processes. It is because we have assumed that meaningful perception itself could not be addressed with words that we have chosen instead to address specific manifestations of social inferencing relative to specific situational demands. Nevertheless, it is becoming increasingly evident that as so much of social psychology is indeed interested in everyday social inferencing processes, there must be a way to anchor all of these particular theories in a global framework that entails the underlying logical dynamics of social inferencing as it organizes meaningful perception. By addressing meaningful perception itself as a topic of study we ought to be able to do this.

The philosophy of pragmatism, which was started by Charles Sanders Peirce, underlies most approaches to social psychology. The process of drawing logical inferences in everyday social life was critical in pragmatism from the beginning. The remainder of this book will explore how the concept of logical inferences can be used to develop theories of meaningful perception and Autistic perception. For now, suffice it to say that social psychology is heavily based in pragmatism, and processes of logical and social inferencing are critical in any perspective that claims its roots are in pragmatism.

Based ultimately in the concept of informal logic, the social inferencing theory of meaningful perception that will be presented in this chapter offers a general framework within which social-psychological theories can be adjudicated and contextualized. This is so because meaningful perception itself constitutes the baseline of our everyday perception. Anything we say about meaningful perception will necessarily have ramifications for social-psychological theories in general. Though scientists today are socialized against making such statements lest they be interpreted as irresponsible, sweeping generalizations, the wealth of evidence articulating the dynamics and importance of social infer-

encing processes in everyday reasoning is itself pushing the point. We now have enough understanding and research into social inferencing processes to be able to claim that meaningful perception is organized in an important way by certain kinds of logical inferencing processes. Furthermore, it would almost be irresponsible if we were to stop short of globalizing this information now that we have gathered together such an impressive and diverse array of social-psychological literatures attesting to the importance and dynamics of social inferencing processes in the subjective organization of meaningful perception.

One of the critical issues throughout all social psychologies, and an issue that is also important in cognitive science and artificial intelligence, is deciding whether human inferencing can be understood in terms of formal logic. Briefly put, if one decides to use formal logic in doing social psychology, one sacrifices the ability to account for a number of subjective experiences and behavioral performances that cannot be explained using formal logic. On the other hand, if one decides to avoid use of formal logic, then one runs the risk of building an argument that is not imbued with a convincing explanatory logic. We are seemingly forced into believing that humans are either logical or nonlogical. Yet, somehow that choice does not seem satisfying.

The central point here is that an increasing number of scientists from many disciplines have become interested in the subjective experience of logical inference in everyday reasoning. For instance, symbolic interactionist William Corsaro (1981, 1985) notes the importance of conversational inference as highlighted in the work of philosopher Peirce (see 1960–66), ethnomethodologist Cicourel (e.g., 1974), and sociolinguist Gumperz (e.g., 1982). This issue is being discussed by sociologists, psychologists, cognitive scientists, neuroscientists, and philosophers, and is addressed variously as the logic of perception (Rock 1987), the logic of metacognition (Nelson 1992), the heuristics of social judgments (Tversky and Kahneman 1974), human inference strategies (Nisbett and Ross 1980), rules of the mind (Anderson 1993), and so forth, in many relatively recent works. Thus, the concept of social inferencing will figure prominently in the following treatment of meaningful perception.

Having briefly recapitulated the importance of social inferencing throughout various social-psychological works, we will now turn our focus to a symbolic interactionist perspective on meaningful

perception. In contemporary symbolic interactionism the conceptualization of meaning has been understood to exist on two levels: (1) the interpersonal level, addressed in the sender-symbol-receiver framework, and (2) the transsituational level, addressed in the emergence/relativity framework.

We will address both theoretical levels of meaning in an attempt to reexamine the relation between the interpersonal and the transsituational. The focus will be on redefining these concepts by moving from the formal rules of logical inference to the informal rules of social inferencing. Then we will be able to discuss the cognitive, syntactic, organizational aspects of each level, as well as the affective, semantic, motivational aspects of each level. This will necessarily lead us into even greater levels of clarification regarding the functions of these levels of meaning.

