

## A SEMIOTIC VIEW OF DEWEY'S TIMES AND HABERMAS'S LIFEWORLDS

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**ABSTRACT:** John Dewey (1859-1952) explained how life was 'corporatised' at the time of rampant, *laissez faire* capitalism in early 20th century America. This paper refers Dewey's observations to Habermas's notions of the colonisation of the lifeworld. The semiotic and pragmatist approaches of Charles Saunders Peirce are then enlisted to look further into these lifeworld changes. The paper suggests modifications to Habermas's schema to bring it more in line with Dewey's empirical account. It puts together a theoretically and empirically informed picture of the contemporary disruption to ways of living and the accompanying social and political instability. The paper then goes on to suggest how that instability appears to have been quelled by communicative means. These stages of: (1) stability; (2) disruption/instability; and (3) the regaining of stability are compared to Habermas's notions of: (1) an original lifeworld; (2) colonisation of that lifeworld by the consequences of purposive rational activity; then (3) communicative action which 'rebuilds'—that is which replaces or modifies or reforms or repairs—the disrupted lifeworld in order to create a new lifeworld. 'Colonisation' could be said to have provoked social instability. Notions of building a new 'lifeworld'—a new cultural and psychic reference—could be said to correspond with attempts to resume social and political stability. The implication is that whatever the degree of purposive rationalism there is always a need for a return to some level of shared values and understandings which imply communicative rationality. This 'return' or 'counter-colonisation' can be thought of as operating via a 'lifeworld negotiation' which might best be understood with reference to a Peircean based pragmatism-semiotic theory of human subjectivity. This paper has been criticised for discussing "arguments" which: "would justify those who accommodated themselves to Nazism." What this paper in fact tries to do is to use the concepts of the above three philosophers to try to account for the ways people think. This paper is not about justifying what philosophies people *should* hold. It is presumed that most readers are sensible and ethical and can make their own minds up in that respect. Rather it attempts to draw from Dewey, Habermas and Peirce to offer a characterisation of what philosophies might be argued to *be* held and to offer an explanation about how these modes of thinking might be said to have come into existence. This paper rejects the notion that ones 'will' and thus the way one is able to think, is totally free and beyond the formative influences of the social-cultural context—including the influences of public relations and other persuasive discourse industries.

**KEYWORDS:** Semiotics; Dewey; Habermas; life-world.

## DEWEY'S CLAIM THAT LIFE WAS 'CORPORATISED'

Dewey wrote: "There is no word which adequately express what is taking place... the United States has steadily moved from an earlier pioneer individualism to a condition of dominant corporateness" (Dewey 1930:36). For Dewey this "corporateness" was associated with the "stagnation of rural districts" as well as "excess and restless movement in cities" (Dewey 1930:58-59). Corporateness, i.e. the end of individualism involved: "... the formation of a collectivistic scheme of interdependence [in] every cranny of life." Personal life was now collective; intellectual life was now collective; emotional life was now collective; leisure and work life now had more collective qualities as did morals and economics (Dewey 1930:47-49). For Dewey corporatism overturned individualism because it brought "men" (sic) together: "on the one side by investment in the same joint stock company, and on the other hand by the fact that the machine compels mass production in order that investors may get their profits" (Dewey 1930:58-59). Dewey compares "individualism" to "corporateness" in order: "...to indicate the decay of the older conceptions, although they are still those that are most loudly and vocally professed, the illustrations given inevitably emphasise those features of growing standardisation and mass uniformity which critics justly deplore." (Dewey 1930:48).

The major pathology of the corporate life according to Dewey is its leaders' lack of moral compass. Their social values dissolve in a morass of economic rationalisation:

...even those who seem to be in control and to carry the expression of their special individual abilities to a high pitch are submerged. They may be captains of finance and industry, but until there is some consensus of belief as to the meaning of finance and industry in civilisation as a whole, they cannot be captains of their own souls—their beliefs and aims... their business is private and its outcome is private profit. No complete satisfaction is possible where such a split exists. Hence the absence of a sense of social value is made up for by an exacerbated acceleration of the activities that increase private advantage and power. One cannot look into the inner consciousness of his fellows; but if there is any general degree of inner contentment on the part of those who form our pecuniary oligarchy, the evidence is sadly lacking. As for the many, they are impelled hither and yon by forces beyond their control. (Dewey 1930:53-54)

