Reflections on Parallel Lines in Sociology and Linguistics

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ABSTRACT

There are two lines of development in both sociological and linguistic thought. One makes a sharp distinction between individuals and society, with an overwhelming emphasis on the role and function of society's norms and rules. The second holds a more integrative perspective on the interaction of society and its members and sees social norms as immanent in individual conduct rather than as externally imposed on the practices of everyday life. The first developmental line reaches its highest point in Saussure's linguistic theory, while the second one is best promoted in Erving Goffman's dramaturgy theory. A thorough analysis of these two lines with reference to sociology and linguistics, respectively, helps further an understanding of the nature of sign. This article attempts to highlight a significant turn of semiotic thinking in Goffman's sociological theory that has to a large extent been neglected. This semiotic turn could be formulated as characterizing the sign in terms of its more interactional function in the practices of everyday life and away from its more structural and external function of providing norms and rules for such interactions. In this approach the function of the sign is made more coherent with the social dimensions of individuals in the interactional situations of everyday life.

Saussure's famous dyadic concepts of *langue* and *parole* have implied much beyond what the concepts themselves assert. The problem at issue is whether the two concepts are solely in a mutually complementary relation in terms of linguistic structure or imply something else. Perhaps the

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"something else" mainly refers to the social and individual groundwork of *langue* and *parole*. Through the wrapped screen of *langue* and *parole*, we can find inside how society and individuality in a complex but integrative way prop, modulate, and even determine the rationality of *langue* and *parole*. Whereas social norms characterize society, the individual highlights his individuality. Nonetheless, both sociality and individuality stem from individuals but not from society. Neither a simple separation of society from individual nor a complex integration of society with individual can tell us the whole truth about this issue.

Two lines of thought have taken shape around the relationship of society and individual that purport to disclose in sociology where social mechanism is or aim to explain in linguistics how a sign system contributes in a positive way to such a relationship. One makes a severe distinction between individuals and society, with an overwhelming emphasis on the role and function of society's norms and rules. The second takes a more integrative perspective on the interaction of society and its members and sees social norms as immanent in individual conduct rather than as externally imposed on the practices of everyday life. A theoretical rationalization of society's norm as dominant over individual's contingencies or practical path seeking, which attempts to build society with individuals contained inside, has characterized the two lines of thinking in general. Erving Goffman, with his semiotic orientation rather than an identification with microsociological analysis (MacCannell, in Riggins 1990, 34), has attempted to arrive at a new way of thinking in the wake of these two lines of thought.

In order to clarify these issues, my intent in this article is to offer some reflections on developments in early twentieth-century thought about language and society and to focus on some issues that have long been neglected. I do not intend to discuss more recent developments, which lie beyond the purview of the article.

Paralleling Thinking in Sociology and Linguistics

The significance of signs and symbols for social functioning did not escape the attention of the forerunners of sociological thinking. In fact, classical sociologists saw symbols and signs as playing a necessary and pertinent role in the social process. Key examples include Emile Durkheim's concept of "collective representation" (Durkheim 1915) and Georg Simmel's notion of "sociability" (Simmel 1971, 127–41; 2009), which is constituted by sign-based reciprocal interaction and conversations.

As Durkheim (1915) characterizes it, collective representation is accomplished through individualized ritual process, on the one hand, that is external-

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ized in social and religious collective life, on the other. In other words, it has to get embodied in a particular totem or taboo that, as a collective sign, fulfills the role of identification and belongingness for each of the members of a primitive community. At the same time, it is only through the ritual practices of those community members that its symbolic function is realized in the dynamic social process. In Durkheim's argument, a totem sign, categorized as a collective representation, ought not to be identified simply with an abstract construct solely at the group level or the level of society but should be interpreted as an outcome of the interplay and mutual influence between group and individuals. On the one hand, for Durkheim, a collective representation is a social fact that has the two features of coerciveness and externality. Durkheim's overwhelming emphasis on the two features made his followers form a one-sided conception of the theory. "A social fact is any way of acting, whether fixed or not, capable of exerting over the individual an external constraint; or which is general over the whole of a given society whilst having an existence of its own, independent of its individual manifestations" (Durkheim 1982, 59). On the other hand, a collective representation differs from a general social fact with its facet of practice. Regrettably, another core facet of this concept, namely, its dependence on individual practice, has been neglected to a large extent, particularly by systems theories, as typically represented by Talcott Parsons (1951), and by structural linguistics, as typically represented by Saussure (1959).

