Agency

The Relation between Meaning, Power, and Knowledge

by Paul Kockelman

Using a Peircean theory of meaning, agency may be theorized in terms of flexibility and accountability, on the one hand, and knowledge and power, on the other. In this theory, residential agency, which is closest to notions such as "power" and "choice," is the degree to which one can control the expression of a sign, compose a sign-object relation, and commit to an interpretant of this sign-object relation. Representational agency, which is closest to notions such as "knowledge" and "consciousness," is the degree to which one can thematize a process, characterize a feature of this theme, and reason with this theme-character relation. Agency, as a kind of social and semiotic facility, is thereby theorized as multidimensional, graduated, and distributed. This theory allows one to analyze, as concomitant phenomena, the *longue durée* processes that underlie relatively perduring institutions and the real-time practices that support relatively fleeting interactions. Finally, it highlights the theoretical and empirical terrain shared by linguistic anthropology, science and technology studies, political economy, and critical theory.

Agency might initially be understood as the relatively flexible wielding of means toward ends. For example, one can use a range of tools to achieve a specific goal, or one can use a specific tool to achieve a range of goals. In this way, flexibility may involve having lots of options open or having a strong say in which particular option will be acted on. And to say that one entity has more agency than another entity is to say that it has more flexibility—relatively more means and ends to choose from (in some given environment, or under some given conditions). For example, in contrast to other animals, humans seem to have a much wider array of both means and ends—where these may be alternately framed as tools and goals, beliefs and desires, or knowledge and value. Finally, with this flexibility usually comes accountability: the more agency one has over some process, the more one can be held responsible for its outcome and thereby be subject to praise or blame, reward or punishment, pride or shame.

With regard to such human-specific modes of flexibility and accountability, the classical tradition has given us several key ideas.[1] First, humans make themselves, both individually and collectively. Negatively viewed, this means that their behavior is not subject to the same laws as the physical world more generally (they become relatively unpredictable); positively viewed, it means that they may have relatively unme-

diated access to the principles underlying their own behavior. Second, humans engage in this self-creation under conditions that are not of their own choosing. Positively viewed, this conditional mediation may be understood as a "tradition" or "source"; negatively viewed, it may be understood as a "structure" or "shackles." Third, humans have some species-specific capacity that allows for this condition-mediated self-creation. This capacity is sometimes understood as a faculty or organ (imagination, mind, *langue*, consciousness, etc.) and sometimes as a facility or ergon (intersubjectivity, semiosis, culture, *parole*, dialogue, etc.). And finally, humans have an ethical responsibility not to let this capacity lie dormant and thus to seize control of the mediating conditions under which they create themselves.[2]

The modern tradition has also given us several key ideas regarding agency, and they relate to the classical tradition in crosscutting ways (cf. Ahearn 2001*a*; Colapietro 1989). First, agency is understood as a kind of inherent human capacity, sometimes phrased as an instinct for hope or rebellion and sometimes as a faculty such as free will or choice. Such ideas are often as disheartening as they are empowering. For example, paraphrasing Gorky, conditions will never be so good that human beings will not yearn or struggle for something

Paul Kockelman is Assistant Professor of Anthropology at Barnard College, Columbia University (3009 Broadway, New York, NY 10027, U.S.A. [pk2113@columbia.edu]). This paper was submitted 11 V 05 and accepted 13 X 06.

1. The point of this review is to provide an analytic typology of various key moves in the theorization of agency, not to provide an intellectual history of their origins or originators.

2. Marx, for example, most forcefully articulated four of these senses in now-classic statements, and scholars like Isaiah Berlin (1992) have argued that Herder and Vico are the key progenitors of these ideas.

better, and, paraphrasing Sartre, man is condemned to choose. Second, agency is understood as a kind of resistance or reactance. From dragging one's heels to putting up one's fists and from obstinacy to insurgency, this sense of agency presupposes some system or antagonist that one is resisting or reacting to—be it the patriarchy, the oligarchy, the corporation, the status quo, the "man," the military industrial complex, capitalism, colonialism, globalization, Satan, temptation, ignorance, illiteracy, injustice, communism, or one's penchant for drink. And finally, agency is understood as a kind of mediating relationality. This last sense of agency is the most interesting and is basically a restatement of the classical tradition: we make ourselves, but not under conditions of our own choosing. This might be understood as Gramscian hegemony: having no choice about the field of options within which one may freely choose. It might be understood as a kind of two-stroke functionalism: we desire to produce that which produces our desire. And it might be understood in terms of structuration or practice theory: the ways in which an interaction-structuring system is continually restructured in interaction (cf. Giddens 1979, 66, and Bourdieu 1977 [1972]).

Finally, there is the Baconian tradition, in which agency might be understood as just another word for knowledge and power. To paraphrase Francis Bacon—and taking the term nature to include "second nature"—if the task of knowledge is to find for a given nature the source of its coming-to-be, the task of power is to superinduce on a given body a new nature (Bacon 2000 [1620], 102). Michel Foucault's (1995) famous distinction between *savoir* and *pouvoir* is grounded in this tradition, as is Ian Hacking's (1993) distinction between representation and intervention. In this way, modern understandings of science and technology are fundamentally related to various traditions of agency.

In this essay, the foregoing ideas of flexibility and accountability, on the one hand, and knowledge and power, on the other, are brought together to theorize agency in terms of a Peircean-based theory of meaning. In particular, *residential agency*, which is closest to "power" and "choice," will be defined as the degree to which one can (1) control the expression of a sign (e.g., determine where and when it may be expressed), (2) compose a sign-object relation (e.g., determine what object a sign stands for and/or which sign stands for that object), and (3) commit to an interpretant of this sign-object relation (e.g., determine what effect the expression of the sign will have so far as it stands for that object). *Representational agency*, which is closest to "knowledge" and "con-

sciousness," will be defined as the degree to which one can (1) thematize a process (e.g., determine what we talk about), (2) characterize a feature of this theme (e.g., determine what we say regarding what we talk about), and (3) reason with this theme-character relation (e.g., determine what we conclude from, or use to conclude, what we say regarding what we talk about). In short, if residential agency involves having power over social, semiotic, and material processes, representational agency involves having knowledge about social, semiotic, and material processes.

In this way, agency will be defined as two sets of three distinct dimensions, each variable by degree. Each of these dimensions will be motivated by a particular understanding of meaning. Various degrees of agency along any one of these dimensions will be seen to depend on semiotic properties of signs, social properties of semiotic communities, and cognitive properties of signers. Accountability will be seen to scale with the degree of agency one has over each of these dimensions. And, as implied in these definitions, agency will be shown not to necessarily (or even usually) inhere in specific people: the "one" in question can be distributed over time (now and then), space (here and there), unit (superindividual and subindividual), number (one and several), entity (human and nonhuman), and individual (Tom and Jane). Thus agency will be seen to involve processes which are multidimensional, graduated, and distributed.

The next section introduces the key components of a Peircean-based theory of meaning: sign, object, interpretant; iconic, indexical, symbolic; affective, energetic, representational. These terms and their interrelations will form the backbone of this theory. The following section defines residential agency and exemplifies its key dimensions. The next treats representational agency and relates it to Boasian notions such as "consciousness" and the nature of epistemology more generally. The next relates residential and representational agency to accountability. It treats the ways in which one's responsibility for some process relates to one's degree of agency over that process and the ways in which communities differ in regard to their construal of this relation.

The Meaning of Meaning

Semiotics is the study of semiosis, or "meaning," a process which involves three components: *signs* (whatever stands for something else), *objects* (whatever a sign stands for), and *interpretants* (whatever a sign creates insofar as it stands for an object) (table 1). In particular, any *semiotic process* relates these

Table 1. Summary of Semiotic Categories

Semiotic Process	Sign-Object Relation	Interpretant	Phenomenology
Sign	Iconic (Quality)	Affective	Firstness
Object	Indexical (Contiguity)	Energetic	Secondness
Interpretant	Symbolic (Convention)	Representational	Thirdness

three components in the following way: a sign stands for its object, on the one hand, and its interpretant, on the other, in such a way as to make the interpretant stand in relation to the object corresponding to its own relation to the object (Kockelman 2005; and see Peirce 1934, 8.332).[3] What is at issue in meaningfulness, then, is not one relation between a sign and an object (qua "standing for") but rather a relation between two such relations (qua "correspondence"). The logic of this relation between relations is shown in figure 1.

For example, *joint attention* is a semiotic process. In particular, turning to observe what someone else is observing or turning to look where someone else is pointing involves an interpretant (a change of attention), an object (what the other person is attending to, or pointing toward), and a sign (the other person's direction of attention or gesture that directs attention). As Mead (1934) noted, any *interaction* is a semiotic process. For example, if I pull back my fist (first phase of an action, or the sign), you duck (reaction, or the interpretant) on the assumption that my next move (second phase of action, or the object) will be to punch you. Generalizing interaction, *the pair-part structures* of everyday interaction—the fact that questions are usually followed by answers, offers by acceptances, commands by undertakings, assessments by agreements, and so forth—consist of semiotic processes in which two components (the sign and interpretant) are foregrounded. In particular, a type of utterance (or action) gives rise to another type of utterance (or action) insofar as it is understood to express a proposition (or purpose).

Indeed, the constituents of so-called material culture are semiotic processes (Kockelman 2006*a*). For example, an *affordance* is a semiotic process whose sign is a natural feature, whose object is a purchase, and whose key interpretant is an action that heeds that feature or an instrument that incorporates that feature (to the extent that the feature "provides purchase"). For example, walking carefully over a frozen pond (as an action) is an interpretant of the purchase provided by ice (as an affordance) insofar as such a form of movement heeds the slipperiness of ice. An *instrument* is a semiotic process whose sign is an artificial entity, whose object is a function, and whose key interpretant is an action that wields that entity or another instrument that incorporates that instrument (to the extent that it "serves a function"). For example, a knife (as an instrument) is an interpretant of the function served by steel (as another instrument) insofar as such a tool incorporates the hardness and sharpness of steel. And an *ac-*

Figure 1. Semiosis as a relation between relations. A sign stands for its object (*a*) and its interpretant (*b*) in such a way as to bring the latter into a relation to the former (*c*) *corresponding to* its own relation to the former (*a*).

tion is a semiotic process whose sign is a controlled behavior, whose object is a purpose, and whose key interpretant is another action that reacts to that action (qua interaction), an instrument that is realized by that action or a subsequent action (by the same actor) that incorporates that action. For example, a pie (as an instrument) provides an interpretant of the purpose of baking (as an action) insofar as it is the realization (or "objectification") of the telos of baking.

It is apparent from these examples that signs can be eye-directions, pointing gestures, utterances, controlled behaviors, environmental features, and artificial entities. Objects can be the focus of attention, purposes, propositions, and functions. And interpretants can be other utterances, changes in attention, reactions, instruments, and heeding and wielding actions. Very few of these interpretants are "in the minds" of the interpreters, yet all of these semiotic processes embody properties normally associated with mental entities: attention, desire, purpose, propositionality, thoughts, and goals. Very few of these signs are addressed to the interpreters (in the sense of purposely expressed for the sake of their interpretants), and therefore most semiotic processes (such as wielding an instrument) are not intentionally communicative. The interpretant component of each of these semiotic processes is itself the sign component of an incipient semiotic process, and therefore the threefold relationality continues indefinitely (a point which will be seen to have fundamental implications for the distribution of agency).

Given the definition of semiotic process offered above, the object of a sign is really that to which all (appropriate and effective) interpretants of that sign correspondingly relate (Kockelman 2005). Objects, then, are relatively abstract entities by definition. They should not be confused with "objects" in the Cartesian sense of *res extensa*, nor should they

---

3. Peirce's collected writings are not only vast and complicated but also often opaque and contradictory. The following framework, then, while in the spirit of Peirce, is not to the letter. It is meant to be simple without being simplistic. A justification and elaboration of this interpretation of Peirce may be found in Kockelman (2005, 2006*d*), and an extension of this framework to account for economic value may be found in Kockelman (2006*b*). Alternative but compatible approaches to Peirce—at once technical, philosophical, ethnographic, and aesthetic—include Colapietro (1989), Daniels (1984, 1997), and Parmentier (1994). Their work is primary reading for any anthropologist interested in Peirce.
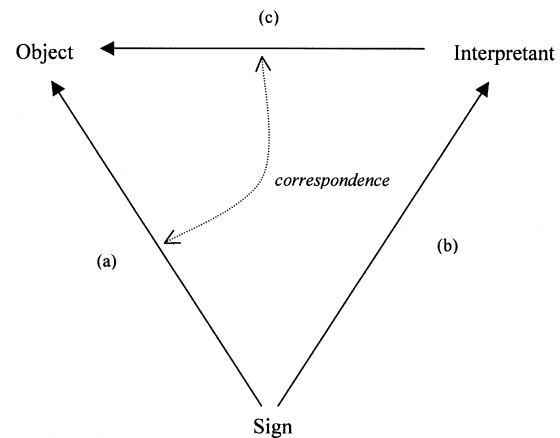
be confused with the "things" that words seem to stand for.[4] Indeed, it is best to think of the object as a *correspondence-preserving projection* from all interpretants of a sign. It may be more or less precise and more or less consistent, as seen by the dotted portion of figure 2.

For example, if a cat's purr is a sign, the object of that sign is a correspondence-preserving projection from the set of behaviors (or interpretants) humans may or must perform (within some particular community) in the context of and because of a cat's purr: pick it up and pet it, stroke it under the chin, exclaim "Oh, that's so cute!", offer a sympathetic low guttural, stay seated petting it even when one needs to pee, and so on. Needless to say, humans tend to objectify such objects by glossing them in terms of physiology (say, the "purr-organ" has been activated), emotion (say, "She must be contented"), or purpose (say, "She wants me to continue petting her"). Similarly, saying that the object of an instrument is a function means that a function is a correspondence-preserving projection of the ensemble of behaviors (qua interpretants) that one is (normatively) entitled or committed to do while wielding the instrument: appropriate and effective actions that one may use the instrument to undertake.

In Peircean semiotics, the relation between sign and object is fundamental and is sometimes referred to as the "ground" (Parmentier 1994, 4; Peirce 1955a). Famously, in the case of *symbols*, this relation is arbitrary and is usually thought to reside in "convention." Examples include words like "boy" and "run." In the case of *indices*, this relation is based in spatiotemporal and/or causal contiguity. Examples include exclamations like "Ouch!" and symptoms like fever. And in the case of *icons*, this relation is based in similarity of qualities (such as shape, size, color, or texture). Examples include portraits and diagrams. The same object may be stood for by a symbol (say, the word "dogs"), an index (say, pointing to a dog), or an icon (say, a picture of a dog). When Saussure speaks of the "arbitrary" and the "motivated" (1983 [1916]), he is really speaking about semiotic processes whose sign-object relations are relatively symbolic versus relatively iconic-indexical (table 1).