Dewey reproaches a handmaiden of this social condition: the "publicity agent"—the current day public relations practitioner or 'spin doctor':

The publicity agent is perhaps the most significant symbol of our present social life. There are individuals who resist; but, for a time at least, sentiment can be manufactured by mass methods for almost any person or cause... I should suppose that the more intelligent of those who wield the publicity agencies which produce conformity would be disturbed at beholding their own success. (Dewey 1930:43-86)

## DEWEY'S LIFE AND TIMES

Dewey lived through some of the worst domestic excesses of US capitalism. Although the first decade of the 20th Century was relatively affluent, it followed two decades of social and economic dislocation. This was the period when the original "Captains of Industry", the original "Millionaires" with names such as Rockefeller, Carnegie, J. P. Morgan and Vanderbilt made their fortunes by creating big industrial trusts or conglomerates. The conglomerates accelerated America's development but made many small business people, artisans and small farmers into factory workers and farm labourers. Modern technology and the concentration of power and wealth into the hands of a relatively small number of large corporations took power away from individuals of all classes who had a tradition of fierce independence within a culture influenced by religious freedom and rebellion against the British. The faded symbols of that old culture still exist in political iconography to do with individualism and freedom. The notion of 'rugged individualism' is exemplified in US President from 1929 to 1933 Herbert Hoover's 1928 speech:

When the war closed the most vital of all issues was whether Governments should continue war ownership and operation of many instrumentalities of production and distribution. We were challenged with the choice of the American system - rugged individualism - or the choice of a European system of diametrically opposed doctrines -- doctrines of paternalism and state socialism. (Hoover 1928)

One consequence of the collision of a stern industrial discipline with keenly individualistic ideals was the genesis of a wide variety of radical political organisations:

...this social ferment included, among others, the Grange, the Greenbackers, the Knights of Labour, the Populist Party, militant craft and industrial unions, utopian societies, and socialist parties and organisations. (Bowman 1995:77)

Some of these organisations were trade union or other left wing inspired organisations. The Knights of Labour included radical small businesspeople and lawyers (Egbert, Persons et al. 1952:236). The socialists experienced a "golden age" between 1902 and 1912 with 125,826 American members in the Socialist Party in 1912. That year there were said to be 56 Socialist Party mayors in local authorities and a Socialist Party congressman in New York State (Egbert, Persons et al. 1952:283). The Socialist Party candidate for President in that year, Eugene Debs won 897,011 votes or about 6 per cent (Fitakis 1993:93). Debs was imprisoned in 1919 for making an alleged seditious speech in 1918 but still attracted 915,000 votes when he fought the 1920 election from his prison cell (Ibid). The mood of the time is explained by Eric Goldman in *Rendezvous with Destiny*:

By 1900 more than one third of American farmers did not work their own acres. The big factory dominated the industrial scene to such an extent that only the most optimistic employee still dreamed of owning his own plant...one per cent of the population owned more than the remaining ninety-nine per cent put together. [This was] especially menacing to the small entrepreneur (Goldman 1952:72).

Adding to the confusion conservative newspapers railed against a seemingly inevita-

ble Government control or take-over of these super-concentrated, monopoly owned industries. They saw such a take-over as threatening the end of free enterprise, replacing it with a de facto “state socialism” (Goldman 1952:73). The resulting political compromise was the creation of “Progressivism” which we will come to below.

Dewey was writing about this loss of ‘individualism’ in the 1920s, but (Hartz) (1955) suggests America had lost its “American Revolution / Thomas Paine / Lafayette” brand of revolutionary individualism by the time of the Paris Commune... the insurrection of Paris against the French government in 1871. Hartz points out that the Paris Commune was not supported in contemporary American newspaper editorials. Hartz says that this conservatism was in contrast to the earlier 19th century findings of De Tocqueville who chronicled what he saw as a locally based, genuine democracy both in the political and economic sense in his 1835 book *Democracy in America* (Bottomore 1969:20). Americans continued with a romantic notion of the frontiersman and the “land of the free”, but as discussed above, technology and “trust style capitalism” (the big corporations) overcame the simple localised modes of employment and styles of living well before the end of the 19th century. Dewey writing in the 1920s attributes American individuality not to revolutionary history but to the US heritage of religious notions of an individual soul, although he says the church link ceased to be conscious by the 20th century (Dewey 1931:71). Discussing Mueller Freienfel’s characterisation of the ‘new American’ Dewey writes:

...what are alleged to be the characteristics of the type? Fundamentally they spring from impersonality. The roots of the intellect are unconscious and vital, in instincts and emotions. In America we are told this subconscious is disregarded: it is suppressed or is subordinated to conscious rationality, which means it is adapted to the needs and conditions of the external world. We have “intellect,” but distinctly in the Bergsonian sense; mind attuned to the conditions of action upon matter, upon the world. Our emotional life is quick, excitable, indiscriminating, lacking in individuality and in direction by intellectual life. Hence the “externality and superficiality of the American soul”; it has no ultimate inner unity and uniqueness - no true personality...I shall not deny the existence of these characteristics. (Dewey 1931:25-27)

Dewey agrees with this lamentable analysis. He wrote that “Americanisation”—this change of the soul in a way which facilitates the instrumentalism of the big corporation—was spreading out from America to other parts of the world. “Americanisation” was in essence the “quantification, mechanisation and standardisation” of the new American way of life (Dewey 1931:29). This new way of regulated life is modelled on the success of the big corporations which by the 1930s had won the acceptance of the public at large. This acceptance was assisted by the ideological effects of two decades of public relations including massive government generate patriotic propaganda during the First World War (Cutlip); (Ewen); (Bernays); (Hiebert); (Pimlott); (Lasswell). War propaganda was organised by the ‘Committee on Public Information’ also called the ‘Creel Committee’. By the 1930s corporations were no longer the target of the pre-war ‘muckrakers’ and trust busters who had exposed excesses such as the shooting of strikers in the

'Ludlow Massacre' (1914)—in which the Rockefeller dynasty was implicated; negligent railway passenger deaths; and appalling hygiene standards in the meat packing industry. It was certainly a confused and confusing time. However, can we now agree with Dewey that: "There is no word which adequately expresses what is [was] taking place." (Dewey, 1931:36)?

### HABERMAS'S 'LIFEWORLD'

Well of course now we *do* have words which can be offered to adequately express what was taking place. These are words such as: 'lifeworld'; 'purposive rationalism'; 'Fordism'; and 'Taylorism'. Taylorism is the label applied to the measurement and management of the efficiency of workers. Taylorism was developed and instituted in the early years of the 20th century. Fordism is the application of efficiency measures to industrial production. Purposive rationalism is a term particularly used by Weber, Parsons and Habermas. As used by Habermas, purposive rationalism involves the organisation of people's thinking habits in ways which *inter alia* achieve Fordist and Taylorist goals. For Habermas, purposive rational and instrumental thinking contrasts with communicative rationality with its validity claims aimed at forming an agreed consensus on reality. Communicative rationalism involves an awareness consequent of an ability of people to draw on the cultural understandings of their own communities. This is as opposed to an awareness prioritised, and thus somewhat confined and directed, by immediate economic necessity. For Habermas communicative rationalism is the result of strategic influences created by interests who want to harness the ways particular communities behave and think. In Habermasian terms, if shielded from strategic communication, communities think with the conceptual abilities facilitated by: internalised narratives; examples of what is reasonable; and the commonsense which is available in their 'lifeworld.' The concept of 'lifeworld' or *lebenswelt* arose with Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Husserl use the term to conceptualise the way consciousness of the world might be possible in terms of a philosophy of phenomenology as opposed to via a 'transcendental apperception' which he attributes to Kant:

In this world we are objects among objects in the sense of the life-world, namely, as being here and there, in the plain certainty of experience, before anything that is established scientifically...we are subjects for this world namely, as the ego subjects experiencing it, contemplating it, valuing it...this surrounding world has only the ontic meaning given to it by our experiencing, our thoughts, our valuations etc... (Husserl 1970:105):