Georg Simmel (1971, 2009) also focused on the function of signs and symbols in his sociological theory. He gives an ideal account of sociability as amicable, playful association—a democracy of equals that results in little friction. Sociability characterizes the true nature of a human as a social being. Simmel had even elevated this sociability to one principle and set it as a social form in opposition to social content or social material. What he was searching for was a code system undergirding the association process. But, for him, code and process stood in a coherent relation, since he always had an integrative perspective on concrete association.

In Simmel's view, a genuine association based on human sociability necessitates removing those intrusive factors that are external to sociability formation and socialization processes and may hamper their development. The factors of economic wealth, social position, fame prestige, and the like are likely to produce negative pressures on those with less power, foiling the purer forms of equal, democratic, and genuine interaction. With the elimination of these intrusive factors, association will be undertaken simply by means of a sign system and supported predominantly by it. This sign system incorporates linguistic

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devices, gestures, and other types of behavior. In this vein, to judge whether an individual person has finally arrived at a phase of social development—as a sociable person—depends mainly on the competency in the use of signs to make appropriate adjustments and responses in the process of association. Furthermore, Simmel had characterized this social interaction through his incisive examination of the difference between oral speech and written medium in making association effective as a private affair or a public activity and as core to conceptualization and emotional expression (2009, 342–45).

A semiotic space emerges in Simmel's domain of sociability and redefines it. In this semiotic space, code and process coexist and support one another through concrete association. Individual and society are integrated as a direct outcome of the sign-based social exchange. It is just this mutually encompassing relation of society and individual that defines the essence of society.

As indicated in this brief examination of the two classical sociologists, a coherent account of the relation between individual and society had been pursued in both Durkheim and Simmel's sociological theories. Such an integrated perspective also underscored their outlook on the function of signs in social process. This integration inheres not only in the relationship between society and individual but also in that between code and process, as well as between structure and event. Regrettably, this tradition was disrupted in theories of systems sociology and linguistic structuralism. This theoretical divergence has a long lineage threading its way among Talcott Parsons in sociology, Saussure and Noam Chomsky (1965) in linguistics, and Claude Levi-Strauss (1963) in anthropology, among other similar thinkers.

However, another developmental line in both sociology and linguistics shows a somewhat more positive or, at least, a less pessimistic direction. As for sociology, this line, as far as I know, links the classical sociology of Durkheim and Simmel with George Mead's (1913, 1922, 1962) theory of the social self, Charles Horton Cooley's (1902) concept of the "looking-glass self," Herbert Blumer's (1940, 1966) symbolic interactionism, Harold Garfinkel's (1967) ethnomethodology, and, most importantly, Erving Goffman's (1959) dramaturgy theory.

In a parallel way, with regard to linguistic development, Edward Sapir may be interpreted as a master in envisioning linguistic signs in this integrative spirit between individual and society. He argued that linguistic signs as an institutional system are activated in a communicative process. Sapir wrote that "[Society] is only apparently a static sum of social institutions; actually it is being reanimated or creatively reaffirmed from day to day by particular acts of a communicative nature which obtain among individuals participating in it" (1949,

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104). Furthermore, speech as a trait of personality should be treated as solidifying both social and individual dimensions in an inseparable way. Even quality of voice in speech is of both a personal and a social style. He writes:

> We know very well that if, for some reason or other, the timbre of the voice that we are heir to has been criticized, we try to modify it, so that it may not be a socially unpleasant instrument of speech. There is always something about the voice that must be ascribed to the social background, precisely as in the case of gesture. Gestures are not the simple, individual things they seem to be. They are largely peculiar to this or that society. In the same way, in spite of the personal and relatively fixed character of the voice, we make involuntary adjustments in the larynx that bring about significant modifications in the voice. Therefore, in deducing fundamental traits of personality from the voice we must try to disentangle the social element from the purely personal one. (Sapir 1949, 535).

This line in linguistics was extended from Edward Sapir to Dell Hymes's ethnography of speaking (1972) and even to conversational analysis (Sacks 1995; Schegloff, 2007).