Consider the notion that the nature of the discussion in the rest of this chapter has been very confusing for symbolic interactionists for the following reasons:

- We have believed the interpersonal level should be discussed first; actually, the transsituational level should be discussed first because the interpersonal represents episodes within the transsituational.
- We have believed the interpersonal framework addresses the social construction of meaningful perception; actually, it addresses the social construction of meaningful symbols.
- We have believed that we do not need to account for affect in our treatment of these levels of meaning; actually, that neglect has left our treatments with a dry, cognitive, syntactic imbalance, which needs to be balanced out with the introduction of affective, semantic, motivational aspects.
- We have believed that we can address these two levels of meaning in terms of loose assumptions we make about certain qualities of social interaction; actually, we need to reword and rethink the loose terminology we have used for these two levels in order to address specifically the social inferencing dynamics on these two levels.

So let us make an effort to clear up some of the confusions we have lived with for decades regarding the social construction of meaning. In the long run, it should be worth the effort.

THE INTERPERSONAL LEVEL OF MEANING

The sender-symbol-receiver, or triadic, framework of meaning is interpersonal because it addresses the manner in which meaningful symbols are constructed minimally by two individuals. The framework was originally expounded by Peirce, and later by Mead, as their chief argument for the social nature of meaning.

The framework consists of three aspects: (1) the sender, (2) the symbolic phenomenon (e.g., act or utterance), and (3) the receiver. The critical achievement of this framework is that it delineates the social construction of meaningful symbols as an exclusively interactive phenomenon requiring two or more individuals. Historically, this is a highly significant accomplishment. For example, Plato declared that meaning is a quality that is inherent in objects. This has been believed throughout most of the story of human knowledge in the West. Peirce was among the first to readdress meaning and to assert the social nature of meaning in his philosophy of pragmatism. Thus, the interpersonal framework is extremely important, and may be said to constitute the starting point for symbolic interactionism as we know it.

Meaningful communication is enabled because the symbol issued by the sender calls out a predictable response in the receiver. This is because the meaning of the symbolic act has been established through experience in face-to-face, interpersonal interaction. For example, imagine a scenario involving two prehistoric individuals:

Uma is eating a deer, and Trog approaches Uma to grab some meat. Uma raises one hand holding a large bone. Trog lunges for the meat. Uma hits Trog soundly on the head. Trog raises himself and lunges once again. Uma responds by raising her hand holding the bone again. But this time Trog retreats.

Thus, the meaning of Uma's raising the hand holding a large bone has been established through interpersonal interaction. The act of raising the hand holding a large bone at mealtime now suggests and re-presents a certain amount of cognitive information processing that is shared by both Uma and Trog. And so we summarize the triadic framework of meaning by saying that the meaning is in the response. The meaning of Uma's gesture has been con-creted because of Trog's response. As Mead would say, now the original gesture has become a significant symbol.

This framework was originally held to be a cognitive framework. That is, it was exclusively based on the interactive organization of information processing that underlies the social construction of meaningful symbols. We need to bring affect into the framework though, because today we are comfortable with the idea that there is an interrelation between cognition and affect. In order to do this, we can say that as the receiver receives the symbol and reacts in the predictable way, there is also an affective response to the cognitive exchange on the part of both actors. So, the sequence of the model could now read: (1) the sender, (2) the symbolic phenomenon (e.g., act or utterance), (3) the receiver, and (4) the affective response in both the sender and the receiver that results from the exchange.

This affective component allows us to further address the social construction of meaningful symbols in terms of the motivation to experience desirable states of affect. So, we can complete the interpersonal scenario in which Uma and Trog together created the meaning of the act of raising a hand holding a large bone at mealtime by saying that when Uma initiates the act and sends the significant symbol, Trog is filled with fear and humiliation, and responds by retreating. Likewise, Uma experiences emotions of satisfaction. These emotions are underlying the meaning of the act, and the predictable responses to the act. It is these emotions that will also underlie motivations for future behavior on the part of Uma and Trog at mealtime specifically, or elsewhere, especially when it comes to the prospect of one of them raising a hand holding a large bone.