While many anthropologists are familiar with Peirce's distinction between icons, indices, and symbols, most are not familiar with his threefold typology of interpretants. In particular, as inspired by Peirce, there are three basic types of interpretants (1955c, 276–77; Kockelman 2005). An *affective interpretant* is a change in one's bodily state. It can range from an increase in metabolism to a blush, from a feeling of pain to a feeling of being off-balance, from sweating to an erection. This change in bodily state is itself a sign that is potentially perceptible to the body's owner or to others who can perceive the owner's body. And, as signs themselves, these interpretants may lead to subsequent and perhaps more developed inter-
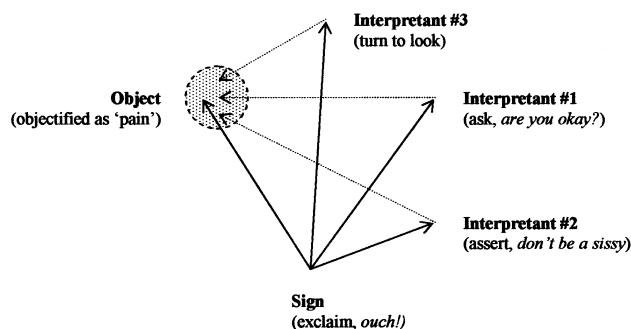

Figure 2. Object as a correspondence-preserving projection. The object of a sign is that to which all appropriate and effective interpretants of that sign correspondingly relate. It may be understood as a correspondence-preserving projection from all interpretants.

pretants. *Energetic interpretants* involve effort and individual causality; they do not necessarily involve purpose, intention, or planning. For example, flinching at the sound of a gun is an energetic interpretant, as are craning one's neck to see what made a sound, saluting a superior, wielding an instrument (say, pounding in a nail with a hammer), and heeding an affordance (say, tiptoeing on a creaky floor). And *representational interpretants* are signs with prepositional content, such as an assertion (or explicit speech act more generally). Thus, to describe someone's movement as "He raised his hand" is to offer an interpretant of such a controlled behavior (qua sign) to the extent that it has a purpose (qua object). And therefore, while such representations are signs (that may be subsequently interpreted), they are also interpretants (of prior signs). Finally, it should be emphasized that the same sign can lead to different kinds of interpretants, sometimes simultaneously and sometimes sequentially. For example, upon being exposed to a violent image, one may blush (affective interpretant), avert one's gaze (energetic interpretant), or say "That shocks me" (representational interpretant) (table 1).

Finally, each of these three types of interpretants may be paired with a slightly more abstract double, known as an *ultimate interpretant* (cf. Peirce 1955c, 277). In particular, an *ultimate affective interpretant* is not a change in bodily state per se but rather a disposition for one's bodily state to change. Such an interpretant, then, is not itself a sign but is evinced only in a pattern of behavior (as the exercise of that disposition). Analogously, an *ultimate energetic interpretant* is a disposition to behave in certain ways as evinced in purposeful and nonpurposeful behaviors. And finally, an *ultimate representational interpretant* is the propositional content of a representational interpretant, plus all the propositions that may be inferred from it, when all of these propositions are embodied in a change of habit, as evinced in behavior that conforms to these propositional contents. For example, a *belief* is the quintessential ultimate representational interpretant: in

---

4. A Cartesian object may constitute the raison d'être of a semiotic object and thereby provide a rationale for all the interpretants of the sign that stands for that object.

being committed to a proposition (i.e., "holding a belief"), one is also committed to any propositions that may be inferred from it, and one's commitment to this inferentially articulated set of propositions is evinced in one's behavior: what one is likely or unlikely to do or say insofar as it confirms or contradicts these propositional contents. These ultimate interpretants are not signs in themselves: while they dispose one toward certain behaviors (affectual, energetic, representational), they are not the behaviors per se but rather dispositions to behave in certain ways. Ultimate interpretants are therefore a very precise way of accounting for a habitus, which, in some sense, is just an ensemble of ultimate interpretants as embodied in an individual and as distributed among members of a community (cf. Bourdieu 1977 [1972]).

While such a sixfold typology of interpretants may seem complicated at first, it should accord with one's intuitions. Indeed, most emotions really involve a complicated bundling together of all these types of interpretants (Kockelman 2005, 2006b). For example, upon hearing a gunshot (as a sign), one may be suffused with adrenaline (affective interpretant); one may make a frightened face (relatively nonpurposeful energetic interpretant); one may run to see what happened (relatively purposeful energetic interpretant); and one may say "That scared the hell out of me" (representational interpretant). Moreover, one may forever tremble at the sight of the woods (ultimate affective interpretant); one may never go into that part of the woods again (ultimate energetic interpretant); and one may forever believe that the woods are filled with dangerous men (ultimate representational interpretant). In this way, most so-called emotions may be decomposed into a bouquet of more basic and varied interpretants, and the seemingly most subjective forms of experience may be reframed in terms of their intersubjective effects.

Putting all the foregoing ideas together, four sets of threefold distinctions may be identified. First, any semiotic process has three components: sign, object, interpretant. There are three kinds of sign-object relations, or grounds: iconicity (quality), indexicality (contiguity), and symbolism (convention). And there are three kinds of interpretants: affective, energetic, and representational (along with their ultimate variants). Finally, Peirce's categories of firstness, secondness, and thirdness (1955b), while notoriously difficult to define, are best understood as genus categories that include the foregoing categories as species (table 1). In particular, firstness is to secondness is to thirdness as sign is to object is to interpretant, as iconic is to indexical is to symbolic, as affective is to energetic is to representational. In what follows, this threefold relationship will undergird a theory of agency.

Residential Agency

Residential agency describes the degree to which one may control the expression of a sign, compose the relation between a sign and an object, and commit to the interpretant of this sign-object relation.[5] To *control* the expression of a sign means to

5. Readers familiar with Goffman should hear echoes of his decomposition of the speaker into participant roles. In particular, in his article "Footing" (1981; and see Kockelman 2004), Goffman decomposed the notion of "speaker" into a number of more basic roles: animator, author, and principal (p. 120). The *animator* is "a body engaged in acoustic activity" (p. 144), the one who physically produces the utterance in question. The *author* is "someone who has selected the sentiments that are being expressed and the words in which they are encoded," and the *principal* is "someone whose position is established by the words that are spoken, someone whose beliefs have been told, someone who is committed to what the words say." In short, the animator says the words, the author composes the words said, and the principal shoulders responsibility for what the words say. As Goffman noted, the same individual does not necessarily inhabit all these participant roles at once. For example, in reported speech authors and principals are disambiguated from animators, and in presidential addresses principals and animators are disambiguated from authors (pp. 145–46). Thus, only when a single individual inhabits all three of Goffman's roles do we have a prototypical speaker.

Notwithstanding the family resemblance between them, participant roles and residential agency should not be confused. First, Goffman's system of participant roles was designed for linguistic signs; residential agency works for any semiotic process. Second, Goffman cannot account for why his system has three terms and not two or four, one or eight. In contrast, residential agency is phrased in terms of thirdness: control the expression of a sign, compose a sign-object relation, and commit to an interpretant of this relation. In this way, it provides a reason for the logic of its own system (in terms of a particular theory of meaning), and it provides much more precise definitions of its various dimensions. Thus, there are three dimensions to residential agency for the same reason that there are three components of any semiotic process, three types of sign-object relations, and so forth.

Third, Goffman has nothing like representational agency to go hand in hand with residential agency, and, in general, he is not theorizing agency as a larger category of social theory but theorizing particular features of interaction that occur in linguistic communication. In this sense, his theory is much narrower in scope.

Fourth, while Goffman takes up incumbency (the idea that different individuals can inhabit different participant roles or that different entities can be involved in different dimensions of agency), he never takes up the crucial question of *degree*: that there are different degrees of control, composition, and commitment as a function of the semiotic or social process at issue. Rather, he takes the inhabitation of participant roles to be an all-or-nothing affair: one is an author or animator or not; one is never more or less of an author or animator. This is probably because he understands his categories as roles (animator, author, principal) and not as both roles and relations (controller and control, composer and composition, committer and commitment). Thus, an animator for Goffman is just the acoustic box (a "speaker" in Sony's sense of the term), whereas a controller is that which determines the time and place of the expression of a sign, and control is a way of gauging the degree to which the controller determines this (which itself depends on semiotic and social factors, as just discussed).

Fifth, and perhaps most important, while there is a close parallel between animator and controller, on the one hand, and author and composer, on the other, the potential parallel between principal and committer is a false one. In particular, Goffman's notion of principal is really a way of describing who bears responsibility for the repercussions of some utterance (the principal is the one who believes what is said or intends to do what is promised), and therefore the principal is really the one who can be held accountable for the utterance. In contrast, commitment is grounded in Mead and Vygotsky's notion of internalization: the degree to which one anticipates an interpretant, where this antici-

determine its position in space and time. Loosely speaking, one determines where and when a sign is expressed. To *compose* the relation between a sign and an object means to determine what object is stood for by a sign and/or which sign stands for this object. Loosely speaking, one determines what meaning is expressed and/or how this meaning is expressed. And to *commit* to the interpretant of a sign-object relation means to determine what effect the expression of a sign will have to the extent that it stands for a particular object. It is the degree to which one may anticipate an interpretant, where this anticipation is evinced in being surprised by and/or disposed to sanction unanticipated interpretants.[6] Loosely speaking, one determines why and/or to what effect a sign is expressed.

For example, controlling the expression of a sign may involve determining when and where an utterance is spoken, an instrument is wielded, or an action is undertaken. Composing a sign-object relation may involve determining which utterance is spoken, which instrument is wielded, or which action is undertaken. And committing to an interpretant of this sign-object relation may involve determining what effect the utterance will have when and where it is spoken, what result the instrument will have when and where it is wielded, or what the outcome of the action will be when and where it is undertaken. Phrasing all these points about residential agency in an Aristotelian idiom, the committer determines the end, the composer determines the means, and the controller determines when and where the means will be wielded for the end. In this way, one may distinguish between instigator-based agency (control: when and where), means-based agency (composition: what and how), and ends-based agency (commitment: why and to what effect).

---

pation is evinced in being surprised by and/or disposed to sanction unanticipated interpretants.

Indeed, it may be argued that Goffman is working with a Saussurian theory of meaning, grounded in a two-term distinction (signifier and signified), which thereby provides two roles: animator (the one who utters the signifier) and author (the one who chooses which signifier to utter and thereby what meaning is signified). His principal is really not of the same order as these other two terms but a second-order interpretation of the relative responsibility of the speaker for what he or she says. In other words, in bringing together animator, author, and principal as three species of a common genus, Goffman conflates two different orders of analysis: analytic categories of agency and local theories of how implication in these categories relates to the agent's degree of accountability.

In contrast, the correct move is to have three first-order pieces (control, composition, and commitment), themselves grounded in a Peircean theory of semiosis (sign, object, interpretant) rather than a Saussurean theory of semiology (signifier, signified), and then add to them a second-order piece: local understandings, within some semiotic community, of how one's accountability for the outcome of some semiotic process (see below) turns on one's degree of control, composition, and commitment over the various components of that semiotic process.

6. Commitment is not the same as address. In particular, an *addressed* semiotic process is one whose interpretant a signer commits to and one whose sign is expressed for the purpose of that interpretant. In this way, address presupposes commitment but not vice versa. Address may be *overt* or *covert* depending on whether the interpreter is meant to (or may easily) infer the signer's commitment and purpose.

As should now be clear, this theory of residential agency is grounded in Peirce's theory of semiosis. In particular, there are three dimensions to residential agency for the same reason that there are three components to any semiotic process: control involves signs (firstness), composition involves the relation between signs and objects (secondness), and commitment involves interpretants of sign-object relations (thirdness). Moreover, Peirce's theory not only justifies the number of dimensions but also provides a means for determining the relative degree of agency one may have over each of these three dimensions with regard to various kinds of semiotic processes. For example, indexical signs (such as pointing) involve a relationship of spatial-temporal contiguity with their objects. This means that such signs may be expressed only in the context of such objects, and therefore the signer has relatively less control with indices than with symbols (whose relationship with their objects is based in convention rather than contiguity). In other words, the spatial and temporal location of the objects of indices constrain the where and the when of the expression of the signs that stand for them. Indeed, not only do indices constrain one's control over the expression of a sign but also they constrain one's composition of the sign-object relation. In other words, whereas symbols may be used to indicate objects that exist in or outside of the immediate context, indexical signs may be used only to indicate objects that exist in that context.

For example, a relatively indexical sign like "Ouch!" must usually be said in contiguity with the pain that causes it, whereas a relatively symbolic sign like "That really hurt" may be used to talk about a painful experience anytime after it occurs (Kockelman 2003). Moreover, because of the complicated grammar and extensive vocabulary that are part and parcel of linguistic symbols, speakers of natural languages have an incredible degree of composition—which is another way of phrasing von Humboldt's understanding of language as infinite ends (qua utterances) with finite means (qua grammar and vocabulary). For example, whereas there are a finite number of interjections for indicating pain, using the vocabulary and grammar of a language one may describe an infinite variety of different kinds of painful events, which may be more or less displaced from (or noncontiguous with) the event of speaking. In short, symbols usually allow for greater degrees of control and composition than indices.

Semiotic grounds (iconic, indexical, symbolic) also constrain one's commitment to the interpretant of one's sign-object relation. Mead (1934), for example, makes a famous distinction between the gestural and the symbolic (and see Vygotsky 1978). In particular, he says that "the vocal gesture becomes a significant symbol . . . when it has the same effect on the individual making it that it has on the individual to whom it is addressed or who explicitly responds to it, and thus involves a reference to the self of the individual making it" (p. 46). Symbols for Mead are inherently self-reflexive signs: the signer can anticipate another's interpretant of a sign insofar as the signer can stand in the shoes of the other and

thereby expect and/or predict the other's reaction. In this way, the symbolic for Mead is the realm of behavior in which one can seize control of one's appearance and thereby act for the sake of others' interpretants. All such behavior has the possibility of being intentionally communicative, even if only covertly so. For example, in Mead's terms using a hammer to pound in a nail is gestural, whereas wielding a hammer to (covertly) inform another of one's purpose (rather than or in addition to driving a nail through a board) is symbolic.[7]

Crucially, while Mead's distinction between the gestural and the symbolic relates to Peirce's distinction between index and symbol, they should not be confused. Moreover, Mead's terms should not be confused with the everyday meaning of gesture (say, in comparison with verbal language). Indeed, for Mead, the features of a semiotic process that really contribute to its being a symbol rather than a gesture are whether the ground (or sign-object relation) is symbolic rather than indexical and whether the sign is symmetrically accessible to the signer's and the interpreter's senses. Signs with relatively conventional grounds (in Peirce's sense) are more likely to be symbols (in Mead's sense), and signs with relatively indexical grounds (in Peirce's sense) are more likely to be gestures (in Mead's sense). And by "symmetric" is meant that the sign appears to the signer and interpreter in ways that are sensibly identical: both perceive (hear, see, smell, touch) the sign in more or less the same way. For example, spoken language is relatively symmetric and a facial expression is relatively asymmetric, with sign language being somewhere in the middle. (Mirrors are one of the means we use to make relatively asymmetric signs symmetric.) In short, taking Mead's cues, semiotic processes whose signs are relatively symmetric and whose grounds are relatively symbolic are easier to commit to than semiotic processes whose signs are relatively asymmetric and whose grounds are relatively iconic-indexical. And commitment is crucial because it allows for self-reflexive semiosis, in which a signer has internalized and therefore can anticipate the interpretants of others. Commitment, then, is fundamental to reflexivity as a defining feature of selfhood.