It is apparent that these two lines of thought in sociology and linguistics are characterized distinctively by a focused attention on the social function of signs in confronting the core problem of how to position the relation of individual and society. Here we find that signs fulfill a pivotal role in the two lines of thought and adumbrate a line of semiotic development as well. This semiotic line of development is a significant turn away from those deviations in both sociology and linguistics from the classical sociological theories of Durkheim and Simmel and a return to the unitary spirit espoused by that classical thought. A systematic exploration of this semiotic turn will certainly contribute to our understanding of sociological history and linguistic development and, of course, to our accurate understanding in a developmental perspective on the influence of semiotic thought upon social sciences as a whole.

Suggestions from Saussure

Saussure must be included in examining this semiotic turn. Although his thought deeply influenced the structuralist movement that followed him, his insistence on the self-sufficiency of language as a sign system ironically legitimates this semiotic turn. Saussure put forward the dyadic categories of *langue* and *parole* and always tried to anchor them in related but different dimensions of language. The com-

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plexity of society and individual in relation with *langue* and *parole* brought about a paradox that Saussure had to confront: "Thus the language [*langue*] is a set of necessary conventions adopted by the social body so as to permit the usage of the faculty of language among individuals." And "by speech [*parole*] we designate the act of the individual putting his faculty into practice by means of the social convention which is the language [*langue*]" (1997, 4a).

Regrettably, the scientific goal set by Saussure for linguistics led him to nearly discard the individual side of language or at least refuse to consider any individual practice as relevant to the social nature of language system. Heterogeneity and diversity of individual linguistic practices appeared to him to be a threat to the totality and self-sufficiency of language as a system and institution. However, Saussure's linguistic outlook should not be considered solely scientific in theoretical framing but should be interpreted as being also concerned partially with the social dimensions of language. This does not detract in any way from Saussure's pioneering contributions to linguistic and semiological development or from his important position in linguistic and semiological history.

It has to be admitted that Saussure knew full well that language incorporates both institutional structure and individual practice. He referred to the former as *langue* and the latter as *parole*.[1] A third term, *langage*, was also posited as a faculty relative to *langue*. Furthermore, *langue* was associated with social convention, and *parole* with individual manifestation. Saussure said that "from the very outset we must put both feet on the ground of language [langue] and use language as the norm of all other manifestations of speech [parole]" (1959, 9). In spite of the fact that this partition of language had an enduring influence on linguists, Saussure had made this partition not to emphasize two absolutely inextricable perspectives on language but, instead, in order to exclude those contingent factors arising in language use from the study of the language system. Moreover, in Saussure's opinion, the fact that language can be approached as a dichotomy of *langue* and *parole* could almost be treated as a taken-for-granted truism. As Saussure writes: "But what is language [*langue*]? It is not to be confused with human speech [*parole*], of which it is only a definite part, though certainly an essential one. It is both a social product of the faculty of speech and a collection of necessary conventions that have been adopted by a social body to permit individuals to exercise that faculty. Taken as a whole, speech is many-sided and heterogeneous; straddling several areas simultaneously—physical,

1. Although Saussure had displayed in his *Course of General Linguistics* a set of three terms—*langage*, *langue*, and *parole*—*langage* was merely posited as a potential or faculty relative to *langue*. Actually, this set of three terms will not be able to alter the nature of Saussure's terminological dichotomy.

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physiological, and psychological—it belongs both to the individual and to society" (1959, 9). This implies no intermediate linking part between them to coalesce these two levels, and as its natural consequence, *parole* can be excluded without harming our understanding of language, in order to warrant the independence and self-sufficiency of *langue*.

Although he repeatedly affirmed that his study is to explain the social life of the sign, what Saussure had actually attained is at most a dissociation of the sign from its social life. Consequently, his *langue* system, understood as a structure, becomes disembodied from any real connection to society, even if the study achieves a theoretical self-sufficiency. By excluding *parole*, Saussure fails to recognize that social life exists in reciprocal interactions, in activities of daily life, and in an individual's conduct, but never in any abstract system of rules. The social life of language is virtually a tautology of language practice. It is not feasible to represent it simply as grammatical rules or dictionary entries, since the essence of social life can be found only in the practices of the participants in such social life. As Wittgenstein insightfully pointed out, "to imagine a language means to imagine a form of life," so that "the *speaking* of language is part of an activity, or of a form of life" (1958, secs. 19, 23). It is doubtful that Saussure's methodology or his dichotomy of language is capable of truly capturing the nature of linguistic signs as social phenomena. The impasse in which Saussure had been trapped is not only a linguistic one but also a sociological one in nature. In refusing to give those individual linguistic practices any serious consideration, he missed an opportunity to get at the comprehensive picture of language in both its systemic and social aspects.