Traditionally, the interpersonal framework has been referred to as a description of the social construction of meaning, but this is a fallacious assumption. The interpersonal framework has actually addressed the social construction of meaningful symbols, and that is qualitatively different than the apparition of meaningful perception itself. This is an extremely important point. Mistaking a cognitive view of the construction of meaningful symbols as a full-blown argument for the social construction of meaning has caused problems. Given the traditional failure to incorporate affect into the framework, this confusion has resulted in symbolic interactionists relegating themselves to a cognitive, and mechanistic, or syntactic, view of the genesis of meaning. But this cognitive treatment of symbol making is not enough to serve as a working treatment of the phenomena of meaningful perception. In fact, we have been forced to agree that we can say no more about mean-

ingful perception precisely because it is rather impossible to add to the interpersonal model once we assume it addresses the broad range of phenomena associated with the social construction of meaning. As we will see shortly, attempts to further the interpersonal framework and attend to a transsituational framework have been rather futile.

The triadic framework addressing interpersonal meaning is incapable of being extended to meaningfully account for transsituational meaning. Without the motivational and affirmational component of affective responses, and with the misunderstanding that we have explicated meaning itself, symbolic interactionism has had its hands tied when it comes to explaining how socially constructed meanings perpetuate themselves on the transsituational level. We have been unable to discuss the following issues on a principled basis:

- How do individuals continually organize meaningful perceptions as they move from one interpersonal event to another?
- What kind of judgments and decision-making processes enable a person to choose which symbols to use and which not to use?
- Is there not more to meaningful perception than simply using symbols?
- How do individuals resolve inconsistency and ambiguity as they move from one interpersonal event to another?
- What kind of subjective organization is required in order for a human to use a given symbol that may have more than one meaning, and may mean different things in different situations at different times?
- What aspect of our meaningful perception allows us to keep from getting stuck in meanings once they are learned and once they are outmoded?
- How do individuals use the interpersonal act of symbol making to build up to the creation of culture and social institutions?
- How do we begin to understand the subjective organization of meaningful perception among individuals with nonnormative meaningful perception (e.g., people with Autism)?

There must be something about the nature of meaningful perception in the human experience that enables the construction of culture and social institutions, yet also supports the tremendous variety of experience in these phenomena that we see throughout human history. Meaningful perception must therefore be implicated in age-old issues of sociological theory that are commonly referred to today in terms of (1) the relation between the individual and the normative order, (2) the micro-macro debate, (3) the problem of order, and (4) the problem of intent.

In order to address these problems, we must see that the interpersonal framework depicts the construction of meaningful symbols, but the apparition and organization of meaningful perception itself must be seen as preceding and superseding the coconstruction of symbols themselves. This is important because the belief has been that meaningful perception itself is constructed through trial and error in social interaction. It would be more appropriate to say that meaningful symbols are constructed through trial and error. Meaningful perception itself is a phenomenon that is neurologically endowed in humans and shaped specifically through social interaction.

We have believed that through experience in interpersonal interactions actors come to coconstruct symbols and to share meanings. However, in this view meaning has been perceived as being almost accidentally attached to objects and utterances in interaction over time. Meaning has been seen as cognitive and syntactic in structure, and almost happenstance in occurrence. But there is much more to this story. In other words, we believe we have an understanding of the notion that meaning is shaped in social interaction. But we do not even know how to begin addressing the dynamic way in which we negotiate, layer, and change meanings as we move from one social event to another.

Indeed, we have routinely assumed that first we must address the interpersonal level of the social construction of meaning, and then move on to address the transsituational level of the subjective organization of socially constructed meanings. But this discussion should serve to illustrate that we are mired in misguided assumptions. Perhaps we should not assume that the interpersonal level should be treated first. Perhaps it is the transsituational level of meaningful perception that provides the firmament for experience in interpersonal exchanges. Once we understand the subjective organization of meaningful perception on the transsituational

level, then it will be easier for us to see that meaning is not constructed originally and exclusively on the interpersonal level alone. It is meaningful symbols that may be said to be concreted specifically through interpersonal exchanges.