As another example of the relative degrees of agency along each of these three dimensions we may turn to Peirce's typology of interpretants. The interpretant component of a semiotic process is usually the sign component of an incipient semiotic process: interpretants, then, are usually just signs seen from a different semiotic frame. This being the case, we may examine affective, energetic, and representational interpretants—now understood as signs—from the standpoint of residential agency. In particular, relatively speaking, we have more control, composition, and commitment over representational interpretants (as signs, which stand for objects and

give rise to further interpretants) than over energetic interpretants; and we have more control, composition, and commitment over energetic interpretants than over affective interpretants. And this should come as no surprise: representational interpretants are relatively symbolic (in Peirce's and Mead's sense) and relatively symmetric, whereas affective and energetic interpretants are relatively iconic and indexical (in Peirce's sense), gestural (in Mead's sense), and asymmetric. To return to an earlier example, one has less residential agency (relatively speaking) over blushing (affective interpretant) than over averting one's eyes (energetic interpretant) or saying "That disgusts me" (representational interpretant). And, within the domain of energetic interpretants, one has less residential agency over a reaction or nonpurposeful behavior (pulling one's hand away from a flame) than over an action or purposeful behavior (raising one's hand to ask a question).

More canonical examples of distributed residential agency include theater and performance more generally. Laurence Olivier controls or "performs" the character of Hamlet that William Shakespeare composed or "scripted" and whose interpretant (say, either the audience's applause or Ophelia's reaction) both Laurence and William to some shared degree committed to. Indeed, not only may different individuals at different points in space-time inhabit these roles but different pieces of the same individual may inhabit them. For example, with psycholocation we speak metaphorically of the lips' controlling what the mind composes and the heart commits to. Reported speech is a classic example of this kind of distributed agency. Following Goffman, I control (or "animate") what another composed (or "authored"). Or, following Bakhtin, every utterance I make is half my own and half someone else's. In the case of linguistic utterances, this distribution of control and composition across multiple actors at different points in space-time is perhaps the best-theorized mode of residential agency, and much linguistic anthropology in the last decades has focused on related issues under headings such as "authorship," "creativity," and "voice" (key works include Goodwin 1990, Hill 1995, and Irvine 1996).

Also of particular interest to linguistic anthropologists is reference. One can investigate the degree of control and composition one has over the manner in which one refers to some entity with a noun-phrase (when committing to the addressee's identification of its referent): "this guy I met," "Jack," "the man over there," "the guy I was telling you about," "my first husband," "that cad," "this man," "he," ∅ (a null-marker), and so on. In particular, the relative symmetry of the speaker's and addressee's horizons constrains what can be referred to and how—what the speaker can refer to (and how) as a function of what the addressee can identify (and how easily)—as a function of the way the social relation between the speaker and the addressee is currently construed. The work of Brown and Gilman (1972) on pronouns, that of Goodwin (1979) on collaborative reference, and that of Hanks (1990) on deixis is fundamental here. Much semiotic agency is at least as subtle as this, turning on the relative

7. Indeed, it involves commitment (being able to anticipate the interpretant of another), address (purposely expressing a sign—in this case a controlled behavior—for the sake of another's interpretant), and covert address (in which the other is not supposed to recognize one's purpose and commitment).

overlap of participants' experiential, discursive, and cultural horizons and requiring detailed analysis of real-time discursive practices. And this example shows that it is not usually a concrete entity—qua participant in an interaction—that determines participants' control, composition, or commitment but rather the temporally unfolding interaction itself. In other words, the locus of agency may often rest not in the individuals but rather in their ongoing interactions and the institutions that enable these.

Regarding invention or "authorship," there is both composition and commitment. In particular, for semiotic and nonsemiotic instruments (e.g., speech acts or tools), composition may be understood as either "choice" (among a range of pregiven instruments: say, using a flat-head or a Phillips-head screw) or "invention" (adding to the range of pregiven instruments: say, inventing glue). For example, I can compose an utterance using words and rules that are already given, or, if I am Joyce, I can invent new words (e.g., "quark") and/or new rules (e.g., the continuous novel). But this is also true for actions: one can "choose" out of an ensemble of known choices (walking through the woods rather than across the park to get home), or one can "invent" a new means (digging a tunnel or teleporting). Similarly, regarding commitment, one can choose from an already given ensemble of ends or one can invent a new end. For example, I can kill someone to maintain my honor, to earn a sum of money, or to extract revenge. Or, I can act for a personal value—say, to create a motiveless crime. Composition and commitment can be distinguished. For example, one may compose a theory or idea but not commit to any particular interpretant or use of it (think of Leo Szilard and fission in relation to the atomic bomb and Hiroshima). When the constituent in question is an identity, choosing versus inventing (versus mere acceptance) is often phrased in terms of authenticity—the degree to which one can compose (be it choose or invent) and commit to one's identity (and its attendant values) rather than merely be socialized into it (Taylor 1989).

To borrow an example from political economy (Kockelman 2006b), many modern commodities, such as computers, promise greater degrees of agency to their users: by being more and more portable, they allow their users more control; by being more and more personalized, they allow their users more composition; and by being more and more predictable, they allow their users more commitment. This process is now reflexive, such that consumers can now have agency over the production of the commodity in question. For example, one may virtually assemble a car, mixing and matching what kinds of features it could have and even taking the assembled features for a "test-drive" to find out what kinds of performance it will offer. And all of this can be done, with an Internet connection, from the comfort of one's home and prior to the actual purchase or production of the commodity in question.

Finally, the foregoing has emphasized the semiotic constraints on residential agency (that is, how properties of semiotic processes enable and constrain signers' residential agency over them). However, social constraints are just as important and, indeed, part and parcel of semiotic constraints. In particular, one cannot say just anything at any given place and time and expect it to have some particular effect. Rather, as a function of the social relation in which one is implicated, different kinds of semiotic processes are more or less permitted and more or less obligatory. In the case of explicit performative utterances, this is self-evident: not just anyone may say, "You're under arrest" or "I pronounce you husband and wife." And even those people who may make such utterances may not usually make them at any time or in any place. Rather, the rights and responsibilities that make up a social status (such as priest, sheriff, mother, doctor) may often be described in terms of semiotic rights and responsibilities: what kinds of actions and utterances one may or must make as a function of the social context one is in. In this way, a key constraint on our residential agency is the kinds of social statuses we relationally inhabit to the extent that these social statuses enable and constrain semiotic processes as to their when and where (control), their what and how (composition), and their why and to what effect (commitment). In a more formal register, much of what the "law" does is regiment what kinds of actions can be performed or utterances can be made when and where, by whom, and to what effect. In other words, the law regiments the residential agency of those who inhabit different kinds of statuses in a way that is relatively unique in being explicit (laws, in contrast to norms, are articulated in language) and political (laws, in contrast to rules, are promulgated and enforced by a state).

Another key aspect of the social mediation of residential agency is common in social theory: the conditions and consequences of internalizing the "gaze" of another. In particular, Bentham's panopticon, Freud's superego, and Nietzsche's conscience all involve the human-specific ability to regiment one's own behavior as if one were being regimented by someone else (see Foucault 1978, 1995). In a Meadian idiom, all involve symbolic behavior rather than gestural behavior. And in the idiom of semiotic agency, all involve commitment: the ability to anticipate another's interpretant (of one's actions and utterances) and thereby come to act and utter for the sake of these interpretants—or, perhaps more often, for the sake of *staving off* such interpretants. In this way, we all come to act as if we were being watched—as if every move of the self were a sign subject to the interpretation of others. Thus, the panopticon—situated between physical architecture and social institution—is a condition of possibility for prisoners to commit to the interpretants of the semiotic processes in which they are implicated. Here, then, one could offer a history of architectural designs and institutional relationships—from the localized and physical to the networked and digital—that enable or constrain the commitment (control and com-

position) of those whose semiotic processes are implicated in them.

Representational Agency

We have seen that a representation is any sign or interpretant that has a proposition for its object. While the focus so far has been on representational interpretants (for example, saying "That shocks me" upon seeing a violent image), representational signs are much more famous—as evinced in any declarative utterance: "John raised his hand," "The dog vomited on the floor," "My nephew has a fever," "Electrons are charged particles," and so forth. Indeed, such utterances are often simultaneously representational signs and interpretants. For example, the utterance "John raised his hand" is at once an interpretant of John's action (as a semiotic process whose sign is a controlled behavior and whose object is a purpose) and a sign that may be subsequently interpreted. What is crucial about representations is that they have propositions as their objects: this means that they may be true or false and be implicated in logical relations such as induction and deduction. Not only may propositions represent the world correctly or incorrectly but also they may stand as the premises and conclusions of inferences. While most semiotic processes (such as facial expressions, instruments, and joint attention) do not have propositional contents, those that do are implicated in another mode of flexibility that may be called "representational agency."

In particular, *representational agency* describes the degree to which one may thematize a process, characterize a feature of this theme, and reason with this theme-character relation. To *thematize* a process means to determine what the theme or topic of a propositional sign will be. Loosely speaking, one determines what the proposition is "about." In the case of linguistic signs, this is typically called the "topic" (from an informational standpoint) and "reference" (from a functional standpoint). For example,[8] the themes of the foregoing utterances were "John," "the dog," "my nephew," and "electrons." To *characterize* a feature of a thematized process means to determine what properties are attributed to this theme. In the case of linguistic signs, this is typically called the "focus" (from an informational standpoint) and "predication" (from a functional standpoint). For example, the characters of the foregoing utterances were "raised his hand," "vomited on the floor," "has a fever," and "are charged particles." The propositional content of a representation, then, brings together a theme and character. If a theme is what one is talking about,

a character is what one is saying regarding what one is talking about.[9]

If the dimensions of thematization and characterization determine the informational content of a proposition, the dimension of reason determines its epistemological status. In particular, what is crucial about representations is the ways in which they are caught up in knowledge. "Knowledge," needless to say, is a tricky term. In a tradition that extends back to Plato, it will here be treated as *justified true representation* (cf. Brandom 1994, 202; Kockelman 2006c). The term "representation" has just been defined as a sign or interpretant with propositional content, as exemplified by everyday assertions, and "justified" means that the maker of such an assertion (or the holder of such a belief) can provide a reason for that representation if called upon by other members of some community. Justification, then, fundamentally turns on the epistemological norms of a community, and different communities have different understandings of what counts as a good reason for one's representations. Often, what is involved is a particular kind of source event upon which the representation is based (Kockelman 2004). For example, how do I know that the dog vomited on the floor? My sister told me (and she is known to be of sound mind, sharp eyes, and good character). How do I know it will rain? I see dark clouds on the horizon (and this provides a compelling reason for such an inference in this climate given my past experience). Such source events may turn on various kinds of perception (seeing, hearing, tasting, touching), modes of report (firsthand, secondhand, thirdhand, gossip, myth), and modes of inference (deductive or inductive, sound or valid). This means that representations are not just inferentially articulated but also indexically grounded. They are caught up in both logical and causal relations.

The term "true" is slightly trickier only because there are so many folk understandings of what it should be. Usually it is taken to be something like correspondence between one's assertion and the state of affairs. As used here, however, it refers to the unchallengeability of one's assertion in the context of one's addressees (see Kockelman 2004). In particular, for a speaker's representation to be "true" means that others subsequently use this representation as a reason for further representations. In this way, it licenses them to make further claims that take one's initial representation for granted as an assumption; moreover, if called upon to justify these further claims, they may refer back to one's initial representation as a reason (Brandom 1994; Kockelman 2006c). Thus, my rep-

---

8. Strictly speaking, one has representational agency over that which is being represented (e.g., some person, instrument, action, thing, or event), not over that which is being used to represent it—over which one, rather, has residential agency. In other words, representational agency involves using signs with propositional content to represent some state of affairs: it is the state of affairs over which one has representational agency.

9. As linguists know, the status of topics and foci can be quite complicated in real-time interaction. For the purposes of the present argument, the emphasis is on topic-comment structure. Readers interested in seeing how these ideas relate to a more sophisticated discursive-linguistic framework are urged to read Chafe (1998), Lambrecht (1994), and Van Valin and LaPolla (1997 chap. 5). Finally, one should consult Peirce's related distinctions between rhematic signs, dicent signs, and argument signs (1955a, 103–4).

resentation that the dog vomited on the floor is "true" to the extent that your reaction is to ask what I cleaned it up with or to demand to know what I've been feeding the dog or to report the dog's having vomited to a friend over the phone, and so forth. In this way, truth is not (primarily) a question of correspondence between an assertion and the state of affairs but rather a question of the social relation between a speaker and an addressee—in particular, the ways in which the addressee—or addressees, however distal, sundry, or unsuspecting—takes up one's claim and thereby presumes it in subsequent actions. (Needless to say, the latter can be a function of the former, and in the case of scientific epistemic communities, we hope that it is, so this definition is in no way meant to eschew various forms of realism, as should be apparent from the indexical grounding of justification.)

Finally, in cases of self-reflexive semiosis (such as talking to oneself and thinking), mathematical demonstrations, legal arguments, political debates, and so forth, the dimension of reason may involve the most stereotypic and celebrated of logical processes: the degree to which one may use one's current representation to infer a new representation and/or the degree to which one has used an old representation to infer one's current representation. Here, then, reasoning is directly tied to inference—the logical (cognitive and semiotic) resources we have for moving from premises to conclusions: deduction, induction, abduction. Examples range from the *Gedanken* experiments of theoretical physicists to the confidence intervals of experimental psychologists, from Bayesian learning to Popper's deductivism, from Venn diagrams to Aristotelian syllogisms. Representational agency, then, turns as much on how we argue as on what we argue about.

In short, and loosely speaking, one may distinguish between theme-based representational agency (what we are talking about), character-based representational agency (what we are saying about what we are talking about), and reason-based representational agency (what are we concluding from, or what we have used to conclude, what we are saying about what we are talking about). To have representational agency is to be able to refer, predicate, and infer—or, if one wants to open up the analysis to include "thinking" (and the internal representations of cognitive scientists), what we are representing, how we are representing what we are representing, and what other representations were used to infer this representation (or were inferred from this representation).

The ways in which our most quotidian representations are caught up in information (theme and character) and knowledge (justified and true information) may be called *the epistemology of the everyday*. Very similar processes on much more elaborated scales provide the foundations for modern scientific research as well. Indeed, an episteme—in Foucault's (1978) sense—may be couched in terms of the dimensions of representational agency: different research traditions have different objects of study (thematization), different questions they pose about these objects (characterization), and different

criteria for deciding whether their answers to these questions are justified and true (reasoning).[10]

Just as the interpretant of one semiotic process may be the sign of an incipient semiotic process and just as the character of one representation (qua focus) may be the theme of a subsequent representation (qua topic), so too may the truth of one representation be the justification for a subsequent representation. In other words, in the tradition of Hilary Putnam (1975), there is a division of residential and representational agency, as distributed across long chains of temporally, spatially, and socially distal actors and institutions.

To take the simplest example of representational agency of direct relevance to linguistic anthropologists, there is *metalanguage* in the strict sense, as evinced in practices such as translation and glossing. Here, one thematizes a sound, word, or utterance (treating it as a sign in need of translation), one characterizes the meaning of that sign (usually in terms of other simpler or more familiar signs), and one offers a reason for one's translation (via philology, a dictionary, regional expertise, two years of ethnographic fieldwork, and so forth). Consider (a piece of) Jakobson's (1990) famous example: "Flicks means movies." Here the sign "flicks" has been thematized, and the object of this sign has been characterized ("means movies"). Moreover, the speaker may be called on to justify this assertion (explaining, say, that she watched a lot of American movies in the '60s), and the addressee may go on to presuppose this assertion, thereby treating it as true (for example, using this word to establish reference in a subsequent speech event). Needless to say, the words in question may be much more loaded than "flicks": "terrorist," "carcinogen," "life," "pornography," "art," "agency." In this way, metalanguage, as one of the most obvious modes of representational agency, is manifestly political—especially when attention is shifted from its reflexive character (long of interest to linguistic anthropologists) to its propositional content (as theme and character) and epistemological status (as justified and true), and such ideas may be generalized from how we

---

10. Several examples may further illuminate the distinction between residential and representational agency. To have representational agency over some state of affairs is to be able to offer a representation of it. For this reason, representational agency always involves residential agency: having representational agency over that which is represented involves having residential agency over that which represents it. For example, when one says "The hammer is heavy," that over which one has representational agency is the hammer (as an instrument and hence a semiotic process without propositional content): it has been thematized and characterized, and this theme-character relation can even be reasoned with: "I know because I weighed it" (offer a reason for it) or "So go get a lighter one" (use it as a reason). In contrast, the utterance "The hammer is heavy," which is a representation of the hammer and its properties (and hence is itself a semiotic process with propositional content), is subject to residential agency: it was controlled, composed, and committed to. One can also have residential agency over a hammer without representational agency: to be able to control one's wielding of it (determine when and where one picks it up), compose one's wielding of it (picking it up rather than a sledgehammer), and commit to the effect of one's wielding it (being surprised if the nail does not go in when hit).

gloss words to how we interpret actions to how we ascribe mental states.

