

Public Abstract

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Title:Living Acts of Semiosis: John Dewey's Model of Esthetic Experience as Key to a Temporal Theory of Signs

This paper examines and compares the semiotic theories of the American pragmatist philosophers Charles S. Peirce, George H. Mead, and John Dewey in order to arrive at a pragmatist theory of signs that can serve as an alternative in sociological research to structuralist, neo-structuralist, poststructuralist, and postmodern semiotics. John Dewey's model of esthetic experience as a temporal rhythm of alternating doings and undergoings is described and offered as the fullest, most complex, and most nuanced model for a theory of signs. Anthropologist Victor Turner's theory of social drama is shown to be compatible with the pragmatists' assumptions about experience. Based on Turner's extensive anthropological fieldwork, social drama theory can supplement a pragmatist semiotic through its more explicit and empirically-grounded treatment of institutions, cultures, and societies.