So, the interpersonal framework addresses the social construction of meaningful symbols, but meaningful perception, according to philosopher Susanne Langer, must precede the construction of symbols. This is all-important. The following discussions address interpersonal and transsituational meaning specifically as conversational phenomena. But we cannot account for all meaningful perception by addressing only talk, or discursive meaning. Langer explicitly relegates the genesis of meaningful perception itself to a nondiscursive, emotional, ritual life. In so doing, she qualifies meaningful perception as something that interactively transforms multilevel incoming sensory data into meaningful feelings. These feelings become emotions. The most valued emotions of the group become fundamental sentiments. The historical experience of meaningful feelings through group rituals leads to the apparition of meaningful symbols. Thus, the act of humans making symbols is the tip of the iceberg of meaning.

Symbolic interactionists typically refer to Mead for the philosophical basis of our understandings of the social construction of meaning. Far less often, we mention Peirce in passing reference to the origins of pragmatism and social psychology. But Langer has been almost completely neglected. We will be interested in the work of Langer in these discussions of meaningful perception. Her work will be treated at length throughout this book.

Langer's affective, nondiscursive treatment of the genesis of meaning will allow us to entertain any number of factors as being implicated in the experience of meaningful perception. This will be an interesting topic of future research. Social psychologists and brain neuroscientists will have a rich area of research in the exploration of what kinds of sensory data, and filtering dynamics, are associated with meaningful perception on affective and nondiscursive levels. For now, we will concern ourselves with the apparition and perpetuation of meaningful perceptions in conversational interaction.

It is important to say this clearly before continuing. There must be many levels of activity in the brain that articulate and assimilate sensory data to form meaningful perceptions. The var-

ious filtering mechanisms of the brain are not being addressed here. The brain neuroarchitecture that articulates sensory input is not specifically being addressed here. Any attempt to make a global statement regarding everything there is to know about meaningful perception is certainly not being addressed here. Indeed, logical inference will not be touted as all there is to meaningful perception. Rather, logical inference will be presented as a critical organizational component of meaningful perception. We will soon see how logical dynamics are involved in the social construction of meaningful symbols. But there are certainly any number of processes implicated in the consummation of meaningful perception. However, understanding the underlying logical dynamics of the subjective organization of transsituational meanings will allow us to get an objective handle on meaningful perception—and this objectification, or rationalization, of meaningful perception has eluded us historically in the social sciences.

Symbolic interactionists have focused largely on the conversational activity of talk. We have focused on the way we learn behavior from one another through talk. We have focused on identity and self as internalizations of talk. But nondiscursive symbolization has been left over as an implicit, back-channeling factor. Thus, Langer will allow us to reconceptualize the first level of the social construction of meaning as being affective and ritually oriented, and only subsequently leading to the social construction of symbols. We will need to reevaluate our two existing levels of meaning because they specifically refer to discursive exchanges in social events. Now that we have a picture of meaningful symbols arising through a structure of meaningful perception that interrelates affect and cognition we can proceed to expand on the dynamics of transsituational meaning. We will want to keep in mind that from now on when we talk about interpersonal and transsituational meaning we are essentially addressing the individual's subjective and intersubjective experience of meaningful perception in conversational interaction. Furthermore, this will entail both discursive and nondiscursive processes.

So, let us review what we have said so far about the interpersonal level of meaning:

- This interpersonal level is typically addressed using the triadic model.

- The triadic framework of meaning paints a picture of (1) Actor A sending (2) a symbol to (3) Actor B, and this triadic framework recognizes that (4) there are affective responses to the symbol from both interactants.
- Thus, it has cognitive information processing and affective responses built into it.
- Therefore, it allows us to talk about the social construction of meaningful symbols.
- It forces the notion that the meaning is in the response.
- It is the first level of meaningful perception to be addressed in the social sciences.
- Its contribution to our understanding is that it describes how meaningful symbols are created by at least two individuals in a face-to-face interaction.
- It was first expounded by Charles Sanders Peirce, yet most people associate it with George Herbert Mead.