Be that as it may, we do not here intend to criticize Saussure without taking into account those historical limitations of his time. Although there is no proof of any actual influence between Saussure and Durkheim as to their social outlooks, there is something of a parallel that can be found in their theories. But some misunderstandings of Durkheim, and these theoretical parallels with Saussure, have been lingering about in sociological and linguistic literature and necessitate a timely correction. They involve a disappointing misunderstanding of Durkheim's social theory, particularly of his notion of "collective representation," and simply linking it to his theoretical emphasis on social facts, and therefore in partially identifying his social theory with social facts characterized collectively, externally, and coercively, but without the link to individual practice. It is inaccurate to treat Durkheim as a social theorist concerned exclusively with a social institution orientation. His social theory is an example of coherent unification of social institutions or norms with individual conduct.

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Saussure was right in recognizing two facets of *langue* and *parole* for language but wrong in artificially eliminating the latter from his theoretical purview. *Langue* as an institutional construct has to be traced back to *parole*, understood as practice, and is at most an abstraction from *parole*. *Langue* maintains its status of existence neither externally nor independently. It only inheres in *parole* and undergirds the latter. But Saussure argued strongly for a conventional basis to language that stems from the conscious or subconscious use of those rules by members of society as they inform the various practices of linguistic communication in everyday life. No a priori rule system of *langue* can arise outside of language use or practice.

The point is on that there is a superficial analog between Saussure's *langue* and Durkheim's social fact. Overemphasis on the externality and independence of *langue* from any individual linguistic behavior naturally caused Saussure to exaggerate the dominance of *langue* over *parole* and created an artificial positioning of social norms over individual members. This stance implies that individuals in society never have any freedom or self-discretion in linguistic use except for absolutely surrendering to the grip of social norms. Therefore, it is meaningless, in Saussure's opinion, for a language speaker to seek any freedom in confronting the pressure of language as a system. What this language speaker can do is, at most, to adhere to these external constraints of *langue*. The function of the individual language speaker is merely to realize or embody the rules of language system.

On the contrary, a large number of linguistic practices show that language speakers use different sets of linguistic rules depending on circumstance (Gumperz 1982). For example, when a person meets another, he may address that person with some linguistic expression other than what he might employ at another time in spite of addressing the same person. He does not need to invoke any external reference but actually uses language appropriate to a judgment of his relationship with another person during this face-to-face encounter. This is the reason why a foreigner is not able to easily master the personal address system of a language, even if many detailed grammatical handbooks and dictionaries are provided. This means that people have freedom in linguistic practice and autonomy in symbolic selection. If people are deprived of this freedom through strict enforcement of language or grammar codes and norms, then this supposes that people are completely passive and are not capable of fulfilling the role of realizing social norms at all.

Language speakers are in a position to choose a high rather than a low pitch of voice, a short rather than a long sentence, a common rather than a bizarre

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phrase to express what they want to convey, and simultaneously to color their speech with their personality. Nonetheless, the extent to which they use their speech in concrete situations implicitly but coherently aligns with the rules or norms lying beneath the surface speech. The difference from Saussure is that, in fact, these rules or norms of *langue* are internally adopted by speakers rather than externally enforced through regulation when they merge with the concrete practices of *parole*. Speakers never deduce their speech behavior from any a priori written rule systems but consciously undertake them with reference unconsciously to some *langue* norms implied in their language behavior. It is as if Saussure's social rules or norms of *langue* reside solely in dictionaries and grammatical handbooks and acquire their externality through written regulations.

The externality of the norms of *langue*, as defined by Saussure, certainly excludes the subjective role of language users. The rules and norms of language must live in the speaker's experience, which, otherwise, becomes useless and meaningless. A living law is not one that sits in the books of the lawmaker but that operates in the social actions of everyday life. Likewise, language lives in the sphere of daily practice, where implicit rules undergird and modify language. Explaining language as a passive reception of rules by speakers does not explain how language is used to construct rather than merely represent the world through a particular cultural lens.