Habermas's *The Theory of Communicative Action* (Habermas 1984) is in line with the 'linguistic turn'. Habermas reinterprets Husserl's "lifeworld" as to do with a notion of an ontology created and presented in a cultural and linguistic manner. This is instead of a notion of ontology conjured up via Husserl's intuitive-psychological conceptualisation: "the ontic meaning given to it by our experiencing" and as "ego subjects experiencing". What appears to be our social and natural world by immediate "experience" to Hus-

serl is for Habermas an equally ‘obvious’ world. But Habermas’s lifeworld is a world made obvious in a manner mediated by the linguistic and symbolic culture which we live within. This Habermasian lifeworld is limited and shaped by the ‘horizons’—that is the limitations or the qualities of our particular culture and our particular quality and degree of education and enculturation within that particular culture. Once we are linguistically and symbolically enculturated reality is thought from within that enculturation and the horizons which limit and shape our culturally facilitated conceptualisation ability. The advantage of a Habermasian lifeworld over a Husserlian lifeworld is the implication that the former allows for interpersonal dialectical exchange of validity claims. Validity claims are limited in the manner of a “universal pragmatics”. That is, there is a limit on the ways humans must communicate in order to make sense to each other. Differing validity claims, provided they are couched within universal pragmatics, would facilitate non pathological, potentially democratic plural perspectives on reality. The notion of universal pragmatics and validity claims allows for, as it were, natural, we might say wholesome changes of ‘mind’ or understanding in response to changing, or changable physical and political circumstances:

In everyday communicative practice there are no completely unfamiliar situations. Every new situation appears in a lifeworld composed of a cultural stock of knowledge that is “always already familiar”. Communicative actors can no more take up an extramundane position in relation to their lifeworld than they can in relation to language as the medium for the processes of reaching understanding through which their lifeworld maintains itself. In drawing upon a cultural tradition they also continue it. The category of the lifeworld has then a different status than the normal world concepts dealt with above. Together with criticisable validity claims these latter concepts form the frame of, or categorical scaffolding that serves to order problematic situations, that is situations that need to be agreed upon in a lifeworld that is already substantially interpreted. (Habermas 1989:125)

Habermas then goes on to expound a theory of what he calls the “colonisation” of this lifeworld. If the lifeworld—the basis for understanding—is composed of a plurality and a democracy of discursively expressed validity claims then it must always be at risk of capture by particular interests. It is at risk of capture because it is always discursively created—as opposed to intuitively experienced *a la* the Husserlian schema. Purposive rationality may sweep aside a discourse derived from a plurality of validity claims which respond to a universal pragmatics—an agreed way of reaching civilised human accord. Such purposive rationality is implicit in Dewey’s passage about ‘men’ brought together: “on the one side by investment in the same joint stock company, and on the other hand by the fact that the machine compels mass production in order that investors may get their profits.” (Dewey 1930:58-59) in the sense that:

...success-oriented action steered by egocentric calculations of utility loses its connection to action oriented by mutual understanding. This strategic action, which is disengaged from the mechanism of reaching understanding... is promoted to the model for methodically dealing with scientifically objectivated nature... Culture loses just those formal properties that enable it to take on ideological

functions...In the end systemic mechanisms suppress forms of social interaction even in those areas where a consensus dependent coordination of action cannot be replaced, that is, where the symbolic reproduction of the lifeworld is at stake. In these areas the mediatisation of the lifeworld assumes the form of colonisation. (Habermas 1984:196) (vol.2)

The implication of Habermas is that discourse arising from communicative interaction in human culture provides the basis from which people are able to understand and interpret their world. Applying this theory to the world as Dewey saw it a number of points might be made: Dewey's description coincides with the notion that previous communal discourse for how life should be understood and lived were being overturned, or at least disrupted, by norms of behaviour resulting from a rapid change to a harsh form of capitalist industrialisation. However the inevitability of such a colonisation is problematised by the fact that at the end of the 19th century it produced a significant backlash among conscious and politically organised groups which implicitly still retained previous lifeworld conceptualisation. This backlash was eventually mollified by a process involving the consensus politics of the 'Progressive Movement.' Walter Lippmann the author of the ground breaking, originally 1922 book: *Public Opinion*, (Lippmann 1965) as well as one of the main founders of what is now known as public relations: Ivy Ledbetter Lee, were leading figures in this movement. They were among a new sophisticated politically conscious profession which helped to re-write the discourse—literally: Exponents of the new science of public opinion and exponents of public relations analysed how people thought *en masse*, then they wrote the speeches and alternative policies for corporation bosses and politicians in order to meet and deflect negative discourses. The Progressive Movement offered alternative validity claims which allowed a new lifeworld to come into existence. This is largely the, what might be termed: 'capitalist-welfare-consensus' lifeworld which the US and most of the 'West' has now. The origin and work of the Progressive Movement is another story which will not be expanded upon here. Its creation and activities suggest the need for a concept of what might be referred to as 'lifeworld negotiation.' Perhaps a concept of lifeworld negotiation should be inserted into the Habermasian schema. It is this schema which we will try to develop with reference to Peirce's ideas.

#### APPLYING PEIRCE TO DEWEY AND HABERMAS

A theory of 'lifeworld negotiation' may be constructed from Peirce's notions of semiotics; the pragmatic maxim; and his use of the concept of 'habit'. A theory of 'lifeworld negotiation' would discuss how thinking can be changed in a manner which avoids Habermas's rigid dichotomy of *either* community based communicative rationality *or* instrumentally motivated, pathologically burdened strategic rationality. In *How to make our ideas clear* Peirce gives an account of his 'pragmatic maxim'. The maxim is summarised elsewhere in this way:

Pragmaticism was originally announced in the form of a maxim, as follows:

Consider what effects that might conceivably have practical bearings you conceive the objects of your conception to have. Then, your conception of those effects is the whole of your conception of the object.

I will restate this in other words...The entire intellectual purport of any symbol consists in the total of all general modes of rational conduct which, conditionally upon all the different circumstances and desires, would ensue upon the acceptance of the symbol. (Peirce, Weiss et al. 1974) (Vol 5.438)

Peirce is saying that it is our historical experiences of each signification and our habits of mind influenced by those experiences which determine any of the many roles which that signification may play in our thinking processes. That is, Peirce is alluding to a far more complex concept than the notion of a single idea being derived from the sign which stands for a single object. Rather he is involving the third point of his approach—the interpretant—which involves the splitting of the signification into its multifaceted ‘significances’ for the thinker. By multifaceted significances we should understand the host of many ways, with many consequences, that the object can be considered when its sign is ruminated upon. Peirce’s competitor for the title of originator of pragmatism: William James signals this indeterminacy of the meaning of any one sign when he emphasises the motivational aspect about how particular ‘rational conduct’ i.e. ‘reasons’, or ‘truths’ are desired and chosen:

Truth lives, in fact, for the most part on a credit system. Our thoughts and beliefs “pass,” so long as nothing challenges them, just as bank notes pass so long as nobody refuses them. (Menand and James 1997:117)

What Peirce, James and the rest of the ‘pragmatism’ tradition as sampled in Menand (1997) imply is that the best, most practical, most pragmatic, most verifiable, most useful notions of truth cannot be arrived at via absolute ‘certainties’ or abstract notions. Unshakable, certain knowledge is not attained through religious revelation. Neither can it be achieved meta-philosophically via systems of reasoning such as those proposed by philosophers including Descartes, Kant, and Hegel. Nor can truth—which is relevant to contemporary circumstances—be deduced using the empiricism of David Hume or by mathematical or other logical deduction or induction whether using special or ordinary languages. Pragmatism implies that meta-philosophical, empirical and logical reasoning approaches are valuable thinking methods. However, of far more importance for Peirce’s pragmatism is the actual conceptualising process itself. That is Peirce was not so concerned with the different varieties of concepts of philosophers. He was more concerned with how they created those concepts or how indeed any concepts or any ideas are created. They are created in a semiotic/pragmatic manner rather than by reasoning and/or defending or attacking modes of reasoning, which is implicit in Habermas’s schema. Counter to Habermas’s positing of some ‘natural’ or inevitably universal pragmatics which must be the womb of any human-style reasoning, Peirce takes one step back and concerns himself more with reasoning *per se*. He is concerned with the process of reasoning. This is what Peirce’s semiotics is all about. Peirce’s semiotics is a thesis on, in his view, the always inevitably imperfect construction of always inevitably imperfect



knowledge which is then tested against an inevitable and undeniable real world:

Logic, in its general sense is, as I believe I have shown, only another name for semiotic, the quasi-necessary or formal, doctrine of signs. By describing the doctrine as “quasi-necessary,” or formal, I mean that we observe the characters of such signs as we know, and from such an observation, by a process which I will not object to naming Abstraction, we are led to statements eminently fallible and therefore in one sense by no means necessary, as to what must be the characters of all signs used by a “scientific” intelligence, that is to say by an intelligence capable of learning by experience. (Peirce, Weiss et al. 1974) (Vol 2.227).

The above section should be read in conjunction with the start of the following section:

A sign or representamen...creates in the mind...an equivalent sign or interpretant of the first sign...[which] stands for that object, not in all respects, but in reference to a sort of idea which I have sometimes call the ground of the representamen.” (Peirce, Weiss et al. 1974) (Vol 2.228)

Here Peirce is emphasising the vulnerability of thinking. He is saying that we can only ever know the world from the store of understanding potentialities which we internalise as signs. We constantly pick from the potentialities of these understandings and constantly revise and adjust our semiotically derived view of the world in response to how certain of the truths which seemed apparent are in fact reacted upon by cold, hard experience. This is not usually a conscious intellectual or detached academic process of thought. It is not a dialectical contest of validity claims within some sort of universal pragmatic set of rules for human discourse. On the contrary, most of the time this process actually *is* thought—i.e. what has just been described is a description of how thinking takes place. It is not a description of the ground rules by which thought might take place. Husserl says something similar:

When we proceed philosophising with Kant, not by starting from his beginning and moving forward in his paths but by enquiring back into what was thus taken for granted (that of which Kantian thinking, like everyone’s thinking, makes use as unquestioned and available), when we become conscious of it as “presuppositions” and accord these their own universal and theoretical interests, there opens up to us, to our astonishment, an infinity of ever new phenomena belonging to a new dimension, coming to light only through consistent penetration into the meaning and validity implications of what was thus taken for granted—an infinity, because continued penetration shows that every phenomenon obtained through this unfolding of meaning, given at first in the lifeworld as obviously existing, itself contains meaning and validity implications whose exposition leads again to new phenomena and so on. These are purely subjective phenomena throughout, but not merely facts involving psychological processes of sense-data; rather they are mental processes which, as such, exercise with essential necessity the function of constituting forms of meaning. But they constitute them in each case out of mental “material” which [itself] proves in turn, with essential necessity to be mental form, i.e. to be constituted; just as any newly developed form [of meaning] is destined

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to become material, namely, to function in the constitution of [some new] form.  
(Husserl 1970:111-112)

Similar to Peirce, Husserl finds thinking to be a very complex process of building on and challenging what is already in the mind. The challenge comes from new mental impulses. Husserl starts with presuppositions. These presuppositions are challenged and activated into a process of new ideas creation when we become aware of our presuppositions' "universal and theoretical interests"—i.e. when we become aware of what made us pre-suppose. When we become aware of the way "validity implications" can challenge our preconceptions "an infinity" of thinking possibilities opens up. This thinking has to be organised through the: "mental processes which, as such, exercise with essential necessity the function of constituting forms of meaning." In other words particular ranges of thoughts have to be relied upon and adhered to in order to maintain cohesive ideas and sanity. This latter controlling mechanism is equivalent to the notions of experience and habits of thought—the empirical testing and comparing of thought against pragmatic reality—which is central to the Peircean schema. New awareness that presuppositions are not reality but mere supposition is equivalent to the interpretant receiving new signification which is so radical that this signification cannot but alter, revise, or change that interpretant. That is, in Peirce previous thinking and thus by implication previous subjectivity—i.e. who we are—changes as we realign our thoughts to new understandings of reality.

On a day to day basis unreflective thinking process seems to serve the immediate requirements of everyday life. At its extreme however, the consequences of such unreflective thinking may lead to pathology. What Habermas refers to as colonisation of the lifeworld may be seen as an example of such pathology. In Husserlian or Peircean terms we might talk about the colonisation of the lifeworld as the state of thought when re-supposition or re-signification of the interpretant has proceeded outside the bounds of respectively: the ability of the subject or community in its "essential necessity [in] constituting forms of meaning" or beyond the bounds of pragmatic reasoning. If understandings break free of the human ability to manage or pragmatically test them "pragmatic reality" may only return after the salutary experiences of pathologies such as war or environmental disaster. In the US domestic circumstances of the late 19th—early 20th Century Dewey is depicting a similar pathological break between presumptions or understandings and pragmatic reality in terms of how society, including its leaders, could understand their *raison d'être*. Change had been so rapid and so disruptive of previous modes of thinking, i.e. previous lifeworld circumstances, that 'presumptions' in the Husserlian sense or the interpretant in the Peircian sense were radically disrupted for many. Different classes of people from the millionaires to artisans, farmers, small business people and professionals were working to, or having to come to terms with, very different presumptions and understandings of their lives. It was left to the 'publicity agents' in alliance with consensus politicians to realign government and corporate policies in ways which re-normalised economic and social circumstances, or at least explained them in a re-normalised way by steering the astonishment of presumptions (Husserl),

or by re-signifying with publicity work the sorts of life it was normal to lead (Peirce). This re-imagining of the sorts of lives it was right for people to lead—the re-tooling of people’s understandings of their worlds—could be described as the ‘negotiation’ or ‘re-negotiation’ of the lifeworld. It involved the deliberate manufacture of communicative artefacts—speeches, newspaper publicity, and government bills (such as anti-trust legislation) to reconfigure the: “cultural stock of knowledge that is ‘always already familiar’” (Habermas). And it is this early 20th century renegotiation of the US lifeworld which dominates the west, and western-style political culture today.

Most people do not battle and fight every day of the week in an attempt to reach a pristine, irreproachable ‘true’ understanding. We do not concern ourselves on a day to day basis with the, veracity, verity or morality of everything that we think or everything that we do. Instead consciously, semi-consciously or quite unconsciously we take the bulk of our understandings, including our perception of the limits to challenging those understandings, from our surrounding lifeworld. We acquiesce into a feeling that ‘life is just like that’. It is hard to see how we could do otherwise—except in the rare, specialised and rather ambiguous occasions of particular academic-intellectual initiatives—initiatives which just do not fit into everyday life. I am using a combination of Peirce and Habermas’s here to indicate a notion of ‘lifeworld’ in the sense of the human culture-infrastructure which supports our thinking subjectivities. This is a cultural infrastructure which supports who we are in terms of our conscious and unconscious existence. The lifeworld is a complex amalgam of material and associated ideological social infrastructure. We are the subjective creation from the multi-millennia-long development of these lifeworlds of which the present century version is only a chapter. It is a rupture in these processes of subjectivity formation which Dewey is writing about in the example above. He is writing about a time when semiotic revision, or in his terms the reconstruction of the ‘soul’ - was not able to keep pace with empirical checking. At the end of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th US economics, politics and various cultural and historical mores were changing too fast. They are changing too fast in terms of Peirce’s suggestion that: “...what must be the characters of all signs used by a “scientific” intelligence, that is to say by an intelligence capable of learning by experience.” People and their institutions just could not keep up. Truths about how life could or should be led were suffering a miss-match between experiential, experimental, ‘quasi-scientific’ or commonsense verification of what seemed to be the case in comparison with what was retained in the interpretants of people’s minds as to what being American was and what their lives were. Who people were just did not seem to be a concept aligned with what they had to be—hence the consequent reshaping, in fact the “Americanisation” as Dewey calls it in more than one place of that nation’s “souls”.

## CONCLUSION

This paper draws attention to the congruence between the concrete changes in people’s lives depicted by Dewey in early 20th century America and Habermas’s lifeworld

theory. It has then suggested a meta-explanation in Peircian terms about how subjectivity can be argued to be created which is relevant to both Dewey's concrete and Habermas's theoretical schema. The implication of this project is that social pathologies which can be described in the concrete and theorised in the abstract can be usefully analysed with the use of semiotics and pragmatics. The paper suggests an approach to understanding effects on Dewey's 'soul', Habermas's 'communicative actors' and Peirce's 'interpretant.' The approach is in terms of explaining the vastly complex and rapid movement and empirical 'checking-out' processes of the interpretant. The notion of this rapid subjectivity-orienting process enlists Peircean theory to understand the pathologies which Dewey and Habermas are both concerned with in their differing ways. 'Lifeworld negotiation' is offered as a term for the recalibration of subjectivity in a new lifeworld reality once rupture of a previous lifeworld has been repaired and subdued by political, social and associated communicative work. This paper is written in the spirit that it is not just philosophers who hold philosophies about the world. On the contrary everyone holds philosophies in their ways of thinking. One first needs to consider explanations for the creation and management of that thinking before one can invoke the principle that: '...the point is to change it.'

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