Also, more generally, we have noted that:

- The triadic framework of interpersonal meaning specifically only addresses the genesis of meaningful symbols, and not the entire phenomenon of the social construction of meaning.
- It can set the stage for understanding why we should study transsituational meaning as the arena in which our meaningful perceptions are subjectively organized as we go from one interpersonal interaction to another.
- It is important to note that Susanne Langer pointed out that meaningful perception, logic, and emotions exist before and beyond words, and that almost everything that has been said about meaning in the social sciences has actually been a discussion of discursive meanings, or talk.
- Therefore, the interpersonal model specifically addresses the social construction of conversational symbols, and the transsituational level will necessarily be required to address how we negotiate conversational symbols and other kinds of meaningful perception as we move from one social event to another.

This much is fairly straightforward, and many symbolic interactionists will likely agree. But, after a discussion of the interpersonal framework, very little has been said about meaning. At this point, let us begin to address the transsituational level of meaningful perception. In other words, given the triadic framework we can speak about how actors create meaningful symbols together in interaction. But now we need to address how our meaningful perceptions are continually organized and reorganized as we move from one interpersonal interaction to another, from one social event to another.

While the triadic framework amply explicates the genesis of meaningful symbols on the interpersonal level, it does not account for the ongoing juxtaposition of ever-changing meanings over time and across space, both within each actor and among actors collectively. Thus, we need to address the dynamic level of transsituational meaning in order to establish the manner in which actors negotiate socially constructed meanings from one situation to another. The transsituational framework addresses the subjective organization of meaning across conversational interactions. Generally speaking, symbolic interactionists need to do this in order to inform four critical issues: (1) how meanings change and vary across situations and over time, (2) how it is that actors transcend one situation after another in a meaningful way in spite of perpetual change and variation in meanings, (3) how individuals begin to effect innovations in culture, and (4) how we may begin to address nonnormative meaningful experience (e.g., in the experience of Autistic perception).

THE TRANSSITUATIONAL LEVEL OF MEANING

Mead and Peirce have an image of the human being as an experimental scientist. Mead's original conceptualization of interactionist concepts rests on the pragmatist notion that there is an analogue between evolutionary processes and human behavior. This derives from the pragmatist tenet of universal realism, which states that different levels of reality reflect one another. The argument specifically leads to the conclusion that everyday human thought processes are a metaphorical analogy of scientific thought processes. As such, the scientific method is an expression of probing and exploratory dynamics that must be reflected in everyday human thought processes.

There are many insightful passages in the writings of Peirce and Mead. Furthermore, one might arguably label Langer as a pragmatist, though she did not label herself as such. There are many profound aspects of the philosophy of pragmatism as found in the writings of Peirce and Mead that lend social psychologists more interesting advantages than do other philosophical orientations. But, if we can summarize the philosophy of pragmatism, and in so doing summarize the writings of Peirce, Mead, and every commentator on their work, we can do it in the following way:

The single most important tenet of the philosophy of pragmatism may be said to be the philosophical claim that the scientific method may be held up as a metaphorical analogy of the cognitive and affective dynamics implied in the everyday human experience.

By implication, Mead and Peirce do argue that logic is part of everyday life, because logic is part of the apparatus of scientific activity. In very specific words, Peirce, Mead, and Langer do argue that logic is endemic to the everyday human experience. However, both Mead's and Langer's vision of logic is incomplete inasmuch as they fail to distinguish among the types of logic humans employ as they subjectively organize their meaningful perception. We can extend Mead's and Langer's thinking by interleaving the contemporary conceptualization of logical inference, which was in fact first elaborated by Peirce, with the ideas regarding human thought as a problem-solving analogue to evolutionary processes. Thus, we will explore how Peirce's conceptualization of the three modes of logical inference—induction, deduction, abduction—can be interrelated with Mead's and Langer's perspectives on the sociology of everyday reasoning.