Also of direct interest to linguistic anthropologists is *stance-taking* (Kockelman 2004 and references therein, and see Hill and Irvine 1992). This turns on indicating how strongly one is committed to the truth of a representation (via grammatical categories such as status and complement-taking predicates such as "believe" and "doubt") and what source events one is using to justify one's representation (as evinced in grammatical categories such as evidentiality and complement-taking predicates such as "see" and "hear"). To continue with the example just given, we may use linguistic categories to indicate our stance toward a translation, and toward any representation more generally: "I suspect that 'flicks' means 'movies'"; "'Flicks' must mean 'movies'"; "I was told that 'flicks' means 'movies'"; "I believe that electrons are charged particles"; "It smells like the dog vomited on the floor"; "The weatherman says it is going to rain"; and so forth. Such grammatical and lexical categories ("believe," "suspect," "must," "smells like," and so forth) are some of the key semiotic resources we have for fine-tuning (mitigating, clarifying, hedging, announcing) the responsibility-taking and right-granting that is part and parcel of knowledge practices to the extent that they turn on the justification for and truthfulness of representations.

As with residential agency, we may theorize various semiotic and social constraints on representational agency. Indeed, with regard to *linguistic epistemes*, there is a long tradition of theories in linguistic anthropology which try to account for the psychological salience of various linguistic forms (both to speakers of a language and to linguists studying languages) and thus the relationship between linguistic structure and linguistic ideology (Hill 1996; Hill and Mannheim 1992; Irvine 1989; Irvine and Gal 2000; Lucy 1992, 1993; Schieffelin, Woolard, and Kroskrity 1998; Silverstein 1981; Whorf 1956*a* [1937]). For example, Boas (1989 [1910], 249) suggested that linguistic and ethnologic phenomena are differentially accessible to consciousness and hence differentially amenable to knowledge:

> It is a characteristic of linguistic classifications that they never rise into consciousness, while other classifications, although the same unconscious origin prevails, often do rise into consciousness. It seems very plausible, for instance, that the fundamental religious notions, like the idea of will power immanent in inanimate objects, or the anthropomorphic character of animals, are in their origin just as little conscious as the fundamental ideas of language. While, however, the use of language is so automatic that the opportunity never arises for the fundamental notions to emerge into consciousness, this happens very frequently in all phenomena relating to religion.

Interpreting Boas in the terms introduced here and making no distinction between ideology and knowledge, we might say that he argued that because linguistic forms (such as tense and gender) are more tacit, habitual, and obligatory than religious or cultural beliefs (regarding, say, cosmic phenomena as expressed in assertions), they are less likely to "rise into consciousness" and hence less likely to be subject to explanations (p. 250). Extending his claims, we may say that grammatical categories are not likely to be foregrounded (thematized), commented upon (characterized), or rationalized (reasoned with) by speakers. To some degree, to the extent that beliefs are often articulated through assertions, this may be understood as the claim that we have more representational agency over the contents of expression than over the means of expression—over what we say than over how we say it. Indeed, it might be phrased as follows: *Any system through which we articulate experience is not itself experienced in a way that is easy to articulate.* We often have very little representational agency over our systems of representation.

Saussure (1983 [1916], 81) characterized a kind of *diachronic unconscious*:

> The first thing which strikes one on studying linguistic facts is that the language user is unaware of their succession in time: he is dealing with a state. Hence the linguist who wishes to understand this state must rule out of consideration everything which brought that state about, and pay no attention to diachrony. Only by suppressing the past can he enter into the state of mind of the language user.

Indeed, one might generalize this relative awareness of synchronic relations (versus diachronic ones) to the relative awareness of syntagmatic, or combining, relations (versus paradigmatic, or selecting, relations), the relative awareness of *parole*, or linguistic utterances (versus *langue*, or language structure), the relative awareness of value *as essence* (versus value *through difference*), and the relative awareness of *signifieds*, or features of objects (versus *signifiers*, or features of signs). In short, as phrased in terms of Saussure's famous categories, speakers' ability to "become conscious of" (or thematize, characterize, and reason with) manifestly linguistic semiotic processes is differentially mediated as a function of whether the semiotic process in question (or any of its components) is synchronic or diachronic, syntagmatic or paradigmatic, *parole*-based or *langue*-based, signified or signifier, understood as essence or understood through difference.

Sapir (1985 [1927], 548) offered two key moves that parallel the foregoing interpretation of Saussure. First, he thought it was easier to thematize and characterize a single constituent or a single sign event than to articulate its relation to other constituents or to the semiotic system per se. This might be called a *systemic unconscious*:

> It is a matter of common knowledge that it is relatively easy to fix the attention on some arbitrarily selected element of experience, such as a sensation or an emotion, but that it is far from easy to become conscious of the exact place which such an element holds within a constellation of behavior. It is easy for an Australian native, for instance, to

say by what kinship term he calls so and so or whether or not he may undertake such and such relations with a given individual. It is exceedingly difficult for him to give a general rule of which these specific examples of behavior are but illustrations, though all the while he acts as though the rule were perfectly well known to him.

Sapir also theorized that grammatical categories of the kind Boas took to be relatively unconscious are likely to be unconsciously projected onto a speaker's conception of the world: "One is always unconsciously finding what one is in unconscious subjection to" (1985 [1927], 549; and see Whorf 1956*b* [1939]). In short, speakers' representational agency over a given domain of experience (what they notice, what they say about what they notice, and what they infer from what they say about what they notice) is influenced by the way the experience is encoded in their linguistic categories. In other words, grammatical categories are taken to be ontological ones. We may generalize this point: *Properties of signs of objects are taken to be properties of objects of signs.*[11] In sum, Sapir argued that individual elements of systems were more subject to representational agency than systems of interrelated elements and that features of the system through which we articulate our experiences of the world are often taken to be features of the world we articulate—and thus confound our attempts to have representational agency over them.

The foregoing points have characterized the ways in which speakers' representational agency over the systems with which they speak is mediated by properties of linguistic systems themselves. However, the general logic of these arguments may be extended to account for the limits of representational agency over any other system in which humans are implicated: economic processes, kinship structures, gender relations, institutional hierarchies, political systems, psychological processes, physical domains, mathematical symbols, computer languages, and so forth. Each of these systems has physical, social, and semiotic properties which both constrain and enable our ability to thematize their constituent elements, characterize properties of these themes, and reason with these theme-character relations. Classic ideas such as Freud's understanding of the unconscious and Marx's understanding of coming to consciousness may be fruitfully related to these ideas.

Agency and Accountability

The foregoing sections have focused on the relative flexibility

11. Whorf (1956*b* [1939]) is perhaps the most extended account of this. See also Peirce (1955*a*), and especially see Parmentier's description of downshifting in Peirce's typology of signs: "the tendency of certain of the classes [in this typology] to be systematically apperceived by their interpretants as being lower-ranking signs" (1994, 18). See also Agha's (1998, 166–68) account of personification and naturalization of social statuses through registers of honorific languages and the processes of over- and underdetermination. And see Silverstein on "finding . . . motivation" (1996, 294).

of various modes of knowledge and power and the distribution of these modes across material, social, and semiotic processes. The task for this section is to sketch the relation between flexibility and accountability. In particular, and generally speaking, the greater one's degree of control, composition, and commitment and the greater one's degree of thematization, characterization, and reasoning, the more responsibility and/or rights one is accorded for the result of some action or utterance. And the more responsibility or rights one is accorded for one's utterance or action, the more one can be praised or blamed for it, the more one can feel pride or shame for it, and the more one can be rewarded or punished for it. In short, agency tends to scale with accountability.

For example, much of modern Western morality (say, American and European legal and lay culture) evaluates agency by criteria that may be rendered in terms of these dimensions. In particular, the prototypic "residential agent" is usually a single human individual who inhabits all three roles at once: controller, composer, and committer. And the prototypic representational agent is usually a single human individual who inhabits all three roles at once: thematizer, characterizer, and reasoner. Depending on the semiotic process in question, we call these prototypic agents "actors," "speakers," and "thinkers" (even if it means, as it usually does, that we radically decontextualize the ways in which any individual act is enabled and constrained by a manifold of multiple and distal, contingent and contestable acts). Moreover, we tend to categorize and hierarchize entities as a function of the degree of agency we take them to have: human primates versus nonhuman primates, adults versus children, animals versus plants, and so forth. And we positively valorize higher degrees of agency than lower degrees of agency and hence more agentive beings over less agentive beings. For example, we may take them to be more worthy of our respect. Indeed, it is precisely agency's relation to responsibility and rights, ontology and evaluation, selfhood and statehood, which makes Western scholars interested in it in the first place.

However, while accountability may tend to scale with these dimensions, it need not. Indeed, one should inquire into local understandings of the various factors summarized earlier: dimensions, degrees, division, and distribution. Various communities will differentially weight such factors when assessing the accountability of some entity for the outcome of some semiotic process in which the entity is implicated: whether it can be praised or blamed, rewarded or punished, subject to pride or shame. In Western legal institutions, for example, responsibility for some action and/or rights over the product realized by some action usually turn on having a "choice" with regard to undertaking that action. Here, then, is where local theories of "agency" intersect with the foregoing theory of agency, and it is one of the reasons the assessment of agency is so important to academics. In this way, and quite importantly, one must take into account not only the semiotic and social theory of agency offered here (delimiting the relevant dimensions of any sign system) but also local understandings

of the relation between agency and accountability: the local theories (however tacit) and practices (however subtle) by which a community assesses the relative agency of its members to the extent that they are to be held accountable. Here is where local legal institutions, pecuniary measures, parenting techniques, metaphysical theories, ethnopsychologies, and so forth, will come to the fore.

For examples of some relatively subtle ways in which this is done, we may turn to Ahearn (2000, 2001*a*, 2001*b*), Duranti (1994, 2004), and Talmy (2000), who have theorized how our descriptions of our own and others' behavior—that is, our representational interpretants of our own and others' actions—turn on grammatical and lexical categories which encode semantic features related to animacy, causality, control, and volition. That is, the linguistic resources we use to represent the behavior of others—be it in political speeches, marriage narratives, or love letters—always already construe that behavior in agentive terms (broadly defined). Saying "I broke the vase" versus "The vase broke" versus "The vase broke on me" construes the speaker's (and hence the actor's) agency over the event in different ways and may thereby license others to attribute different degrees of accountability—as evinced in, say, whether or not they require one to replace the broken vase. In short, as these scholars have shown, through the attribution of accountability enabled by the construal of agency, the most subtle of grammatical and literary processes may have the starkest of affective and political repercussions (Kockelman [2002] undertakes an Ahearn- and Duranti-inspired approach). The work of these scholars thereby complements the approach outlined here.

Indeed, even in Western legal and lay culture an actor's accountability need not scale with all these dimensions equally but may be decided on the basis of one or two of them. For example, when we speak of the "hangman's guilt," we are describing the fact that an individual may take responsibility and therefore feel guilty (though not necessarily be punished) for an action in which the individual was only the controller (merely "pushing the button") and not even accorded much control (say, the time and place were fixed by the state). Or, for readers familiar with the Winchester Mystery House, a roadside attraction near San Jose, California, there is Mrs. Winchester's guilt because her husband invented guns that were used to kill others (embodied in the mysterious architectural ambiguities of her house, which were designed to ward off ghosts of people slain by those guns). In this case, it was her husband who composed the means (not herself) and neither she nor her husband who controlled their wielding or committed to their ends. There is killing the messenger: while we acknowledge its senselessness, we also note its frequent occurrence. And there is Oedipus: while his sleeping with his mother and his killing of his father were unintentional (or uncommitted to, under that interpretation, though controlled and composed), he felt guilty enough to blind himself for those actions. And there are the various key events from the *Iliad*: a hero on the battlefield is considered praiseworthy because of some great achievement (say, vanquishing a foe) even though this achievement was due to the fact that a god had possessed him and acted through him for the god's own purpose (cf. Taylor 1989 on afflatus). To reiterate: one must distinguish between the analytic categories offered here (the dimensions, degrees, division, and distribution of agency) and local understandings of accountability as a function of one's relative agency (often couched in terms such as "choice," "intention," "premeditation," "free will," and "self-consciousness").

Conclusion

Agency has been theorized in terms of flexibility and accountability, on the one hand, and knowledge and power, on the other. This theory has tried to illuminate agency from a number of perspectives, allowing one to study the distribution of agency in and across real-time social, semiotic, and material processes. In particular, the foregoing definitions allow one to investigate various *dimensions* of agency—control, composition, commitment; thematization, characterization, and reason—without squashing them together as a single, unspecified quality. Along any one of these dimensions, they allow one to determine constraints on and conditions for various *degrees* of agency and to calibrate and compare these degrees with some precision. They allow one to investigate the *division* of incumbency across these dimensions: who or what is the controller, composer, and committer; who or what is the thematizer, characterizer, and reasoner. And they allow one to investigate the *distribution* of this incumbency across time (now and then), space (here and there), entity (human or nonhuman), unit (superindividual or subindividual), individual (Jack or Jill), and number (single individual or several individuals). In short, while the stakes of agency—as outlined in the classical, modern, and Baconian traditions—remain the same, agency itself has been retheorized in a way that strives to be analytically precise, empirically tractable, and metaphysically satisfying.

Acknowledgments

Comments

Asif Agha
Department of Anthropology, University of Pennsylvania, 3260 South St., Philadelphia, PA 19104-6398 (asifagha@sas .upenn.edu). 15 I 07

The term *agency* is linked in recent social theory to a larger set of longer-theorized concepts—freedom, hegemony, self-

invention, tradition, liberty, power, resistance, coercion, creativity, norm—in relation to which it appears to designate a more elementary concept, one that is apparently at stake in all the others, and, to some theorists, even to constitute a core problem area against which any social theory is judged. Kockelman's Peircean reconstruction makes plain that, far from being an elementary concept, agency is a highly reticulated and multidimensional phenomenon, that it has an internal anatomy that derives from the ways in which human conduct (semiosis) reflexively grasps its own characteristics. There are many varieties of agency. The point is to understand why such variety arises at all.

A Peircean account of agency (as a concept) also helps us see why social theory (as a genre of explanation) has had so much trouble with it. Kockelman shows that social theory is best able to explain a concept like agency if its explanations are grounded in an account of how concepts arise within human conduct (a process Peirce calls semiosis). Peirce is not a practitioner of *social theory* in the more specific sense that this genre name has now acquired. Yet he is preeminent as a theorist of human conduct, one who coins for his own theories the genre names *pragmatism* and *pragmaticism*, both names for the study of what the Greeks called *ta prágmata*, "human actions, affairs, practices." Since his theories slightly predate the institutionalization of all the social sciences of the twentieth century, the present-day revival of interest in Peirce is an attempt to rethink difficulties inherited from these institutionalized projects and to renew and enlarge social theory by grounding it in a conception of human conduct more fundamental than any articulated by his precursors or (so far) by his successors.

The term *agency* itself groups together a cluster of problems that we inherit from twentieth-century forms of social theory. It is a name for a variable dimension of human conduct, a capacity whereby social actors (whether individual or institutional ones) effectively transform a context of action and thereby enlarge the sphere of their enablements. It is a variable dimension of conduct because different actors can do this to different degrees at different times. These differences are linked in Foucault's influential formulation to the problematics of power and knowledge, that is, to (1) the capacity of social actors to overcome constraints placed on their conduct ("power") by discursive practices presupposed in the sociohistorical contexts in which they must act and (2) the capacity of social actors to grasp and understand their contexts of action (through "knowledge") and thus to reconceptualize the very forms of conduct available to them. Kockelman shows that once we recognize that power and knowledge are emergent features of the use of signs (emergent as forms of "meaning" within semiosis) we can disaggregate the various issues now grouped under the rubric of agency into empirically tractable concepts. Thus to begin to see that our actions involve different degrees of control, composition, and commitment and that we differ—both from others *and* from ourselves across diverse zones of practical experience—

in our ability to thematize, characterize, and reason about this process is to begin to see *which* dimensions of our conduct are variably linked in what we call our agency.

It is useful to consider why we now think that agency is an interesting problem at all. The problem of agency derives much of its contemporary urgency (for Foucault and for others after him) in the wake of a dead theory of mind and society (many call it "structuralism"), an outlook that abstracts structures of mind from frames of historical conduct and regards mental structures as causally preeminent in shaping conduct. Conduct thus appears, by contrast, to lack agency. Although most social theorists now agree that structuralism was a mistake, many find themselves left holding in their hands fragments and fractions of mind and body of different shapes and sizes—cognition and action, representation and interaction, thought and substance, mentality and history, structure and time—that cannot quite be put back together again (in a manner analogous to Humpty Dumpty) in the absence of a theory that establishes their connection, a connection that structuralism so neatly severed.

A Peircean account of human conduct establishes those connections in its most basic premises from the outset. Kockelman's reconstruction of agency helps us see that, by availing ourselves of a Peircean understanding of mind in history, we are able to occupy a position of far greater theoretical and practical agency than any available to the king's horses and the king's men when they first met Humpty Dumpty, pieces and all.

Laura M. Ahearn
Department of Anthropology, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ 08901, U.S.A (ahearn@rci.rutgers.edu). 19 I 07

In contrast to many scholars who use the term "agency" without defining it, Kockelman not only defines it but disaggregates it into two tripartite dimensions, residential agency and representational agency. The paper is steeped in Peircean semiotics, which undoubtedly makes it a challenge for some readers unfamiliar with Peirce's terminology, but Kockelman's succinct overview of the main components of Peirce's theory of meaning provides the necessary background for the analysis that follows. Indeed, anyone interested in a primer on Peirce would do well to read the first few pages of this article.

My comments will be of two types (not three, as they would be if I were a Peircean). First, I will briefly list some of the article's strongest points, because these are the observations that help us to conceptualize agency in new ways. Then I will raise some questions that remained in my mind after I read (and reread) the article.

Kockelman makes several important points that are necessary consequences of a Peircean approach to agency, though one could arrive at these insights through other theoretical means:

1. Agency is not necessarily (or even usually) a property exercised by specific people but instead can be distributed across time and space, between or among subindividual and supraindividual units, and over types of entities, such as humans and nonhumans.

2. Semiosis—and therefore agency itself—is not often best thought of as a process that takes place only in individuals' minds.

3. Most semiotic processes are not intentionally communicative. (Is this also true of agency?)

4. The different kinds of ultimate interpretants are extremely helpful in understanding how Bourdieu's habitus can come to be embodied in an individual at the same time as it is distributed (unevenly) across members of a community.

5. The idea of "residential agency" enables a useful distinction to be made among three types of agency: "instigator-based agency," "means-based agency," and "ends-based agency."

Despite these illuminating observations, I was left with several sets of questions about Kockelman's analysis of agency:

1. What role does intentionality play in Kockelman's theory of agency? The very first line of the article ("Agency might initially be understood as the relatively flexible wielding of means toward ends") indicates that goals and intentions are an essential part of his definition of agency, but nowhere in the article does he explain what he thinks it means for someone or something to "intend." The difference, if any, between "purposeful" and "intentional" would also be important to know. Duranti (2006) tackles this issue in a short essay, but there is much more to be said about it.

2. Why were the terms "residential" and "representational" chosen? I can see the reasoning behind "representational," as that type of agency involves propositions, but why "residential"? And why only two types of agency—why not three, since this is a Peircean analysis? Are these two types supposed to exhaust all possible types of agency? And since we all know—or think we know—that knowledge is power, how are these two types of agency, which roughly map onto power and knowledge, related?

3. Kockelman notes that it is important to take into account "local understandings of the relation between agency and accountability." Does this mean that there are local or folk theories of agency itself? If so, is Kockelman's theory merely another folk theory of agency, or does he intend it to subsume all local theories?

4. What would an ethnographic analysis using this approach to agency look like? How would it help the researcher understand and explain the actions observed? Or is this theory not intended to be applied in a concrete way but rather to be used to think more abstractly about agency in general?

Answering these questions would help to flesh out what is necessarily a schematic overview of a complex theory. In sum, Kockelman's article is a thought-provoking approach to agency that deserves to be pondered and built upon.

Vincent Colapietro
Department of Philosophy, Pennsylvania State University, University Park, PA 16802, U.S.A. (vxc5@psu.edu). 17 I 07

Drawing upon a variety of resources, Kockelman offers a suggestive and illuminating sketch of human agency. This semiotic portrait of the human actor is impressive not least because of the theoretically detailed and experientially sensitive manner in which it is executed. As both a student of Peirce's writings and a philosopher who has devoted considerable attention to questions regarding agency, however, I am more than anything else disposed to raise a number of questions about Kockelman's project. This disposition should be taken not as an interpretant signaling rejection but rather as one indicating a willingness to explore even more deeply than he has managed to do the relevance of Peirce's theories for an account of agency and, in turn, the facets of agency. I have no interest in challenging the validity of his enterprise, only a hope of directing his attention toward unthematized facets of an admittedly complex phenomenon.

Too often expositors of Peirce leave unexplained or, worse, unproven the power and fecundity of his theories. Kockelman is not such an expositor, but there are more resources in Peirce than Kockelman either draws upon or points out. This is, for example, especially true of Peirce's account of the interpretant of signs. The threefold distinction upon which Kockleman draws (the affective, the energetic, and the "representational" or logical) is only one among at least several classifications of the constitutive functions of semiotic processes. In my judgment, at least some of Peirce's other classifications of interpretants (especially the immediate, the dynamic, and the final) bear upon questions about agency.

Human agency does not unequivocally or necessarily reside in an individual organism, in effect (though certainly not in intent) conceived as a separable being or process. Is not part of the value of a semiotic portrait of the human actor, especially for a discipline such as anthropology, that it allows us to see just how variously located and widely distributed is human agency? Does not human agency reside, first and foremost, in our individual participation in irreducibly communal practices, and do not the constitutive abilities of residential agency have an ineradicably communal form?

Is representative agency truly a distinct dimension of our species-specific capacity, or is it rather a distinctive employment of what Kockelman calls residential agency? Knowers qua knowers are agents, and therefore representation is a name for a set of practices instituted and maintained by human actors in natural settings and cultural contexts. Are not power and knowledge themselves to be explained, from a Peircean perspective at least, ultimately *in terms of* flexibility and accountability?

No less than structuralist and poststructuralist approaches, Peircean semiotics decenters the sovereign subject of the modern epoch, but without effacing human agency. Like such

theorists as Foucault and Derrida, Peirce is as much interested in situating as in decentering subjectivity. Among his most significant achievements is that of exhibiting human beings as somatic, semiotic, and social *actors* caught up in processes over which they have very limited control and about which they have only fragmentary, fallible, and (in no small measure) distorted understandings. Kockelman's singular achievement is to have made such constructive use of Peircean semiotics for portraying such actors. My penultimate question is whether he has offered a compelling account of agency. Kockelman stresses, in reference to flexibility and accountability, the extent to which an agent can *control* the expression of a sign and *compose* the relationship between sign and object and finally the degree to which the user of signs is *committed* to an interpretant. But Peirce emphasizes the capacity of objects to reconfigure, through the mediation of signs, our relationship to these objects and also our own habits. He emphatically ascribes agency to the signs themselves: they have a life and thus dynamism of their own. Thus, the degree to which determination by what is other than the self is compatible with self-determination—the extent to which individual agency is not only a communal achievement but also (and inescapably) a communal practice—remains difficult for us to theorize. And this leads me to my final question: Is part of the reason for this that the culturally specific form of agency characteristic of our time and place (a form of which such matters as flexibility and accountability as well as knowledge and power are treated as definitive) is allowed to influence our efforts on this front unduly? Kockelman has unquestionably put Peirce to good use, and I suspect that he can adequately address at least some of these queries. My hope is that the sequence of interpretants generated by my questions will assist Kockelman and others in making greater sense of agency.

Marcel Danesi
Department of Anthropology, University of Toronto, Toronto, Ont., Canada M5S 1A1 (marcel.danesi@utoronto.ca). 22 I 07

The notion of agency is one of the most neglected in theoretical discussions of the sign, both in semiotics and in its cognate fields. Kockelman's highlighting of this notion is welcome indeed, since it projects the spotlight on sign making (or meaning making) rather than sign use (or meaning reception) and, thus, on the creative processes involved in semiosis (the production and comprehension of signs). Defining agency as a "flexible wielding of means toward ends," Kockelman brings out the importance of "self-creation" or "self-invention" (signifying, ritualistic, etc.) in human systems from the outset. He refers to the important work of Charles Peirce in this domain, which is much discussed in current semiotic practice but often neglected in affine disciplines such as linguistics and cultural anthropology.

I have no particular issues with Kockelman on his explication of Peircean sign theory. As far as I can tell, it is correct and even insightful. Nor do I have any bone to pick with him on his division of semiotic agency into residential and representational. In so doing, he has given us a terminology for making Peircean sign theory more manageable and thus for expanding its application to the study of cultural objects—from material things to rituals and symbolic systems. My goal here is simply to provide a few complementary addenda to Kockelman's treatment.

The first of these regards the notion of abduction as creative bodily-based semiosis. Peirce saw abduction (or imaginative inference) as the faculty of mind underlying the creation of signs. He went against the Western tradition of studying the human mind "objectively" or "scientifically," arguing that only an orientation based on a study of creative processes would provide truly meaningful insights into the nature of human knowledge and of the way it is literally created by the mind. Kockelman—at least as I read him—redefines abduction as agency. Missing from his discussion, however, is Peirce's idea that abduction (agency) is an extension of bodily experiences, a kind of abstracted sensoriality. Peirce believed that reality could not be studied independently of the individual's sensory and emotional involvement in it. The purported "facts" that people come to grasp are, therefore, no more than "artifacts" of human inference. The reason we are so convinced by them is that we have invented them.

A second addendum is the notion of *energeia*, a kind of "creative potency" that undergirds every act of meaning making, from the simple invention of words to the creation of elaborate artistic texts (Lotman 1990). As Torop (1999, 11) aptly puts it, Lotman's notion of creative potency is at the basis of his corollary notion of *modeling*—a view that has started to influence semiotic methodology broadly. Essentially, as I read Kockelman's interpretation of Peirce with "Lotmanian eyes," I see his notion of agency as related to the notion of *energeia*, the force that links the biosphere (sensoriality) with the semiosphere (semiosis) in all acts of representation. The semiosphere is "the smallest functioning mechanism" (Lotman 1990, 125) of human cognition that allows the mind to conceptualize basic experiences of sensation. For Lotman, the ability to convert biospheric into semiospheric reality is the reason that, over time, the human species has come to be regulated not by force of natural selection but by the "force of history." As opposed to Nature, culture is everywhere *meaningful*, everywhere the result of modeling structures that seek to give meaning, order, and continuity to experience. The notion of *energeia* provides a framework for investigating the origin and evolution of the signifying properties of these structures. And if there is any one finding of semiotic research that stands out from all others it is that, despite great diversity in the world's sign systems,

the differences among them are more in detail than in substance. These systems serve the original functions for which they were designed, revealing strikingly similar patterns throughout the world. Kockelman seems to underplay somewhat this paradox of human agency.

Of all the sign systems that have been produced by human *energeia,* none is more powerful or more singular than language. It is the ultimate achievement of the human species, providing a constant and ongoing "internal dialogue" between Nature and human minds. This dialogue, as I see it, is the source of the agency that Kockelman discusses so insightfully. In so doing, he has given us an empirically testable and usable framework for investigating it in its various dimensions and distribution across time and space.

Alessandro Duranti
Department of Anthropology, University of California at Los Angeles, Los Angeles CA 90095-1553, U.S.A. (aduranti@anthro.ucla.edu). 13 I 07

This is an ambitious project. We cannot but be impressed by Kockelman's audacity in building an analytically complex conceptual apparatus for such a popular and yet slippery concept, even though we might be distracted by the abundance of subcategories and definitions. At a general level, linguistic anthropologists will be sympathetic to the view of human interaction as semiosis that underlies Peirce's writings and Kockelman's model. The article also gives us a chance to reexamine Peirce's notion of *interpretant* understood as the effect(s) of the use of a particular sign. This move forces us to avoid thinking in terms of Fregean *Sinn* (sense) and *Bedeutung* (referent) and to adopt instead a view of meaning as an amalgam or construct of a potentially infinite number of responses/acts (mental or physical), which may not be but in many cases are directly observable. Unfortunately, however, the example chosen to illustrate the concept of interpretant (an imagined English *ouch!*) and its discussion do not help us to calibrate the feasibility of this notion vis-à-vis other notions that are more commonly used and, at first glance, more helpful for thinking about meaning as an interactional achievement (which seems to be Kockelman's goal). In particular, it is not clear how to compare the ontological status of interpretant with respect to the notions of uptake and perlocutionary effect in speech-act theory, the notion of turn in conversation analysis, or the notion of participation in the work of Erving Goffman and Marjorie Goodwin, who are cited but not discussed. Is an interpretant produced by a combination of illocutionary and perlocutionary force? How could we use it and acknowledge the known constraints and expectations usually associated with particular types of sequences of acts or turns (e.g., adjacency pairs such as request/response, compliment/rejection)? How could it account for narratives and their unfolding? How could be used to ac-

knowledge the hierarchical relation among different types of "signs" (e.g., indexes, stances, [speech] act, register, genre [Ochs 1996])? Along similar lines, one cannot but wonder whether it is possible at all to reconcile the model implied by the three semiotic triads presented in table 1 with the work of the many and diverse writers mentioned by Kockelman as potential contributors to his vision of a theory of agency. Perhaps the attempt to be "analytically precise" (one of Kockelman's explicit goals) comes with a price: the difficulty of making explicit how to take advantage of the contributions and insights of writers with quite different epistemological and ontological commitments. Kockelman wants it both ways: to be exclusive (by adopting Peirce's elaborate classification of signs and types of interpretants he seems to imply that the pragmatist's theory is *the* way to go) and ecumenical (by citing a wide range of writers with the most diverse ideas about meaning and interaction he seems to indicate that there is room for everyone in his theoretical framework). But the introduction of a theory of agency that is definitely more formal than the average discussion of such a concept in anthropology warrants a more direct engagement with the potentially relevant literature. In particular, it would be useful to clarify (1) what Kockelman's model can do that other models did not do and (2) how his model can do what other models already do. Especially when some of the concepts introduced by Kockelman are similar to or reminiscent of those introduced by others, it would be important to find out whether there are differences that matter and why. It is through this direct comparison that we can get a sense of "gain" or "loss" in making one (theoretical, analytical, methodological) choice over another. For example, I found some intriguing similarities between some of the concepts introduced by Kockelman and my own characterization of agency in language. I also spoke of "degree of control" in my definition (Duranti 2004, 453) and introduced a distinction between "performance" and its "representation" that is echoed by Kockelman's distinction between residential and representational agency. Since his conceptualization of degree of control is more elaborate than mine, I intend to examine it carefully in future publications, but I wonder whether this will be possible without buying into a formal apparatus that I find cumbersome and too tied to American pragmatism. Conversely, Kockelman's cursory mention of the possible benefits of drawing from my own and others' more detailed discussion of the encoding of agency in natural-historical languages (in his discussion of representational agency) makes me wonder how he could fit our generalizations into his model. Would he have to translate linguists' notion of transitivity, for example, into Peircean triads? More generally, Kockelman's use of Peirce's theory seems to work as a heuristic device, a way to jump-start a general discussion, but I am not convinced that it provides the best foundations for a theory of agency in which language encoding plays a major role.

N. J. Enfield
Language and Cognition Group, Max Planck Institute for
Psycholinguistics, 6500 AH Nijmegen, The Netherlands
(nick.enfield@mpi.nl). 12 I 07

This article offers a carefully crafted set of analytic distinctions
whose first payoff is a powerful demonstration of the com-
pound nature of agency.[1] In the same way, some decades ago,
linguists established that "subject" in grammatical analysis is
not an essential entity but is characterized by a cluster of
properties. Empirical evidence from languages unlike English
in grammatical type proved the point by showing that the
elements of "subject" could be separated and distributed
across different parts of a clause (Li 1976). Analogously, Kock-
elman's theoretical decomposition of agency now invites em-
pirical support from the ethnographic record of the possibility
of cultural difference in structural distribution of the logically
separable elements of agency (cf., e.g., Danziger 2006).

A compelling theme for me is the degree and type of agency
that speakers may have in the semiotic processes of articu-
lating linguistic utterances. Kockelman says that a signer
(speaker, etc.) has relatively less control over indexical signs
than over symbolic signs, but this is not to be read as an
overestimation of the degree to which our symbolic expres-
sivity is "unbounded." In typically multimodal interaction our
greater creative freedom is often in the predominantly *iconic-
indexical* resources of co-speech hand gesture (Kendon 2004;
Goldin-Meadow 2003; McNeill 2005) and other types of il-
lustrative device such as diagrams. And conventional symbolic
systems such as language can constrain expressive agency in
ways that indexical signs do not. The infinite expressivity
attributed to language is classically credited to the operations
of syntax upon the lexicon, not to the lexicon itself. Within
a community, the meanings of words are extraordinarily inert
because they are required to remain tolerably convergent.
When we speak of the degrees to which I may be able to
determine (*a*) what I want to talk about, (*b*) what I want to
say about it, and (*c*) what I want to conclude from that, we
are speaking at the level of the linguistic utterance (e.g., a
proposition), but at the level of (type) form-meaning map-
pings in individual morpholexical items I do not have much
control over what I want a word to mean. True, as Kockelman
points out, I can invent a whole new word, but listeners won't
understand it unless I embed it amongst familiar words in
familiar grammatical structures. As cultural innovator, I see
so far only because I am standing on the shoulders of his-
torico-cultural giants (or, better, I am a midget on a vast
pyramid of other midgets [Richerson and Boyd 2005, 50]).

Another potential cause of diminished semiotic agency is

---

1. If the presentation of Kockelman's neo-Peircean framework is too
elliptical for ready comprehension by "nonintimates" (Parmentier 1994),
I recommend putting in the effort to delve into the logic of this powerful
framework (for which, see Kockelman 2005, 2006*a*, 2006*c*).

the relation between states of mind and forms of represen-
tation. Tomlin (1997) reports an experimental manipulation
of speakers' visual attention by which he was able to fully
control whether his subjects would produce a grammatically
active description of a scene ("*The red fish* ate the blue one")
or a passive one ("The blue fish got eaten by the red one").
A speaker's formulation of an utterance may also be con-
strained by the anticipated state of mind of a listener. In
planning what to say (and, especially, how to say it) a speaker
cannot afford to ignore any unseen pragmatic effects of mark-
edness (Havranek 1964 [1932]). I had better stick to the "nor-
mal way of saying it" unless I want to invite a special inter-
pretation (Grice 1975; Levinson 2000; Enfield and Stivers
2007). As Wittgenstein (1953, §1.60) put it: "Suppose that,
instead of saying 'Bring me the broom', you said 'Bring me
the broomstick and the brush which is fitted on to it.'!—Isn't
the answer: 'Do you want the broom? Why do you put it so
oddly?'" Avoiding such turbulence significantly diminishes
our expressive options.

As students of meaning and semiotic action, we should not
underestimate the degree to which we are constrained by the
semiotic systems at our disposal. Speakers are subjected to a
range of deterministic (read: agency-diminishing) forces, run-
ning from conventions of code to norms of usage to our own
cognitive states to the anticipated responses of others. We are
coerced from all sides. In Goffman's words: "Not, then, men
and their moments. Rather, moments and their men" (1967,
3). And intriguingly, as Kockelman points out, we regiment
our own behavior (read: diminish our own agency), regarding
social facts as "exerting over the individual an external con-
straint" (Durkheim 1982 [1895, 59]). Humans are naturally
disposed to treat institutional facts as brute facts (Searle 1969,
51) through "the treatment of certain human actions *as if*
they were an integral part of physical determinism" (Lévi-
Strauss 1966, 221). This counterpoints the agency-attributing
anthropomorphizing of nature, the hallmark of religion and
other reflexes of human social intelligence.

Robert Layton
Department of Anthropology, University of Durham, 43
Old Elvet, Durham DH1 3HN, UK (r.h.layton@
durham.ac.uk). 3 I 07

According to Kockelman's first footnote, "the point of this
review is to provide *an analytic typology* [my emphasis] of
various key moves in the theorization of agency." Its success
therefore hinges on whether the typology highlights useful
relations and differences between different ways of deploying
signs. No doubt assessments will differ. I find Kockelman's
mapping of the landscape unhelpful. He distinguishes two
types of agency, residential ("the degree to which one may
control the expression of a sign") and representational (the
ability to determine what we talk about and how we talk
about it). Representational agency ("closest to 'knowledge'

and 'consciousness'") recalls Foucault's (1972) concept of discourse.

It is noteworthy that Kockelman goes farther than Peirce in eliminating any interior, cognitive dimension from his semiotic, dealing purely in terms of exterior signs and symptoms (although the sign/symptom distinction [Mounin 1970] is not acknowledged) and their relation to objects. Kockelman's characterization of Saussure's *signified*—"*signifieds,* or features of objects"—is decidedly un-Saussurian. This is contrary to Saussure's treatment of the signified as a concept: "I propose . . . to replace *concept* and *sound-image* respectively by *signified* and *signifier*" (Saussure 1959, 67). Kockelman's statement "When Saussure speaks of the 'arbitrary' and the 'motivated' . . . he is really speaking about semiotic processes whose sign-object relations are relatively symbolic versus relatively iconic-indexical" simplifies a complex problem. Saussure is ambiguous in his example of what he calls a symbol: "the symbol of justice, a pair of scales, could not be replaced by just any other symbol, such as a chariot" (1959, 68). He apparently intends that the idea of a pair of scales, unlike a chariot, is a metaphor for the more general concept of balanced judgement, although he may also have intended that justice could be represented by a picture (an icon) which looks like the object, a pair of scales. Equally, while Peirce is primarily concerned with the link between a sign and the object it refers to, he takes sense into account when he writes, "The sign stands for something, its object. . . . Not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea" (1955*a*, 99).

In my assessment, Kockelman's discussion of residential agency makes the same mistake as Gell's (1998, 21) argument that land mines and works of art afford comparable types of agency. In residential agency instruments and actions are semiotic processes, but Kockelman makes no distinction between those artefacts that depend on successful semiosis to achieve their effect and those that do not.

While exploding land mines no doubt evoke semiotic processes, semiosis is not necessary to effect their curtailment of life and limb. Bombs are dropped and rifles fired by agents motivated by antagonistic relations towards the victims, and the consequent deaths provoke responses in those who consider them justified or not, but semiosis is not necessary to achieve the weapons' material impact, whereas semiosis must take place for agents to influence others via channels of information such as icons or symbols. I also consider it useful to add a third category, intermediate between the effects of tools and weapons and the effect of art objects: economic transactions in goods and services. While goods and services (unlike works of art) often involve resources that are essential to survival, semiosis is an integral part of the transaction where gift and market spheres or subsistence and prestige are distinguished.

Furthermore, a powerful actor may demonstrate his agency by *denying* intersubjective semiosis. Crossland (2000) points out that the abduction of the "disappeared" during military rule in Argentina and their subsequent anonymous burial are indices of the ruling junta's power and a denial of the victim's agency; the powerlessness of the victims' relatives was driven home by the junta's refusal to acknowledge that the disappearances had taken place. Autocratic leaders often seek to destabilize shared meanings (the Saussurian dimension) as a further means to disempower their victims. Another example occurred during the war in former Yugoslavia, when a Bosnian Croat leader asserted that the bridge at Mostar, which his troops had been visibly shelling for weeks to break the emblematic link between two ethnic communities, "fell down through old age," Rana Mitter, in his study of recent Chinese history, identifies a similar aspect of the 1960s Cultural Revolution. At that time, Mitter notes, words such as "class," "bourgeois," and "humanist" could mean whatever a group or person in control chose them to mean, effectively disempowering their victims. The Red Guard phase (1966–69) was defined almost entirely according to power relations, not moral norms or understandings (Mitter 2004, 209).

The extent of intersubjectivity is therefore another key variable. One would also want to investigate which social processes lead to highly codified semiotic systems such as the highway code and which promote relatively inchoate systems such as food or fashion, a field that Mounin investigated in detail but the perspective mapped out by Kockelman in this paper leaves relatively inaccessible.

Jeff Sugarman
Faculty of Education, Simon Fraser University, 8888 University Dr., Burnaby, BC, Canada V5A 1S6 (sugarman@sfu.ca). 31 XII 06

As a psychologist, I find it curious, if not disheartening, that my contemporary disciplinary colleagues rarely address the question of human agency. There can be no worthy inquiry into the human condition that does not clear a path toward an answer to this question. It is agency that imbues personal being with significance and social being with virtue. If human individuals have no agency, no freedom to choose and act, personal life loses its possibilities and social life loses its responsibilities. As agents, we humans are creatures who break with nature, but not completely, and it is the distinctively human features of our agency that express the partiality and dialectic of this break. But what is it that differentiates human agency from that of other animate and inanimate entities while preserving our participation in nature? A reply that has grown particularly influential locates the uniqueness of the human agentic condition in our capacity to give meaning to reality.

Peirce's contributions are highly relevant to this suggestion, though unfortunately few psychologists are familiar with his work. In this light, I commend Kockelman not only for drawing attention to the significance and applicability of Peircean semiotics to a psychology of meaning (Peirce's antipsychologism notwithstanding) but also for widening the scope

within which agency might be theorized. Kockelman's explication of Peirce's notoriously complicated analysis is exceedingly clear and replete with lively, effective illustrations. I find the account particularly instructive for ways in which a manifold of agentic features might be dimensionalized and thereby investigated. There is in fact little in what Kockelman provides with which I disagree. I do, however, have some concerns regarding what has been omitted.

Kockelman's elaboration of the Peircean scheme results in what appears to be more a taxonomy of agentic features than a theoretical explanation or argument for agency. For instance, one would expect a theory of agency to contain a repudiation of strict determinism, a detailing of possibilities or constraints on the freedom to choose and act, and a positioning of the theory within incompatibilist or compatibilist standpoints. Lacking these, Kockelman's theory does not establish agency but begs the question. It is difficult to know how Kockelman views the ontological status of agency in the absence of these and other considerations. It may be implied that he follows Peirce's metaphysics. According to Peirce's externalism, agency is a sign made increasingly intelligible by the renderings and rerenderings of semiotic processes inhering in the natural and sociocultural orders (Colapietro 1989). However, Peirce takes signs, objects, and interpretants to be transient forms of reality continually being transposed as they exchange positions within a semiotic relation. What, then, is the ontological status of agency if it ultimately dissolves to this process? It may be that action externalizes itself intelligibly by semiotic processes. However, surely a distinction is to be made between action and its intelligibility.

What seems to me notably missing from Kockelman's account is sufficient recognition of the psychological capacities specific to human agents that enable them to transcend the determinants of the natural and sociocultural orders. It is precisely the features of psychologically capable human agents (e.g., the sophisticated forms of memory and imagination requisite to deliberative, reflective thought) with the possibility to transform themselves and their world that distinguish them from other agentic entities. Psychologically capable human agents emerge developmentally from their biophysical and sociocultural determinants. However, once they have emerged psychologically as self-interpreting beings, they become deeply implicated in their own further self-determination in ways that are not fully reducible to these determinants. Even as human agents continue to be constituted by sociocultural relational practices, they also come to contribute to those practices in innovative ways. The emergence of this individual capacity realizes a human agentic psychological realm that is sui generis and irreducible to physical, biological, and sociocultural forms of reality (see Martin, Sugarman, and Thompson 2003).

With the development of a reflective, interpretive awareness, agentic persons have a capacity, albeit limited and provisional, to transcend and revise the social and cultural means and practices of which they are constituted. If it were not for

this underdetermination of human agents by their social, cultural, and biophysical constituents, societies, even if somehow spontaneously emergent, would remain static (Martin and Sugarman 1999). We have flexibility not only to adopt and wield sociocultural means and practices but also to revise and transform them and, in so doing, extend the lifeworld of which we are part.

I recognize that Kockelman may regard arguments for the requirement of a modest form of emergent deliberative self-determination with suspicion. However, avoiding overly strong forms of dualism and their attendant difficulties should not lead to a denial of a real and influential, if constrained, self-interpreting agency. Otherwise, we risk losing exactly that which we seek to understand and explain.

Jean-Pierre Warnier
Department de Sciences Sociales, Université de Paris V, 12 rue Cujas, F-75230 Paris 05, France (jp-warnier@ wanadoo.fr). 17 I 07

Kockelman presents one of the most thought-provoking analyses of agency I know of, although he does not seem to include, as I would (see Warnier 2001 and 2006), cognitive and bodily processes as an essential component of agency. He chooses to define agency in terms of a Peircean-based theory of meaning. In my view, this choice is largely beyond critique, because any other dimension of action may fall outside the scope of what Kockelman calls "agency." My first question, then, is, How does Kockelman define "action," "practice," and "sensori-motor behaviour" as against "agency"?

The case of the hammer that he mentions is a good example for discussion. I assume that the hammer is used by a person, for example, a stone carver. We may indeed consider that the carver finds a particular hammer too heavy for the task and may say, "The hammer is heavy." Here we clearly have a case of residential and of representational agency. But what is the object of this type of agency? Is it the knowledge of the fact that the hammer is inadequate to the task, or is it also the task itself, once the carver has procured the proper hammer and carries on with his carving in a routine way? In other words, does "agency" have to do only with the knowledge processes that occur upstream of the routine action of carving, or does it also include the latter?

A second question arises from the first. Besides the three traditions mentioned in the article, one may consider a fourth one, running from Cabanis through phenomenology to Mead and some "cognitive scientists" for whom there is no human "action" (if not "agency") that does not involve an essential element of "meaning" and conscious thematization but *also*, in the end, some kind of "gestural behaviour," "sensori-motor behaviour," or preconscious embodied "procedural knowledge." Foucault would certainly qualify as part of this tradition in that, for him, power and discipline always address the body. Kockelman recognizes the relevance of "gestural

behaviour," perhaps not as an essential component of agency but as one of its possible dimensions. For example, he mentions the use of instruments (a knife, Phillips-head screw), the action of baking, changes in bodily states, and even "so-called material culture." My question is, In the end, does "agency" *always* involve some kind of sensori-motor behaviour based on some kind of procedural knowledge *essential* to it? In my view, the answer is yes. At some point, a high-ranking executive, in order to implement any kind of agency, will have to speak up (which mobilizes the learned procedural knowledge of operating the 250 muscles of the breathing and speech apparatus) or take his/her pen and sign the documents presented to him/her.

I am not sure that Kockelman would answer yes to this question. But assuming that he does, the discussion leads to a third and last question. If we assume that agency always involves "symbolic behaviour" *and* "gestural behaviour" or, in cognitive parlance, "verbalized knowledge" *and* "procedural knowledge" or again "speech" *and* "sensori-motor behaviour," how do we analyse the way these two components, as it were, are articulated? Kockelman's emphasis on meaning, symbolic behaviour, sign, and representation is fully consistent with Peircean analytical philosophy, but how does this paradigm relate the sign to "gestural behaviour" (in Mead's terms)? How can I articulate preconscious, fully human, embodied procedural knowledge, based on (fully human) "material culture," on the one hand, with verbalized and "thematized" knowledge, within the framework of a comprehensive theory of agency, on the other? So far, I have not found any satisfactory answer to this question. I know, however, that one has to admit gaps, discrepancies, and even contradictions as well as, in some cases, a high degree of coherence between what seem to me to be the two essential dimensions of "agency." I would not mind using "agency" to refer to everything that belongs to the realm of verbalized and thematized knowledge or "meaning" and "action" or "practice" or "habitus" to refer to everything that belongs to the realm of "gestural behaviour," provided that we recognize both as fully human and specify that neither may take place without the other. However, this would still leave the third question open to discussion.

Reply

Agha succinctly characterizes the conceptual terrain in which agency and a set of related terms have been articulated. He offers a compelling general description of agency, which should be stressed: "a capacity whereby social actors (whether individual or institutional ones) effectively transform a context of action and thereby enlarge the sphere of their enablements." And he notes that there are other varieties of agency waiting to be found and theorized. Finally, in a different context altogether, he encourages me to include a set of mitigating remarks (which are equally relevant here) as to my use of a pragmatic typology (Kockelman 2006*b*, 85). If I may offer one interpretant of some of Agha's present and prior signs (and thereby begin to answer some of the other commentators' questions), it is that my essay should be treated as one of many potential moves in a strategy of enablement. This essay and its author are *subject to every agentive constraint that any sign or signer is subject to.*

In 1996, when I was enrolled in her course on language and culture, Ahearn was organizing a panel on agency for the American Anthropological Association and finishing her essay "'A Twisted Rope Binds My Waist': Locating Constraints on Meaning in a Tij Songfest" (1998). While she is far too gracious to point these connections out, the subtitle of her essay alone shows her influence on me. Her questions are particularly generous in that they invite me to expand on my claims and particularly relevant in that they echo questions raised by Duranti and Warnier as to the relation between agency, intentionality, language, and action.

In a tradition that goes back to Brentano (1995 [1874]), one needs to distinguish between intentionality (as a kind of genus category) and intentions (as one of its species). The former refers to the object-directedness of mental states and speech acts: such mental states and speech acts have propositional content and thereby represent states of affairs in ways which can be correct or incorrect, fulfilled or unfulfilled. Just as I can believe that it is raining or intend to go to the store, I can assert that it is raining or promise to go to the store. And just as beliefs and assertions can be incorrect, intentions and promises can go unfulfilled. While both assertions and promises, as well as beliefs and intentions, exhibit intentionality, there are long-standing battles regarding which kind of intentionality (the psychological kind or the linguistic kind) is originary and which is derivative (Haugeland 1998). Regarding this last question, it is likely that the issue is resolvable (and, as currently couched, will turn out to be a nonissue) only when we take into account processes that occur on ontogenetic, historical, and phylogenetic time-scales (Kockelman 2006*c*, 73–86; Tomasello 1999; Vygotsky 1979).

Within the genus of intentionality, beliefs, perceptions, and intentions are three key species, sometimes known as "propositional attitudes" or "intentional modes," differentiated as a function of their inferential articulation (qua logical properties) and indexical grounding (qua causal properties). Beliefs can be used as reasons and are in need of reasons; perceptions can be used as reasons and are caused by states of affairs; intentions are in need of reasons and are causal of states of affairs. This essay treats that species of intentionality known as belief in some detail (as to its propositional content and its inferential and indexical nature). Kockelman (2006*c*), with much help from analytic philosophers such as Brandom (1994) and cognitive psychologists such as Tomasello (1999), generalizes these ideas by theorizing the *representational whole*: indexically and inferentially coherent ensembles of memories, perceptions, be-

liefs, plans, and intentions. The emphasis here on social relations and semiotic practices, then, is meant to reframe "mental states," not to deny neurocognition.

In a particular semiotic frame, so-called mental states should be understood as a special kind of social status (Kockelman 2005, 242–45, 278–84; 2006c, 2006d). In particular, Linton (1936) famously defined a status as a collection of rights and responsibilities one holds as a function of one's position in the social fabric, and he defined a role as any enactment of one's status: putting one's rights or responsibilities into effect by acting on them or according to them. To generalize and extend these ideas: An *intentional status* is a set of commitments and entitlements to signify and interpret in particular ways (normative ways of speaking and acting attendant upon "holding a belief" or "having a desire"). An *intentional role* is any enactment of that intentional status: signifying and interpreting in ways that conform to those norms. An intentional role is to an intentional status what a sign is to an object, and an *intentional attitude* is just another's interpretant of one's status by way of having perceived one's roles. I infer your desire to get well, as an intentional status, insofar as I have seen you act as if you desired to get well, and as a function of this attitude (toward your status, having perceived your role), I come to expect you to act in certain ways (and sanction your behavior as a function of these expectations).

Given that any sign or interpretant that one expresses may be used by others to infer one's status, there is much ambiguity: many different roles can indicate the same status, and the same role can indicate many different statuses. Hence, the idea of an *emblematic role* needs to be introduced: a role which is minimally ambiguous (so that it stands for only one status) and maximally public (so that each of us knows that we all know the status in question). Thus, just as there are emblematic roles of social statuses (such as uniforms), there are *relatively* emblematic roles of intentional statuses. Kockelman (2003, 2004; 2005, 86–90) treats such "stances" (qua semiotic means by which we indicate our orientation to states of affairs) in great ethnographic and linguistic detail—focusing on interjections, complement-taking predicates, and grammatical categories such as status, mood, and evidentiality. In the case of social statuses, Turner's (1980) work on the social skin, Silverstein's (1995) work on indexicality, and Agha's (1995, 1998; 2003, 236–44) work on emblematic function are foundational.

Intentional statuses, then, are no more "private" than social statuses: each is known only through the roles that enact them and only relatively incontrovertibly known when these roles are emblematic. The important difference, rather, is their inferential articulation and causal grounding. Moreover, projection is key; much theorizing (qua representational agency) about features of mental states turns on features of relatively emblematic roles of intentional statuses—in particular, complement-taking predicates, wherein both propositional mode and content are made explicit: I believe that you desire to get well. Finally, given that mental states have been reframed as

semiotic processes (whose sign, object, and interpretant components are intentional roles, statuses, and attitudes, respectively), they can easily be framed in terms of residential agency (as to one's degree of control, composition, and commitment over these components).

For various reasons, people take intentions (as one species of intentionality) to be crucial to agency. The above points should dispel this idea: representational agency is exactly about intentionality qua "beliefs" or "knowledge." Intentions per se, as a putative private cause for our public actions and as a key means of judging accountability for the repercussions of such actions, are nonetheless important, as Ahearn stresses. An action is a semiotic process. Its sign is a controlled behavior, its object is a purpose, and its interpretant may be another's reaction (as in the example of two boxers), an incorporating action by the same actor (e.g., in opening the window I offer an interpretant of the purpose of my having walked into the room), or an instrument that is realized by the action (e.g., a pot provides an interpretant of the purpose of throwing clay). As such, one may have residential agency over an action: control (when and where the behavior is undertaken), composition (what behavior is undertaken and what purpose it has), and commitment (what effect this behavior will have when and where it is undertaken).

In a particular semiotic frame, then, a purpose is just the object of those semiotic processes we call actions. Following Anscombe (1957), an intention is the purpose of an action which has a representational interpretant that the actor would commit to (Kockelman 2006a, 44–49, 60–61). This is the proper semiotic generalization of her maxim "An intention is an action under a description." In the absence of commitment (qua reflexive semiosis) and representational interpretants (qua propositional contents) there are no intentions—though there may very well be purposes (just try to stymie the trajectory of any rat or chimpanzee). Finally, "intentions" are just intentions interpreted from a Western folk-psychological episteme or, to paraphrase Tomasello, little pieces of furniture in the house of mind.

As described in the context of actions as semiotic processes, then, intentions are maximally caught up in residential and representational agency. This is why the grammatical and lexical categories that undergird representational interpretants of action are so important (we project their features onto the states of affairs they represent) and why the information content and epistemic status of such representations must be theorized. In particular, representational agency is maximally caught up in offering a reason for our intentions (usually by referring to our beliefs and values). Here is where reference to evaluative standards, in the sense of Davidson (1980) and Taylor (1989), comes to the fore. Elsewhere (Kockelman 2006b, 101–2; 2006a, 55–60) I work through the details, showing how we ground our intentions and actions, through reasoning, in value and identity.

Colapietro's 1989 *Peirce's Approach to the Self* was an important text in my intellectual formation, so in some sense

my essay is already a response to him qua agreement in principles and uptake of particulars. Crucially, he notes here that other sets of Peircean categories may be implicated in modes of agency and so clears space for future theorists to move through. In a point that I will return to below, he stresses the ways in which agency is distributed, graduated, and dimensional and hence inherently communal. Footnotes 9 and 10 make clear the relation between residential and representational agency. While the latter is not a mode of the former, it does presuppose the former: having representational agency over that which is represented involves having residential agency over that which represents. A point of his which cannot be stressed enough is "the capacity of objects to reconfigure, through the mediation of signs, our relationship to these objects and also our own habits." While I stressed the mediation of habits (as interpretants of signs), it is important not to overlook the ways signs are mediated by their (dynamic) objects. These are crucial to knowledge practices (for example, as source events or empirical evidence that are used as reasons for beliefs). And these are crucial for the ways novel events and technologies affect the experiences and practices of their users. Finally, Colapietro makes another claim that must be stressed: "The degree to which determination by what is other than the self is compatible with self-determination." Tradition is source as much as shackle.

Danesi's notions of abduction and *energeia* deserve a privileged place in theories of meaning. As is brought out by Danesi, the idea of abduction undergirds my account of interpretation and is explicitly discussed as one key mode of inference. Readers should take up his inspired account of abduction as "an extension of bodily experiences, a kind of abstracted sensoriality." The idea of modeling is new to me, as is the stimulating work of Lotman that he points to. Also usefully emphasized by Danesi is the "internal dialogue" between world and mind, as well as the relative similarity of diverse semiotic systems (as opposed to their differences). Let me stress, then, that a comparative, typological approach should be used in tandem with detailed attention to individual diversity. *Energeia,* as a kind of "creative potency," I do not, alas, treat at all (coming closest to it with my discussion of agency as grounded in *ergon* rather than organ). Paul Friedrich, a linguistic anthropologist who has more *energeia* than anyone I know, has devoted much of his life and work to poetic indeterminacy (1986), one key means by which human beings, however situated, transcend their situations.

Duranti's questions are appropriate and helpful, and I have elsewhere (Kockelman 2005) answered most of them.

Drawing on his own research on the semiotic affordances of gesture (2003, 2005), Enfield offers examples of very important but understudied sign systems that enable complex modes of agency. While the focus of his work is on kinship mapping, his analysis is general enough to account for the relation between diagrams and inference in scientific and technological settings. He also emphasizes the relation between agency and recipient design: the fact that recipient design presupposes commitment but this commitment constrains composition. Such potential trade-offs, in which one dimension of agency is necessarily lost when another is gained, are crucial topics for investigation.

I want to expand on his last point: one sense of "fetishization" is the degree to which we take an entity to have more residential and/or representational agency than it has, and one sense of "reification" is the degree to which we take an entity to have less residential and representational agency than it has—with all the usual caveats regarding how one would obtain the fiducial view necessary to make such a claim (Kockelman 2005, 265–69; 2006*d*, 17). Finally, to echo Agha and Ahearn in the context of Enfield, *most modes of meanness turn on meaning:* the way one's modes of residential and representational agency may be used to constrain and enable others' modes of residential and representational agency. Key topics in critical theory—such as domination, exploitation, coercion, hegemony, and constraint—can be fruitfully approached from such a semiotic stance.

I thank Layton for offering me the opportunity to clarify the usual distinction between "tools" (such as hammers and blenders) and "symbols" (such as speech acts). As I explain in depth elsewhere (Kockelman 2006*a*, 39–40; Vygotsky 1979), a speech act is wielded to change a social status or intentional state (an addressee acquires a belief; a man becomes a husband), while a hammer is wielded to change a state of affairs (a nail goes into a board). The effects of speech acts are brought about by another's interpretant of them; the effects of hammers are brought about by the reaction of an "object" to them. In other words, for speech acts there are two interpreters: the one who interprets the speech act (by saying it in a particular context—and thus every signer is simultaneously an interpreter) and the one who interprets the wielding of the speech act by undergoing a change in social or intentional status. For hammers and tools more generally there is one interpreter and one reactor: the one who interprets the tool by wielding it and that which undergoes a change in state by reacting to the wielding of the tool. It should be emphasized that these are differences in degree not in kind. One sense of fetishization is to treat the feasibility and efficaciousness conditions of tools (and secondness more generally) as the appropriateness and effectiveness conditions of symbols (or thirdness more generally), and one sense of reification is to do the reverse. Finally, note the nice mapping onto discipline and punishment.

Sugarman outlines "a modest form of emergent deliberative self-determination" (and here there is an interesting overlap with Colapietro's concerns). This is a good idea and feliciously phrased. It resonates very well with what I call the classic tradition and is thus in keeping with the great humanist ideas of Herder, Vico, and Marx (and my heart is with the humanists even if my head is with Hobbes). He is right to emphasize "the psychological capacities specific to human agents," with the caveat that such capacities are as social and semiotic as they are cognitive and neurological. Sugarman's

own work is a great example of this. In another context (Kockelman 2005, 290–91; Hockett 1958), I have characterized that host of seemingly human-specific and individual-centric facilites—standing at the irreducible intersection of language, culture, and cognition—that are emblematic of the status *human* (enter *energeia*): metaphor, generativity, meta-language (or meta-representation), symbolism, displacement, performativity, logical form, poetic indeterminacy, and so forth. As I say there in a footnote, "Most of these properties have several important features: something finite allows for something infinite; something fixed allows for something emergent: something normative allows for something transformative of norms" (2005, 300).

Also, to answer some of Warnier's and Sugarman's questions about the seeming exclusion of psychology in this essay, if you are a cognitive psychologist rather than a linguistic anthropologist, have no fear: just replace the initial definition of "semiotic process" with "cognitive process"—whatever represents, whatever is represented, and whatever a representation gives rise to insofar as it represents. Stereotypically, these three components of a cognitive process map onto mental states, states of affairs, and speech acts, respectively. But they may be scaled up or down (e.g., that which represents may be larger or smaller than a mental state—say, a script or a concept), shifted from left to right (e.g., that which represents may just as easily be a speech act as a mental state), or self-embedded (e.g., in "thinking" a mental state represents a state of affairs and gives rise to another mental state). All the same claims of this essay still hold (folding in appropriate theory and data from the cognitive sciences), and agency may thereby also be understood as a cognitive facility that is multidimensional, graduated, and distributed. Semoisis is just cognition seen from a different frame.

To conclude, Colapietro and Enfield both emphasize how constrained our agency actually is, and this cannot be stressed enough. Precisely because it is graduated, dimensional, and distributed, most actors have relatively little agency as individuals. Moreover, given the symbolic-conventional nature of our semiotic systems, the vast majority of our semiotic processes involve what Peirce would call replicas: signs (objects and interpretants) that are tokens of recognizable types. Nonetheless, we are not absolutely beholden to replication and certainly not bound to Peirce's categories (reenter *energeia*). Hence, in another context, I have defined *singularities* as "unreplicable and/or unprecedented . . . sign events" (2005). Happily, I am supported on this by none other than Vladimir Nabokov (1990, 70), who writes, regarding the incipient and incestuous ardor of young Ada and Van,

> No point would there be, if we left out, for example, the little matter of prodigious individual awareness and young genius, which makes, in some cases, of this or that particular gasp an *unprecedented and unrepeatable event* in the continuum of life or at least a thematic anthemia of such events in a work of art, or a denouncer's article.

No point would there be at all.

—Paul Kockelman

References Cited

Agha, Asif. 1995. Process and personality. *Semiotica* 107(1): 125–46.

———. 1998. Stereotypes and registers of honorific language. *Language in Society* 27:151–93.

———. 2003. The social life of cultural value. *Language and Communication* 23:231–73.

Ahearn, Laura. 1998. "A twisted rope binds my waist": Locating constraints on meaning in a Tij songfest. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 8(1):60–86.

———. 2000. Agency. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 9(1–2):12–15.

———. 2001*a*. Language and agency. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 30:109–37.

———. 2001*b*. *Invitations of love: Literacy, love letters, and social change in Nepal*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Anscombe, G. E. M. 1957. *Intention*. Oxford: Blackwell.

Bacon, Francis. 2000 (1620). *The new organon*. Ed. Lisa Jardine and Michael Silverthorne. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Berlin, Isaiah. 1992. *Vico and Herder*. London: Hogarth Press.

Bloch, M., 1974. Symbols, song, dance, and features of articulation: Is religion an extreme form of traditional authority? *Archives Européennes de Sociologie* 15:55–81. [NJE]

Boas, Franz. 1989 (1910). Psychological problems in anthropology. In a *Franz Boas reader*, ed. G. W. Stocking Jr., 243–54. Chicago: Midway Reprints.

Bourdieu, Pierre. 1977 (1972). *Outline of a theory of practice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Brandom, Robert. 1994. *Making it explicit: Reasoning, representing, and discursive commitment*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Brentano, Franz. 1995 (1874). *Psychology from an empirical standpoint*. New York: Routledge.

Brown, R., and A. Gilman. 1972. The pronouns of power and solidarity. In *Language and social context*, ed. P. P. Giglioli, 252–82. New York: Penguin.

Chafe, Wallace. 1998. Language and the flow of thought. In *The new psychology of language*, ed. Michael Tomasello, 93–112. Mahway, N.J.: Lawrence Erlbaum.

Colapietro, Vincent M. 1989. *Peirce's approach to the self: A semiotic perspective on human subjectivity*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Crossland, Zoë. 2000. Buried lives: Forensic archaeology and the disappeared in Argentina. *Archaeological Dialogues* 7: 145–58. [RL]

Daniels, E. Valentine. 1984. *Fluid signs: Being a person the Tamil way*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 1997. *Charred lullabies: Chapters in an anthropology of violence.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Danziger, E., 2006. The thought that counts: Interactional consequences of variation in cultural theories of meaning. In *Roots of human sociality: Culture, cognition, and interaction,* ed. N. J. Enfield and S. C. Levinson, 259–78. Oxford: Berg. [NJE]

Davidson, Donald. 1980. Actions, reasons, and causes. In *Essays on actions and events,* 3–20. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Duranti, Alessandro. 1994. *From grammar to politics.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

———. 2004. Agency in language. In *A companion to linguistic anthropology,* ed. Alessandro Duranti, 451–73. New York: Blackwell.

———. 2006. The social ontology of intentions. *Discourse Studies* 8(1):31–40. [LMA]

Durkheim, E., 1982 (1895). *The rules of sociological method.* London: Macmillan.

Enfield, Nick J. 2003. Producing and editing diagrams using co-speech gesture: Spatializing nonspatial relations in explanations of kinship in Laos. *Journal of Linguistic Anthroplogy* 13(1):7–50.

———. 2005. The body as a cognitive artifact in kinship representations. *Current Anthropology* 46:51–73.

Enfield, N. J., and T. Stivers, eds. 2007. *Person reference in interaction: Linguistic, cultural, and social perspectives.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Foucault, M. 1972. *The archaeology of knowledge.* London: Tavistock. [RL]

———. 1978. *The history of sexuality.* Trans. Robert Hurley. New York: Vintage.

———. 1995. *Displine and punish: The birth of the prison.* Trans. Alan Sheridan. New York: Vintage Books.

Friedrich, Paul. 1986. *The language parallax.* Austin: University of Texas Press.

Gell, Alfred. 1998. *Art and agency: An anthropological theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. [RL]

Giddens, Anthony. 1979. *Central problems in social theory: Action, structure, and contradiction in social analysis.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Goffman, E. 1967. *Interaction ritual.* Harmondsworth: Penguin. [NJE]

———. 1981. Footing. In *Forms of talk,* 124–59. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Goldin-Meadow, S. 2003. *Hearing gesture: How our hands help us think.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press. [NJE]

Goodwin, Charles. 1979. The interactive construction of a sentence in natural conversation. In *Everyday language: Studies in ethnomethodology,* ed. George Psathas, 97–121. New York: Irvington.

Goodwin, Marjorie H. 1990. *He-said-she-said: Talk as social organization among black children.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Grice, H. P. 1975. Logic and conversation. In *Speech acts,* ed.

P. Cole and J. L. Morgan, 41–58. New York: Academic Press. [NJE]

Hacking, Ian. 1993. *Representing and intervening.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hanks, William F. 1990. *Referential practice.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Haugeland, John. 1998. The intentionality all-stars. In *Having thought: Essays in the metaphysics of mind,* 127–70. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Havránek, B., 1964 (1932). The functional differentiation of the standard language. In *A Prague School reader on esthetics, literary structure, and style,* ed. P. L. Garvin, 3–16. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press. [NJE]

Hill, Jane H. 1995. The voices of Don Gabriel: Responsibility and self in modern Mexicano narrative. In *The dialogic emergence of culture,* ed. Dennis Tedlock and Bruce Mannheim, 97–147. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.

———. 1996. The grammar of consciousness and the consciousness of grammar. In *The matrix of language: Contemporary linguistic anthropology,* ed. Donald Brenneis and Ronald K. S. Macaulay, 307–23. Boulder: Westview Press.

Hill, Jane H., and Judith T. Irvine. 1992. *Responsibility and evidence in oral discourse.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Hill, Jane H., and Bruce Mannheim. 1992. Language and world view. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21:381–406.

Hockett, C. F. 1958. *A course in modern linguistics.* New York: Macmillan.

Irvine, Judith T. 1989. Ideologies of honorific language. *Pragmatics* 2:251–62.

———. 1996. Shadow conversations: The indeterminacy of participant roles. In *Natural histories of discourse,* ed. Michael Silverstein and Greg Urban, 131–59. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Irvine, Judith T., and Susan Gal. 2000. Language ideology and linguistic differentiation. In *Regimes of language: Ideologies, polities, and identities,* ed. Paul V. Kroskrity. Santa Fe: School of American Research.

Jakobson, Roman. 1990. Shifters and verbal categories. In *On language,* ed. Linda Waugh and Monica Monville-Burston, 386–92. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Kendon, A., 2004. *Gesture: Visible action as utterance.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [NJE]

Kockelman, Paul. 2002. The semiopathology of everyday strife: Agency, patiency, and the unconscious. In Stance and subjectivity among the Q'eqchi'-Maya: Minding language and measuring labor under neoliberal globalization, chap. 6. Ph.D. diss., University of Chicago.

———. 2003. The meaning of interjections in Q'eqchi'-Maya: From emotive reaction to social and discursive action. *Current Anthropology* 44:467–90.

———. 2004. Stance and subjectivity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 14:127–50.

———. 2005. The semiotic stance. *Semiotica* 157:233–304.

———. 2006*a*. Residence in the world: Affordances, instruments, actions, roles, and identities. *Semiotica* 162:19–71.

———. 2006*b*. A semiotic ontology of the commodity. *Journal of Linguistic Anthropology* 16:76–102.

———. 2006*c*. Representations of the world: Memories, perceptions, beliefs, intentions, and plans. *Semiotica* 162:73–125.

———. 2006*d*. Agent, person, subject, self. *Semiotica* 162:1–18.

Lambrecht, Knud. 1994. *Information structure and sentence form.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Levinson, S. C. 2000. *Presumptive meanings: The theory of generalized conversational implicature.* Cambridge, Mass., and London: MIT Press.

Lévi-Strauss, C. 1966. *The savage mind.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Li, C. N., ed. *Subject and topic.* New York: Academic Press.

Linton, Robert. 1936. *The study of man.* New York: Appleton Century Crofts.

Lotman, Yuri. 1990. *The universe of the mind: A semiotic theory of culture.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press. [MD]

Lucy, John A. 1992. *Language diversity and thought.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

———. 1993. *Reflexive language: Reported speech and metapragmatics.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

McNeill, D. 2005. *Gesture and thought.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press.

Martin, J., and J. Sugarman. 1999. *The psychology of human possibility and constraint.* Albany: SUNY Press. [JS]

Martin, J., J. Sugarman, and J. Thompson. 2003. *Psychology and the question of agency.* Albany: SUNY Press. [JS]

Mead, George Herbert. 1934. *Mind, self, and society from the standpoint of a social behavioralist.* Ed. Charles S. Morris. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Mitter, Rana. 2004. *A bitter revolution: China's struggle with the modern world.* Oxford: Oxford University Press. [RL]

Mounin, Georges. 1970. *Introduction à la sémiologie.* Paris: Editions de Minuit. [RL]

Nabokov, Vladimir. 1990. *Ada, or ardor.* New York: Vintage.

Ochs, E. 1996. Linguistic resources for socializing humanity. In *Rethinking linguistic relativity,* ed. J. J. Gumperz and S. C. Levinson, 407–37. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [AD]

Parmentier, Richard J. 1994. Peirce divested for nonintimates. In *Signs in society: Studies in semiotic anthropology,* 3–22. Bloomington: Indiana University Press.

Peirce, Charles S. 1934. *Collected papers of Charles Sanders Peirce.* Vol. 5. Edited by Charles Hartshorne and Paul Weiss. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. 1955*a*. Logic as semiotic: The theory of signs. In *Philosophical writings of Peirce,* ed. Justus Buchler, 98–119. New York: Dover Publications.

———. 1955*b*. The principles of phenomenology. In *Philosophical writings of Peirce,* ed. Justus Buchler, 74–97. New York: Dover Publications.

———. 1955*c*. Pragmatism in retrospect: A last formulation. In *Philosophical writings of Peirce,* ed. Justus Buchler, pp. 269–89. New York: Dover Publications.

Putnam, Hilary. 1975. The meaning of "meaning." In *Philosophical papers: Mind, language, and reality,* vol. 2, 215–71. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Richerson, P. J., and R. Boyd. 2005. *Not by genes alone: How culture transformed human evolution.* Chicago: University of Chicago Press. [NJE]

Sapir, Edward. 1985 (1927). The unconscious patterning of behavior in society. In *Selected writings in language, culture, and personality,* ed. David G. Mandelbaum, 544–59. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Saussure, Ferdinand de. 1983 (1916). *Course in general linguistics.* La Salle, Ill.: Open Court Press.

Schieffelin, B., K. A. Woolard, and P. V. Kroskrity. 1998. *Language ideologies: Practice and theory.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Searle, J. R. 1969. *Speech acts: An essay in the philosophy of language.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [NJE]

Silverstein, Michael. 1981. *The limits of awareness.* Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, Austin, Sociolinguistic Working Paper 84.

———. 1995. Shifters, linguistic categories, and cultural description. In *Language, culture, and society: A book of readings,* ed. Ben G. Blount, 187–221. Prospect Heights, Ill: Waveland Press.

———. 1996. Monoglot "Standard" in America: Standardization and metaphors of linguistic hegemony. In *The matrix of language,* ed. Donald Brenneis and Ronald Macaulay, 284–306. Boulder: Westview Press.

Talmy, Leonard. 2000. Force dynamics in language and cognition. In *Towards a cognitive semantics,* 409–70. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Taylor, Charles. 1989. *Sources of the self.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tomasello, Michael. 1999. *The cultural origins of cognition.* Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

Tomlin, R. S. 1997. Mapping conceptual representations into linguistic representations: The role of attention in grammar. In ed J. Nuyts and E. Pedersen. *Language and conceptualization,* 162–89. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. [NJE]

Torop, Peeter. 1999. Cultural semiotics and culture. *Sign Systems Studies* 27:9–23. [MD]

Turner, Terrence. 1980. The social skin. In *Not work alone,* ed. Jeremy Cherfas and Roger Lewin. 112–40. Beverly Hills: Sage.

Van Valin, Robert D., Jr., and Randy J. LaPolla. 1997. *Syntax: Structure, meaning, and function.* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Vygotsky, Lev S. 1979*a*. Tool and symbol in child development. In *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes,* ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner,

Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman, 19–30. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.

———. 1979*b*. *Mind and society: The development of higher psychological processes*. Ed. Michael Cole, Vera John-Steiner, Sylvia Scribner, and Ellen Souberman. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Warnier, J.-P. 2001. A praxeological approach to subjectivation in a material world. *Journal of Material Culture* 5–24. [JW]

———. 2006. Inside and outside, surfaces and containers. In *Handbook of material culture,* ed. C. Tilley et al. 186–95. London: Sage. [JW]

Whorf, Benjamin. 1956*a* (1937). Grammatical categories. In *Language, thought, and reality*, ed. John B. Carroll, 87–101. Cambridge: MIT Press.

———. 1956*b* (1939). The relation of habitual thought and behavior to language. In *Language, thought, and reality*, ed. John B. Carroll, 134–59. Cambridge: MIT Press.

Wittgenstein, L. 1953. *Philosophical investigations.* Oxford: Basil Blackwell. [NJE]