Corresponding to this artificial severing of *langue* from *parole* and assigning a dominant role to the former, Saussure defined a sign as a combination of acoustic image (*signifiant*) and concept (*signifié*) and eliminated referent or object from his definition. It appeared to Saussure that his *langue* does not need to be concerned at all with any entity, state of affairs, and conduct in the real world and is a perfectly homogenous and independent system. Removing the notion of reference appeared to be inevitable, if not necessary, for Saussure. In Saussure's theory, an acoustic image (*signifiant*) can in an automatic manner couple with its conceptual correlate (*signifié*), as long as it operates in a language system (*langue*). It is this system itself rather than any language users or speakers that completes this coupling. In the absence of subjective users, language becomes simplified as a univocal coupling system that attaches arbitrary *signifiant* to specific *signifié*. The language user plays a merely passive role in the coupling of sound and concept.

However, as was illustrated even in Frege's (1948) early theory of reference, as well as in Russell's theory of denoting (Russell 2005), it is primarily through denoting that proper names are possible. Denoting makes it possible to ascribe different names to the same object. Language users employ proper names or

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denoting phrases distinctively to describe the same object differently and to enrich its sense. Giving different senses to the same object reflects people's various attitudes toward a shared object. Only in this way could the nature of language be illuminated sufficiently.

The Semiotic Turn in Goffman

In the first part of this article, we pointed out two lines of development in sociology and linguistics. One line of development gives social norms, language structures, and institutions such a dominant focus that individual conduct or practice is seen as playing a passive or weak role. Thinkers in this line of development start off with a dichotomy between objective structure and subjective role but, in the final analysis, lean toward the objective, structural side of social norms as playing the dominant role. They remove themselves from the solid ground of social life in understanding how people behave in their ordinary social and linguistic activities. This line reaches its highest development in Saussure's linguistic theory.

In contrast, a second line of thought attempts to integrate the roles of the individual and society. This line of development includes George Mead, Charles Horton Cooley, Herbert Blumer, Erving Goffman, and several others in the Chicago school, but reaches its apogee in Erving Goffman. The philosopher John Dewey may also be considered part of this line of thought, but an analysis of this idea is beyond the constraints of this article.

In fact, the second line of thought gets its impetus from a theoretical reaction to the first one, particularly in the case of sociology. Mead consistently insisted that it was only through a reciprocal action of stimulus and response between oneself and others that a symbol employed in communication could become socially significant. He never imagined any external norms that could determine individual conduct a priori. Conversely, individuals acquire their sociability only in virtue of reciprocal interaction in concrete settings. One becomes a social person not through reading an encyclopedia of social norms but through lived communication with others. People learn from other people what ought or ought not to be done in society, rather than from any external regulations. Even one's selfhood is a result of concrete, lived interactions among people. It is through concrete practice that one's self is configured and through which the self's social, psychological, and physical dimensions are completed. Cooley thought, similarly, that the distinction between individuals and society should not be so distinct. His concept of the looking-glass self vividly illuminated how an individual comes to acquire his social character through contin-

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uous reflections from others in frequent, reciprocal interactions (1902). Based on his insightful reading of Mead, Blumer argued that social interaction is primarily symbolic, in that one makes use of interactional settings and of other participants in order to provide an interpretation and definition of the interactive process. Herbert Blumer clearly pointed out that "symbolic interaction involves interpretation, or ascertaining the meaning of the actions or remarks of the other person, and definition, or conveying indications to another person as to how he is to act. Human association consists of a process of such interpretation and definition. Through this process the participants fit their own acts to the ongoing acts of one another and guide others in doing so" (1966, 537–38).

Erving Goffman's dramaturgical theory obviously compensates for the deficiencies of the first developmental line with his thorough analysis of both conditions and process of diverse social encounters. Although Goffman himself doesn't like to be attached to any theoretical label for his research, his dramaturgical theory and its conceptual system still are treated generally as a variant of symbolic interactionism. Based on his analysis of the diverse social encounters, he recognized the heterogeneity of daily interactions, and how they were integrated with codes and rules rather than determined a priori by any external ones. Goffman recognized those codes or norms lying behind concrete interactional behaviors but insisted on their inseparable relation with daily social interactions. Goffman knew very well the extent to which these social norms or rules are coherently and immanently combined with concrete interactional involvement:

> I have suggested that the behavior of an individual while in a situation is guided by social values or norms concerning involvement. These rulings apply to the intensity of his involvements, their distribution among possible main and side activities, and, importantly, their tendency to bring him into an engagement with all, some, or none present. There will be then a patterned distribution or allocation of the individual's involvement. . . . In any case, if we want to describe conduct on a back ward, or in a street market, a bridge game, an investiture, or a revivalist church service, it would seem reasonable to employ the structure of involvement in these situations as one frame of reference. (1963a, 193)

However, distinct from other pioneers of the Chicago sociological school, Goffman had developed his dramaturgical theory with reference to a tripartite division of the individual, social interaction, and society. It is this situated social

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interaction that links individual and society in an entwined manner (1964). Indeed, placed in a social interaction, people have to make a judgment of what can be used from their former experience for defining the current situation, whether they appear appropriately, and what communicative strategies they should take as an interactional participant for success in the communication. Blumer also elaborated the nature of social situation in this respect: "By making indications to himself and by interpreting what he indicates, the human being has to forge or piece together a line of action. In order to act the individual has to identify what he wants, establish an objective or goal, map out a prospective line of behavior, note and interpret the actions of others, size up his situation, check himself at this or that point, figure out what to do at other points, and frequently spur himself on in the face of dragging dispositions or discouraging settings" (1966, 536).

The social situation as it unfolds in mutual interaction serves as an intermediate link between the individual and society. This intermediate role is not a wedge mechanically inserted between the individual and society. Its dynamic character resides in the interactional activities. It is only in a variety of social encounters in which individuals are involved that all the characteristics of a society are embodied and demonstrated. In other words, what a society is in nature would only be perceived, found, and identified from individual activities in some social situation. Neither can a society exist independent of individual interactional activities, nor can an individual live alone and automatically acquire his sociability. The individual is a social being, while society exists only in interactions between individuals.

Activities in social situations mean social interaction, requiring actors to make use of signs to activate the process of social interaction and to fill in the process with what they want to express. "Social interaction can be identified narrowly as that which uniquely transpires in social situations, that is, environments in which two or more individuals are physically in one another's response presence" (Goffman 1983, 2). Through social interaction, actors become capable of touching in both imagination and in reality on social dimension ("*categoric* kind") and individual one ("*individual* kind") simultaneously. Any tilt toward one kind means a partial and unreal judgment over the relationship of society and individual. As result of such a tilting attitude, the value a set of signs would have in social interaction disappears, and its role in configuring the process of social interaction is cancelled. As Goffman said, "the *categoric* kind involving placing that other in one or more social categories, and the *individual* kind, whereby the subject under observation is locked to a uniquely distin-

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guishing identity through appearance, tone of voice, mention of name or other person-differentiating device" (1983, 3).

With lively interaction by means of sign system in social situation, actors together build a world or subuniverse (James 1950, 283–324; Schutz 1962, 207–59), where the social situation gets framed and defined (Goffman 1974). Experiences accrued in building diverse worlds or subuniverses help transform actors in interaction into a new stage of development, which takes growth of self as its core objective. Goffman's self-presentation and impression management, being manifested at the level of sign activities, may be significantly traced to an ulterior motivation like this. The Self expands its volume through experiences accrued in interaction but has to depend on signs, and it travels through them to complete the transition from totality to infinity (Levinas 1969). It is as if Goffman had completed a great leap in searching for the genuine relationship of society and individual.

Undoubtedly, Goffman's social theory, based on daily encounters, symbolizes a turn from a macro sociological tradition toward a micro one. This sociological turn implies a new perspective on the nature of society as well. Society is no longer interpreted as a product resulting from the gathering of individuals in a mechanical and static way, but as based on a variety of social situations, in which individuals interact with each other in a reciprocal and dynamic manner. Social structures or social systems do not directly determine an individual's action but rather exert their influence on individuals through mediated social interaction within specific social situations. This perspective explains more cogently the reason why society would be of such a complicated character. It is the complexity of social situations that accounts for the complexity of society.

Goffman did not examine social interactions without taking into account the signs and symbols that arose therein, which serve not only as sign-equipment to convey what one wants to express but also as evidence to let people read and interpret the real intentions or motives of other participants regardless of how delicately their motives are concealed. Grouping people in virtue of their status or wealth in a hierarchical system of society does not determine the sort of mutual interaction between such group members, let alone what really happens in such interactions. In terms of Goffman's explanation, a social gathering differentiates itself from social grouping based on its interactional components. Grouping people is by definition a collection of individuals with reference to some external social indicators, but a gathering of people is defined by the mutual interaction between them. Both focused and unfocused interaction requires people to place themselves in communication with one another. A lived sign system can

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only serve its function in social situations. In social situations, the sign becomes capable of contributing to the definition of the situation through a cooperative process.

Signs are important in effective communication. In communication, there are not only verbal but also nonverbal signs. Anything, from the settings of the interaction to bodily movements, can qualify as a sign as long as it contributes to the interaction process. Moreover, verbal and nonverbal signs are equal in function in regard to a concrete communication happening in a gathering, and the latter sometimes even more relevant to the communicative process. A wink, a hand signal, a directional shift of head may activate a verbal exchange between people or suspend it. This is "the neglected situation" (Goffman 1964) often seen in weighing the significance of a linguistic symbol against other nonverbal ones. Neither a communication without signs nor an interaction without communication constitutes a gathering. Goffman's theory of social interaction is thoroughly semiotic. He saw social interaction as a semiotic space.

Goffman further classified the sign-equipment available in a social situation into two types: the signs that a person *gives* and the signs that a person *gives off* (see Schiffrin [2006], Tannen [2009] for valuable attention to two types of sign activity).

> The expressiveness of the individual (and therefore his capacity to give impressions) appears to involve two radically different kinds of sign activity: the expression that he gives, and the expression that he gives off. The first involves verbal symbols or their substitutes which he uses admittedly and solely to convey the information that he and the others are known to attach to these symbols. This is communication in the traditional and narrow sense. The second involves a wide range of action that others can treat as symptomatic of the actor, the expectation being that the action was performed for reasons other than the information conveyed in this way. (Goffman 1959, 2)

The former is one that is deliberately displayed by the sign's sender but does not necessarily display the sender's true intentions ("the first [expression given] involving deceit"; see Goffman 1959, 2). The latter is unintentional but often represents the sender's true intention. The signs a performer intentionally gives in an interaction prop up a certain social impression that is generally recognized and accepted in common social interactions of that type. In contrast, signs a performer unintentionally gives off refer to a reality behind the veil of impression

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presented. In the semiotic tradition, those signs that people intentionally give are generally deemed as signs because of their universal recognition among the members of a social community. Goffman's claim that the signs one "gives off," one's "unmeant gestures," also have their formal sign status, has seriously challenged such a traditional definition of sign. This challenge is very meaningful in that signs ought to completely exhibit human beings in their personal and social dimensions. The social reality that results from the socialization process is lodged together with the unconsciously held unsocial reality. Furthermore, the symbolic status of these two kinds of signs ultimately stems from two modes of existence, but in a complementary way. The completeness that people want to achieve with reference to both private and public domains correspondingly require both *given* signs and *given off* signs.

Social recognition assigns the linguistic message of signs *"given"* a status of "legal evidence" (Goffman 1963a, 13–14), where legitimacy begins to link with social norms. "Linguistic messages can be translated, stored, and held up as legal evidence; expressive messages tend to be ones for which the giver cannot be made legally responsible" (13–14). However, a message in an interaction process is doing much more than exchanging norms and testifying a legal validity. The message has to act as a channel to display even unconsciously an actor's individuality, which can let other people have a vivid perception and a context sensitive judgment about the actor. Legal evidence in dominantly linguistic signs given and vivid confirmation in expressive signs given off begin to be in a functionally complementary relation. A face-to-face encounter, involving the physical co-presence of communication participants, has to involve these two kinds of sign for attaining its communicative effects. As result, a linguistic message intentionally given inevitably mixes with expressive messages unintentionally given off: "Every linguistic message carries some expressive information, namely, that the sender is sending messages" (13–14).

What Goffman wanted to identify in dramaturgical performance is the discrepancy between appearances and the all-too-human reality. In social interaction, signs are employed to simultaneously present the self to team members and to the audience or outsiders. Signs are no longer just seen as means of communication external to its participants but are posited rather as an integral part of the communicative process and finally come to characterize one's mode of existence. The appearances and impressions rely largely on socially acceptable signs, whereas the all-too-human nature is displayed through socially unacceptable symbols. In this sense, social life actually proceeds like a symbolic system, where one either displays or conceals his real truth. He has succeeded in con-

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cealing his reality behind the scenes with recourse to signs but has also presented his socially constructed reality on the front stage by virtue of signs as well. His biological self and social or "looking-glass" self are simultaneously presented in social interaction toward his audience. This is the social basis for symbolic communication. In Goffman's terms, the sign's function is not restricted to the transmission of information or meaning from one to another, but it is able to present selfhood as a whole in a dynamic manner.

Nonetheless, in Goffman's opinion, signs themselves would not constitute a stimulus-response chain but are effectively managed by people with their judgment in the interactional situation. For instance, a question in a stretch of discourse does not necessitate an answer at the discursive level but relies rather on the audience to indicate whether the question should be given a polite answer, or whether it should be given an answer based on the judgment of the importance of the situation, or whether the situation is negligible. This attests to the mutual dependence between the sign and the individual user, as well as between sign function and social interaction. One sign does not necessarily posit another as its premise, and one may not be a natural consequent of another as well. The independent or autonomous flow of signs is an illusion that does not seem congruous with the nature of signs. Signs are an individual's signs in society. This recalls Charles Peirce's dictum "It is that the word or sign which man uses is the man himself" (1868, 156).

Goffman had frequently employed *team* as a larger unit in his dramaturgical theory in place of the term *social group*. Compared with the social group as a product of the division of social labor, *team* is defined as a unit of social interaction. A team in social interaction may be composed of members within the same social group or across different ones. This concept puts the basic unit of society in question. In this sense, society is composed neither of individuals, nor of social groups, but of interactional teams. The semiotic significance for the concept of team is that symbolic communication generally occurs between team members, of which some overall objective requires them to cooperate by means of signs to maintain a unified and socially acceptable impression. Those signs that do not cohere with the overall team impression will become symbolically scandalous, which tends to disrupt the fostered team impression. But it has disclosed the true reality of the team members concealed behind its appearance.

Goffman's dramaturgical theory was not a microsociological experiment undertaken in any virtual interaction but was used to characterize the distinctive political and moral style of participants in social interaction. Signs were not merely serving a role of propping up interactional performance or fostering a

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socially acceptable impression but served to define people's moral quality and political character. Goffman's research on a mental hospital revealed that people strongly identify with personal possessions, such as body makeup, clothes, decorative accessories, and the like, in order to construct their sense of self and their overall identity in distinctive contrast to others (Goffman 1963b). These personal possessions became people's identity symbols and were given a special position in people's social life. Official deprivation of these personal possessions from the patients in mental hospitals means more than a coercive confiscation of any physical objects. It is almost equal to eradication of the person's personality, character, and even identity. People in such situations face a struggle for their symbolic rights. They are doing their best to maintain integrity and respect as human beings through maintaining certain symbolic possessions.

Interactional citizenship is another important concept in Goffman. He interpreted symmetrical and unsymmetrical interactions as two typical patterns of social interaction. It is the social stratification of privileged occupation, wealth, political power, reputation, and the like that has produced many forms of unsymmetrical interaction in our social life. Such interactional patterns support a stratified social structure through signs that pervade our everyday life. Unsymmetrical voice pitch, gestural contrast, embarrassment versus relaxation, monopoly of turn taking in conversation, loud speaking versus silence or submissive hearing, and the like, can be interpreted as symbolic manifestations of the unsymmetrical interaction patterns prevalent within our class-structured society. Interactional citizenship promotes the ideal of symmetrical interaction, applied to everyone in society.

Conclusion

Several comments still need to be made on these reflections. As indicated, one invisible but somewhat logical line of semiotic development could be made from Saussure to Goffman but only in the context of the two developmental lines outlined in both sociology and linguistics. This developmental line represents a significant progress in semiotic thinking, providing a deeper perspective on the nature of society.

Scholars of conversational analysis, ethnography of speaking, and sociolinguistics have reached a consensus in recognizing Goffman's great contribution to these realms and are either consciously or unconsciously utilizing some of Goffman's influential concepts. These include concepts such as face-to-face interaction and social encounter, among others. Nonetheless, few of them willingly recognize Goffman's influence on semiotic thought. This situation is exac-

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erbated by the fact that, unfortunately, not even a chapter is allocated to Goffman in current semiotic textbooks, nor is a sufficient evaluation of his influence offered in semiotic circles.

What this article has attempted to highlight is that signs, as they are manifested in social interaction, serve as the essential component of people's existential character. Signs, thereby, are not just viewed instrumentally as a vehicle of communication, as traditional scholarship has characterized them.

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