The Motivational Structure of Transsituational Meaning

Regarding the motivational aspect of our meaningful perception in symbolic interaction, we can approach the issue in a straightforward fashion. Recall that a fundamental premise was posited in the introduction: Meaningful perception is a goal-oriented activity. Specifically, the goal of meaningful perception is to gauge the relations between behavior and its affective outcomes, on the part of self and others. This implies that there is a motivation, a strategy, and a goal in the meaningful perception of every social event.

These ideas are reflected in many areas of academic thought. The work of sociolinguist Allen Grimshaw is based, in part, on the premise of actors subscribing to the schema of a goal, an instrumentality based in talk for achieving the goal, and the desired ends themselves. Allowing ourselves to be informed from this sociolinguistic perspective is particularly interesting and relevant because our study of meaningful perception is largely focused on conversational interaction. Grimshaw claims to only study ambiguity in talk, and how actors repair breaks of ambiguity in talk. His work highlights the repair processes of talk, processes of reaffirming understanding that he points out require more than formal logic for their perpetuation. They require sensitivity to cultural context, which is more than formal logic could ever provide. Though Grimshaw has never claimed to study meaning, his work might possibly be interpreted as informing a study in meaning, because meaning and ambiguity coexist in symbolic interaction.

Thus, we will assume the motivational component of the subjective organization of meaningful perception entails the following structure:

Motivation → Strategy → Affective Goal

Later, we discuss the affective goals of symbolic interaction as centering around the emotions of pride and humiliation. For now, we can state that the goal of meaningful perception is to approach pride and to avoid humiliation, though it is never that simple in reality. The interrelation between pride and humiliation entails the ambiguous drama of life. The strategies, or instrumentalities, of meaningful perception are based in social inferencing processes. And the ends of meaningful perception are inferred in a retrospective act as soon as they have been experienced. These logical inferences may be located specifically in the syntactic structure of meaningful perception, which we will now discuss at length.

The ends of symbolic interaction are perpetually being evaluated. Although strategic seeking out of pride and humiliation is complex, it is entailed in the perpetual goal-oriented nature of meaningful perception. In a sense, there are ends in the form of prideful and humiliating emotions that we seek out and avoid. These dynamics account for motivation in meaningful perception, a motivation that helps shore up actors' perceptions on a transsituational level as they move from one social event to another.

In the remainder of this chapter we will discuss the organizational dynamics that underlie our meaningful perceptions of the world. This organizational component can be referred to as the syntactic structuring that coexists with the motivational, or semantic, structure above. In other words, we can speak about the semantic structure of meaningful perception in terms of Motivation → Strategy → Affective Goal. And we can speak of the syntactic structure of meaningful perception by focusing on the self-regulating and self-organizing capacity of the brain to engage in logical inferences that yield meaningful perceptions of Motivation → Strategy → Affective Goal. So, the motivational, or semantic, structure of meaningful perception addresses *what* meanings we engage, and the organizational, or syntactic, structure of meaningful perception addresses *how* we derive those meanings.

The Organizational Structure of Transsituational Meaning

The only installment regarding the transsituational level of meaningful perception is one that addresses the subjective organization of transsituational meaning. How do individuals continually organize their meaningful perceptions as they move from one social event to another? This is the question being addressed in Mead's emergence/relativity framework. We can also refer to the work of symbolic interactionist Peter McHugh in discussing this framework because McHugh's (1968) book, *Defining the Situation: The Organization of Meaning in Social Interaction*, is an innovative attempt to further Mead's original ideas, and his research has as much bearing on this chapter's ideas as Mead's. Mead outlined the emergence/relativity framework in his book *Philosophy of the Present* (1932), in an attempt to deal with the problem of order, specifically the organizational structure of transsituational meaning. McHugh points out that these concepts of emergence and relativity need to be extended if they are to fulfill their promise because these ideas are main elements in the solution of the issue, but they are not yet entirely clear or specific. So we will ultimately have to include other ideas to fulfill the agenda.

Mead's strategy for developing the emergence/relativity framework is to relate the fundamental components of social experience to the fundamental qualities of social experience: