Semiosis & sign exchange: design for a subjective situationism, including conceptual grounds of business information modeling

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The step from triad to hexad introduces relationships along dimensions. For the three elements of the original triad are replaced in the hexad by three element pairs. Each original element may now be considered a dimension containing such a pair. Thus, in the hexad, the background interpretant and foreground interpretant occupy the ideal dimension. The real dimension is occupied by situation and object, while context and sign shape the information dimension.

The next step is to apply this dimensional articulation for the purpose of recursion. Basically, it is what Chapter 3 accomplishes for the ontological design of subjective situationism. For example, start naively by considering the real dimension in isolation. Do the concepts of situation and object entertain absolute roles in their relationship? Why not see a role as relative? It permits a shift of roles.

Suppose a role is broadened. This happens when an object shifts to a situation (and reality’s horizon narrows correspondingly). The hexad’s dimensional articulation requires, however, one or more objects for a situation. A shift from, say, \( x \) being an object to \( x \) being a situation can therefore only occur through immediate recognition of objects in what is now situation \( x \).

Shifting a role in the opposite direction lets situation \( x \) become object \( x \). Now as object, it immediately entails a situation.

Including all elements of the hexad, the character of recursion can be added to the model of semiosis. It thereby explains additional dynamics, i.e., through recursion. In Chapter 3, it is especially role shifting of elements/concepts along dimensions which results in an ontology with greatly increased variety. Still only consisting of six basic variables, the ontology at this stage shows already a promising potential for incorporating relevant variety in conceptual
information models.

Chapter 3 also addresses the special position in knowledge of ontology, or metaphysics. And a large part surveys some earlier attempts to recognize variety, undertaken with various degrees of ontological awareness. Though similar concepts abound, elsewhere the conceptual configuration of subjective situationism with its ‘double dynamics’ – first of Peircean semiosis through irreducibility, second of concept recursion through shifting – has not been discovered.

The importance of Chapter 4 in the ontological design lies in the extension from semiotic hexad to ennead.
Chapters 3 and 4 closely relate to Chapter 2. Overall, I report on my conceptual development. As development, these chapters are an informal confirmation of the relevance of Peirce's model of sign dynamics. One interpretant leads to another, etcetera.

I read the beginning of *Logic as Semiotic* for the first time many years before starting to write this treatise. To be honest, what I did, then, was trying to read it. I don't remember that I understood much of it. But apparently I kept a notion at the back of my mind\(^1\) that Peirce is probably also trying. He tries to communicate something fundamental about signs.

Later, I designed a formalized yet flexible approach for – the activity of – conceptual modeling of information systems. I call this approach: metapattern (Wisse, 2001). A key characteristic of the metapattern is the recognition of, say, situatedness of behavior. And I consider behavior a broadly applicable concept: behavior is any collection of properties.

Why I call the modeling approach *metapattern* is motivated by the so-called pattern movement in software engineering. I position conceptual information modeling apart from modeling for actual construction (see § 1.1). The *meta* indicates that it involves the *approach* – conceptual engineering – to developing such conceptual models/patterns.

The pattern movement in software engineering takes its key concept of pattern from architecture, usually referring to the work of C. Alexander (1964, 1977 and 1979). For conceptual modeling I find an even more appropriate ancestry in *Mind and Nature, A Necessary Unity* (1979, p 11) by G. Bateson who

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1. When I write “at the back of my mind,” I hope the reader appreciates this as figurative speech. I am making no suggestion here, at all, as to the way information is structured in – the mind of – a sign user in general, and myself in particular.
specifically mentions the concept of metapattern. He views it as “a pattern of patterns.” Taking his cue directly from BATESON, in Metapatterns (1995) T. VOLK presents a set of concepts, indeed much like building blocks for architectural design. His main metapatterns are sphere, sheet, tube, border, binary, center, layer, calendar, arrow, break, and cycle. My metapattern is labeled with a noun in the singular. It operates at a higher level of abstraction than the – collection of – metapatterns of, for example, VOLK.

In the next chapter I explain how the metapattern for conceptual information modeling actually works. At the present stage, it is only important to know that I no longer presume a sign to exist in isolation. There always is a particular context. And with multiple contexts possible, a full degree of freedom is added to modeling information.

What is an information model? In any case, it is a sign, too. But I do not like to restrict myself too much with definitions. When I have a nagging feeling that the optimal solution is blocked by a specification, instead I prefer to abstract differences away. I consistently find it a dependable tactic out of – too much – uncertainty, and continue to apply it. So, loosely, I take information and sign as equivalent.

From this generalization I decided to return to several texts, now equipped with my metapattern. That is how I came to a renewed reading also of Logic as semiotic. I credit it to the metapattern that, this time around, I did focus on just a few words almost dangling at the end of a sentence. It is the sentence by PEIRCE that is featured extensively in Chapter 2. I repeat it here (1897, p 99):

A sign […] is something which stands to somebody for something in some respect or capacity.

Now, the metapattern can easily be misunderstood as just a(nother) method or technique. I could of course dutifully outline the metapattern’s symbols, rules for their configuration, etcetera. But then I would probably fail to show why my attention was especially caught by the word sequence “in some respect or capacity.” It is a failure because it does not grasp that I designed the

2. Two other texts were on my ‘list,’ viz., A theory of semiotics (1976) by UMBERTO ECO (1932-), and Die Welt als Wille und Vorstellung (Part I originally published in 1818; second edition, with Part II added, in 1844; third edition in 1859) by ARTHUR SCHOPENHAUER (1788-1860). The latter book is also available in English as The World as Will and Representation (originally published in 1958). I thought I could now make ‘metapattern sense’ of ECO, too. My research into his theory is documented in Chapter 5. As for SCHOPENHAUER, in spite of his admonishment that a reader reads his books at least twice, I felt that I understood him right away. Nevertheless, he got his second reading from me, after all. In Chapter 6 I show his surprising relevance for actual concerns about meaning.
metapattern as a challenge to modeling paradigms without requisite variety.

To increase my chances of successfully conveying my interpretation, I start by presenting the metapattern’s principles, or axioms. Starting with its symbols lacks grounds. Attention to grounds is necessary because the metapattern is not built upon a particular established, already familiar, ontology. Communicating it is far more problematic as the metapattern itself incorporates a different ontological configuration of concepts. The foundation that largely is the metapattern is a metaontology, even. It follows when being and behaving are taken to only sensibly occur in particular situations.

This chapter concentrates on the metapattern-as-(meta)ontology: subjective situationism. The next chapter contains a description of the metapattern-as-technique. How I present both (meta)ontology and technique here is, as suggested by the very first sentence of this chapter, influenced by my reconstruction of Peirce’s theory of signs. As documented in the previous chapter, by also departing from it I have developed his concept of ground. The result is a model of the process of sign use as, not of triadic, but of hexadic dynamics. In turn, the metapattern did not remain completely untouched. Conversely, I acquired a deeper understanding by applying the hexadic mode of sign use to concepts (also read: interpretants) developed earlier. So my return to Peirce made me also return to my own work and develop it further. With such dialectics in perpetual flux, of course I can only report here on the metapattern as I view it at the time of writing this treatise. Then again, though I only provide a summary, this bipartite sketch of the metapattern is also new and improved. I now aim to present it complete with speculative foundation (this chapter) and in hexadic terms or even, as developed in the next chapter (especially see Figure 4.5.2), in enneadic terms.


4. The reader is invited, as a scientific experiment in the Peircean sense, to become fully conscious about the interpretant arrived at after consuming the sign “new and improved” in what that same reader had established as that sign’s context. Are you irritated? Amused?

The complex nature of such an experiment is evident when the reader realizes that he now includes his consumption of this note as a precondition. It is useless, for example, to ask the reader to conduct the experi-
3.1 an experimental perspective

I once again turn to PEIRCE for inspiration. In *The essentials of pragmatism*, he starts his arguments by setting experimentalists apart from other persons. An experimentalist, writes PEIRCE, is somebody who (1905, p 251) has his mind moulded by his life in the laboratory to a degree that is little suspected. He suggests a wide chasm separates the experimentalist from everybody else, i.e., from anybody without the experimental attitude. Indeed (1905, p 251), he and they are as oil and water, and though they be shaken up together, it is remarkable how quickly they will go their several mental ways, without having gained more than a faint flavour from the association.

If only those other people could relate to experimentalists, PEIRCE continues, they would discover that (1905, p 251) whatever assertion you may make to him, [i.e., to an experimentalist,] he will either understand as meaning that if a given prescription for an experiment ever can be and ever is carried out in act, an experience of a given description will result, or else he will see no sense at all in what you say.

In my opinion, with this statement PEIRCE is foreshadowing the *Tractatus logico-philosophicus* (1921) of LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN (1889-1951) who in his final sentence urges that the unspeakable should remain unsaid. PEIRCE does not reach such a draconic, positivist conclusion which, by the way, WITTGENSTEIN recalled in his later, more mature work.

What PEIRCE seems to be saying between the lines is that his own words will most likely be misunderstood, or even neglected, because (1905, p 251) those other men [are unqualified] to take skilful soundings of the experimentalist’s mind. Or is he? He does present himself squarely as someone familiar, from an early

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5. This quotation is not in any way meant to preempt Part ii where I develop an anatomy of shared meaning. What it does suppose to mean becomes clear as this paragraph proceeds.

6. The *Tractatus* was finished in 1918 and first published in 1921. In German, WITTGENSTEIN’s famous last sentence is (p 115): “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muß man schweigen.”

7. *Philosophical Investigations* (1953). See also *Wittgenstein’s Definition of Meaning as Use* (1967) by S. J. G. HALLET who writes that (p 76) “[I]t is important to notice [...] that what Wittgenstein criticized was always an atomic, simplified meaning, an isolated element in the total speech situation. No such item survived criticism. It was not adequate to what is required of meaning. Use, on the other hand, is something complex and varying, and so immune to the same sort of criticism.”
age on, with “laboratory life.” But he also writes that it (1905, p 252)
did not prevent [me] from becoming interested in methods of thinking.
Thus, he claims being a philosopher, too. Quite rightly, as a matter of academ-
ic fact, for he studies philosophy. PEIRCE also teaches it for some time. It is
therefore only natural that (1905, p 252)
in the writings of some philosophers […] I sometimes came upon strains of thought that
recalled the way of the laboratory. […] Endeavouring, as a man of that type naturally would,
to formulate what he so approved, [I] formulated the theory [of pragmatism].
As already quoted from PEIRCE (1905) in the previous chapter (see § 2.3), “the
conduct of life” is based on “conceptions” resulting from accurate definition of
“all the conceivable experimental phenomena which the affirmation or
denial of the concept[ion] could imply.” Pragmatism declares that such experi-
ments yield “a complete definition of the concept[ion].” PEIRCE includes the
view that those experiments are themselves conducted through dynamics of
triads. In the previous chapter, I showed how my further development of his
concept of ground led to a hexadic model of an experimental step in the course of
arriving at a – temporarily final – foreground and background interpretant.
It is, however, not my intention to repeat the previous chapter. What I want
to bring out is precisely the emphasis that PEIRCE puts on, say, the experi-
mental flavor of his pragmatism. I rephrase it here as an emphasis on observation.
This helps to qualify the Peircean relationship between on the one hand the
sign user, and on the other hand the object which the sign is assumed to stand for.8

Figure 3.1.1.
Sign user in observation mode.

In his capacity of an observer, the sign user is predominantly passive toward
the sign and, indirectly, toward the object. Such passivity is paradoxical, for at
the same time the sign user is very actively occupied with interpretation. But at
least as PEIRCE has it, all of semiosis occurs within the boundaries of the “sci-

8. For the time being, I refrain from intro-
ducing situation and context into the expla-
nation. They are not yet required at this stage.

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cientific intelligence.” In my hexadic view, that is where the dynamics are triggered to internally construct — yet another — foreground and background interpretant, etcetera. The intelligence, or mind, does its ‘work’ without changing either the original sign or the object outside it. Again, during every step of the process of sign use, observation leaves (outer) sign and object untouched. In terms of process, the sign — and with it, the object — is the input, and the interpretant is the output. This is shown in Figure 3.1.1.

Figure 3.1.2. Passivity toward the intelligence’s exterior world.

Figure 3.1.2 sketches some of the process dynamics of sign use. The passive stance of the Peircean observer regarding his exterior world is absolute during all subsequent steps, i.e., in all steps but the first of his process of sign use.

### 3.2 an engineering attitude

I don’t consider myself an experimentalist, as PEIRCE does. I am an engineer. Anyway, information systems engineering is what I studied and still practice. Does this touch of autobiography mean that I want to oppose engineers, myself included, to other people? Do I proclaim an incompatibility to exist which I myself have overcome? Am I nevertheless stating a lack of confidence, as PEIRCE does? Do I doubt that I get my meaning across?

It is exactly questions like these, but with general implications, that Part ii treats. There the focus is on sign exchange and on a corresponding anatomy of meaning. Here, I just contrast the engineer with the experimentalist.

Above, I sketched a caricature of the experimentalist by casting him as an observer, only. My caricature of an engineer is that he is active in his outside world, as Figure 3.2.1 shows. He does not leave objects unchanged. On the contrary, he modifies them, creates new objects. And he deletes objects, too. The interpretant is, so to speak, what he starts from (Ist), striving to implement a corresponding object-as-sign (Soll). Faithful to PEIRCE, an engineer can only learn about his external construct through another sign. It drives his feedback.
In Figure 3.2.1, the process of constructing an object is labeled conduct. The association with the Peircean concept is fully intentional. Adding the perspective of the engineer, however, illuminates that PEIRCE does not elaborate on *actual conduct*, i.e., he did not extend his theory to behavior of the ‘owner’ of the “scientific intelligence” outside that intelligence or mind. I recognize his pragmatism as strictly oriented, not at explaining such actual, externally oriented conduct, but at explaining the *structure of the basis of conduct*, i.e., the beliefs and doubts (1905, p 257) developed internally by the “scientific intelligence.” This makes Peircean pragmatism also an ethics or, rather, a metaethics.

I continue to take conduct to mean: actual conduct. That is, specific behavior. But, then, observation is – an instance of – conduct, too. For I consider conduct to entail any *exchange* between a sign user and his external world. To the extent that the sign user is motivated to understand the world without changing it he primarily acts as observer. When he attempts to change the world in any way his engineering attitude has gained the upper hand.

These two attitudes can never be completely separated. I presume that *all* exchange has aspects of both observation and engineering. It is their proportion which may vary, from – always in the sign user’s impression, that is – all to nothing for each aspect. It is well known that, for example, at the level of quantum mechanics in physics the experimenter (also read: observer) is an insoluble part of his experiment. He is therefore also irrevocably engineering the experiment while it takes place. This is not at all incompatible with other experimental situations. They should be considered *special cases* occurring within a larger, more general *framework* allowing varying degrees of both observational and engineering involvement (just to mention the aspects which are relevant to my ontological development, here). Figure 3.2.2 provides an overview of how observation mode and engineering mode may be combined in a single process instance of sign use.

At least in his essay *The essentials of pragmatism*, PEIRCE migrates his notion of
the experimentalist to the workings of the “scientific intelligence.” But experiments do not take place either outside the sign user, or inside him. The focus should instead be on the exchange. An experiment, or any instance of conduct, for that matter, occurs both inside and outside the sign user. Recognizing only one of the extreme cases (either/or), makes blind to the fundamentally complementary relationship of sign user and his world (and/and). As I said before, Figure 3.2.2 outlines the variety of proportions, possible between observation and engineering in the course of exchanges.

Figure 3.2.2.
The space of modal mixes for sign use (limited to observation and engineering).

The emphasis on exchange also suggests that the – internal – dynamics of sign use need not necessarily converge. In § 2.3, I proposed the idea of a threshold value. Whenever the difference – according to whatever measure – between consecutive interpretants falls below that value, the process instance halts. It now makes sense to introduce a second threshold value. In contrast to the lower, it is a higher threshold. Its contribution is that the process also stops whenever two consecutive interpretants exceed such a value. So, in addition to feedback based on the lower threshold, such as (with b for bottom)

\[ I_n - I_{n-1} < I_{a,b}, \]

control of a process of sign use also involves checking whether or not (with t for top)

\[ I_n - I_{n-1} < I_{a,t}, \]

9. As N. Wiener explains in *The Human use of human beings: cybernetics and society* (1950): “For any machine subject to a varied external environment to act effectively it is necessary that information concerning the results of its own action be furnished to it as part of the information on which it must continue to act.”

When such control is understood as decision making, also the work of H.A. Simon is
When the second comparison holds true in the mind, arriving at a satisfactory interpretant is practically deemed impossible. The sign user can start a new, externally oriented exchange. He sets up an experiment with fresh objects and – which is what he could only experience – signs. Engineering such an experiment makes a new observation possible.10

3.3 explicit axioms

What PEIRCE hints at when he places experimentalists apart from other people is, as I call it, their incompatibility. Superficially there may not be any differences noticeable. If so, there must be something – more – hidden from perception. This treatise can serve as an example. I am confident that I invite criticism. I am only too aware of many assumptions so far left unexplained, or even unspoken. It is the essential nature, dilemma even, of much communication. Explaining my assumptions can never starts ex nihilo. For which are the assumptions underlying, precisely, the assumptions to be described? Is there a practical, yet responsible way out of such infinite regress?

very relevant. In Administrative Behavior (1945, p 76) he proposes different ways to qualify the rationality of a decision. His perspective, though, is still the ideal of objective rationality. But in practice, he says (p 79) “[i]t is impossible for the behavior of a single, isolated individual to reach any high degree of rationality. The number of alternatives he must explore is so great, the information he would need to evaluate them so vast that even an approximation to objective rationality is hard to conceive.” SIMON continues to develop “the limits of rationality.” He concludes that (p 108) “[h]uman rationality operates […] within the limits of a psychological environment.” And, of course, this “environment” is precisely what PEIRCE calls “intelligence,” accompanied by the adjective “scientific” when it is (1897, p 98) “capable of learning by experience.”

With J.G. MARCH, SIMON extends his ideas on the “cognitive limits of rationality” in Organizations (1958).

10. To the best of my knowledge, the perspectives of observation and engineering have not yet been integrated this way in an approach to sign use. Still, these attempts at modeling cognitive dynamics should not be taken too seriously as contributions to cognitive psychology proper. No doubt, higher order dynamics are involved. I include my ‘experiments’ [a] in search of specific boundary concepts, and [b] to provide an example of developing such – in this case – interdisciplinary concepts. The role of boundary concepts in meaning is explained at length in Part ii.
In strictly logical positivist science the problem is not even acknowledged. Phenomena (also read, in a wide sense: objects) exist without ambiguity and only need to be properly labeled. Definitions are all important. Science is like taking inventory of reality, applying the a priori definitions. When the proper procedures are observed, original statements about the objective inventory are the truth about reality. Still following accepted procedures, derived statements are then equally labeled true. That is why mathematical, or symbolic, logic has acquired such importance in logical positivism. It is seen as a guarantee to verify the claims that are made to truth. Positivist logic is assumed to lead to the truth when the predicate – which is an initial statement about an object’s particular property – is ‘true’ and subsequent symbolic procedures are properly ‘observed.’

This is to a large extent a treatise about positivist science. I consider it a constructive critique. For in order to save what is valuable, positivism’s assumptions must be critically assessed. But what are they, actually? For example, does the world really consist of neatly separated objects? Does an object have universal continuity? Are the truth claims made by logical positivism really based on universal validity of such assumptions?

The enormous success of positivist science must not necessarily be taken as proof that its assumptions are optimal. What may be concluded, is that they often hold on the limited fields at which the positivist approach is applied. That is, they work for relatively simple, small-scale problems. But traditional

11. My scant sketch of logical positivism is of course a caricature, too. For a serious introduction the reader may consult Logical Positivism (1981) and Essential Readings in Logical Positivism (1981). The first book is written by O. Hanfling, the latter edited by him. That metaphysics is always present is also made clear by G. Bergmann in The Metaphysics of Logical Positivism (1954).

Elsewhere, Bergmann remarks humorously (1959, p 54): “I do not have to prove, as they do at Oxford, that all metaphysics is nonsense.” Myers remarks that (1961, p 186) “the opponents of philosophy itself, encouraged by the failure of one grand system after another, have boldly declared that metaphysics has no present and no future.”

The pioneer of experimental psychology Wilhelm Wundt (1832-1920) also writes System der Philosophie (1889). Though he considers himself a positivist, Wundt even gives (p v) metaphysics a central position in his system. He comments that such emphasis bewilders both his opponents and allies. But he adds (p vi): “Dass die Aufgabe der Wissenschaft nur unter Zuhilfenahme von Voraussetzungen gelöst werden kann, die selbst nicht empirisch gegeben sind, ist ein den Erfahrungswissenschaften bereits geläufiger Gedanke.” (My translation reads: “It is already commonly accepted in the experiential sciences that their task can only be accomplished with the help of assumptions which, in their turn, are without empirical ground.”)
positivism fails as problems grow more complex. Again, most assumptions are saved when they are integrated into a larger, explicit ontological framework.

A typical positivist, or modern, solution for improving upon positivism would yet again start from the premise that something is either true or false. So, by its own reasoning, if positivism is not true, it must be false. In postmodern thinking, such a conclusion is too hasty. Why not maintain logical positivism? But then, also for its own protection, do not give it room for scientific hegemony. Respect and apply its strengths, recognize and avoid its limitations. Properly constrained, it can take its optimal place among other approaches. As with observer and engineer being aspects of the sign user, there will undoubtedly be a characteristic positivist element in any conduct, scientific or otherwise.

It is possible to integrate positivist contributions when the approach’s basic set of assumptions are repositioned as just one instance besides many others that all fit encompassing dimensions. This design is of course the engineer in me at work. I do not accept that different instruments need to be constructed where, applying proper abstraction, a single instrument can handle all variety.¹³

I act responsibly, especially when I seek scientific recognition of the results of my efforts, when I explicitly state my axioms for an encompassing ontology. But why didn’t I state them at the outset of this treatise? It is mainly to avoid the impression that I aim for truth in the positivist sense. However, I strongly believe the axioms I will presently report. It is belief according to PEIRCE’s pragmatism. That is another reason why I present them here, and not before. My axioms are the result of much experimenting, that is, of much observation and engineering. And they will continue to be so, of course. After my introduction to PEIRCE, I may assume that this meaning is now fully clear.

Then, finally, what are my axioms? I start from the experience of exchange. What I call my very own ‘I’ is one participant in a continuity of existence experienced through exchange instances, some consciously and most no doubt unconsciously. All the other participants are ‘not-I.’ Together we are reality, or the world.

¹² Further on, it will become clear that postmodern may be substituted here by situationist, yielding that such a conclusion is too hasty according to situationist theory, or thinking.

¹³ It is the combination of engineer and mathematician that I embody. This way, the overall theme of this treatise is explained by me having received my training at [1] the department of information science, of [2] the faculty of mathematics at [3] a university of engineering technology.
In relation to not-I, I feel the privileged participant. It is the privilege of having a different status. There is no moral value implied, though. I am not morally superior or inferior to all that I consider as not-I. Again, I just feel different. It is the experience of a boundary. Not-I crosses it to I. And I cross it to not-I. It is what, here by definition, exchanges are for.

At this point I can already assume that anyone professing himself a positivist will feel uncomfortable with such outright subjective axioms. Indeed, when science is supposed to provide objective knowledge, my account of ‘my’ axioms definitively looks silly. But is it, really? Isn’t avoiding any account what is unscientific? Isn't ignoring subjectivity what is really irresponsible? I don’t feel embarrassed at expressing the essentially subjective nature of conceptual grounds. I will therefore continue in the same spirit. My account can not be positively proven, and ‘I’ also do not expect it to be. Nobody’s account can. For some branches of psychology this is already familiar ground. Comparing it to physical sciences, for example R.J. LIFTON states in The Life of the Self (1976, p 24):

Depth-psychological work is simply not, in its very nature, comparably precise in concepts or observations, nor comparably susceptible to proof or disproof. It is radically less predictive and notoriously more complex in its many-layered, unmanageable variables.

I do not want to argue here about the precision possible in physical or natural sciences. What I find relevant is that LIFTON proceeds to insist for depth-psychology upon (p 25) a complete autonomy from positivistic definitions.

He adds:

Depth psychology [...] must draw upon the individual and collective experience of its era in evolving its concept of the self; and then, in a subtle chain (or web) of cause and effect, turn that self on the self–apply it to the understanding of the individual.

The result often looks unfamiliar to positivist eyes. My own account, as I have already said, is certainly no exception. I continue it.

I am a configuration of all sorts of instruments to live in the world (DAWKINS, 1976). One of my instruments is intelligence (SCHOPENHAUER, 1813, 1818). It is precisely this intelligence which, in fact, – in fiction, not in fact, actually (VAIHINGER, 1911) – makes me think that I am different from not-I. Sometimes I even think that all that I amount to is my intelligence, with all the rest being not-I. But soon enough, my intelligence knows better, again. I must have received, and processed, a sign from one or more of my other ‘instruments,’ alerting me to our essential alliance. But, still, I can never be absolutely sure whether there is a real I. I am pretty sure, though. Sure enough to believe in I.

My intelligence does not really mind (pun intended) that it does not really (another pun?) very well understand the world where it is closest at hand. Its
range of focus, ‘me’ being somewhat farsighted, seems away from its own center.\textsuperscript{14} It is quite well adapted for making out differences – further – beyond I. This whole I-thing, and I also call it \textit{all that subject business}, is far too integrat-ed, anyway, to make properly organized sense of.

My intelligence likes objects. It has an insurmountable problem, though. It cannot directly experience objects (PEIRCE, and of course many others). Now I come to think of it, maybe that is why my intelligence likes them so. For it could turn out very disappointing when it really met one. What my intelligence probably likes about objects is precisely its \textit{distance} to them.

What I get through as \textit{intellectual experience} is something I call information. A sign is the same thing. But I don’t believe, fundamentally so, that signs are all that not-I is about. Again, that is why I believe in objects.

I actually believe that many objects are subjects, like me. Such beliefs rest on my capacity of \textit{empathy} (see Chapter 6; it also explains that the variety of information is largely dependent on the interests of the subject).

Figure 3.3.1 shows how some of the concepts mentioned are thought – yes, of course, by me – to relate to each other. Of course, it is not so much that an object unequivocally emits information to a subject. Rather, the subject’s interpretant or “reality construct” (HOLZNER, 1968) leads him to believe in the existence of a corresponding object.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=0.5\textwidth]{figure3.3.1.png}
\caption{Overview of some foundational concepts.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{14} This coincides with an observation often made about intellectuals. They are considered so farsighted that their morals do not apply to themselves, at all.
As I said, subjective intelligence never directly meets what is beyond the exchange. I nevertheless like to speculate what might be ‘on the other side.’ Actually, I have learned that I had better like it. For I have to do it, anyway, to make sense of my life.

What do I speculate that not-I involves? I have just said: objects. Frankly, I don’t believe this anymore. For that belief has kept me – please note, of course this ‘me’ is ‘I,’ too – running into those long, seemingly endless cycles of interpretation, experimentation, etcetera.

One day it hit me. I don’t believe in a “crisis of the self” (R. Barglow, 1994), anyway. But I could never make sense out of the change of a particular object while it remains the same, too. Or, inversely, when an object keeps what I view as its identity while changing. My problem was that I could not explain that duality annex synthesis with familiar either/or assumptions. How I understood my information was that, and the object is characterized by sameness, and by differences.

What finally struck me was that object is too stable a concept to be independently, that is, in isolation, able to resolve both the opposing and binding forces of continuity and change. What I need are two variables, instead of the binary one that in hindsight I now recognize so clearly as insufficient.

Enter situation. Both object and situation are extremely common terms. However, speculating on their dynamic relationship led me to the resolution of forces. The core concept should not be object, or situation. What is critically variable, I presume, is behavior. It entails a shift of focus which I recognize as also underlying F.H. Allport’s “theory of event-structure” (1955, p 665):

[T]he distinctive reality of phenomenal aggregates is now seen to lie not in these ultimate and uniform particle-elements, but in their cyclical ongoings and in the diverse cycles, systems, and orders to which, by their events of encounter, they give rise. It is these relatively enduring and myriad structures of ongoings and events, rather than the compounding or aggregation of ‘particles,’ that provide the phenomena of nature in all their uniqueness and variety.

But does not behavior presuppose ‘something’ that does the behaving? An object, after all? In this respect, role is a synonym for behavior. A single object, as keeper of sameness, can practice several behaviors. It may exhibit all sorts of differences, or perform all sorts of different roles. What determines a behavioral difference for an object is its particular involvement with(in) a situation.

These are my axioms. It is a set of concepts for which I do not even attempt to provide any positive proof. That is what they are axioms for, or grounds, or

basic assumptions. Figure 3.3.2 sketches a development of concepts reconcili-
ing, as a system, continuity with change.

Figure 3.3.2.
An attempt at relating the concepts of continuity and identity.

Figure 3.3.3.
Same object, different behaviors/roles.

I emphasize that it is precisely two concepts both associated with continuity, i.e., object and situation, which in combination make differentiated recognition of change possible. Figure 3.3.3 sketches the different behaviors/roles of
an object x in situations a, b, and c, respectively. The Hegelian account of HAAS reflects such a dissemination-without-loss-of-relatedness of a single identity into a multitude of partial identities (2000, pp 97-98):

Multiplicity means a way of being many, many ones. Being many does not mean “having many predicates” or “having many as a predicate”; rather, as a concept, being many is the “ways” in which being both is and is not many. To be many as many is to be without one [...]; but as such, being many is not just many – for it is also its negation, that is, one.

Elsewhere, HAAS directs my interpretation once again to both the tension between psychological and sociological outlooks, and to the possibility of their mutual reinforcement (p 147):

Each component is identical with itself in comparison with the others, but each can make this comparison, be self-identical, self-sufficient, only insofar as it is in relation with the others – identity is based on difference, difference is grounded in identity, and multiplicity means that which is summarily constructed from differences.]

Axioms, which is their nature, are elementary to my additional assumptions, etcetera, all the way on to hypotheses, comments, opinions, conclusions, proposals, etcetera. So, I will return to them throughout the treatise where I feel I need their fundamental support to be explicitly available.

There are three remarks I right away make here. The first is that, indeed, positivist axioms are encompassed by my situational variety. For when an object’s behavior is taken as invariant across situations, rather than as variant, there is also no need for different situations to be recognized.16 In this simple manner, the way to practicing positivism is always left open.

Secondly, now that I have made an attempt to express my axioms I hope that any earlier causes for confusion are sufficiently resolved. Or whatever critique has undoubtedly become more focused. Disagreements at the axiomatic level are also treated extensively in Part ii on the anatomy of meaning, even especially so in the critical Chapters 9 through 12.

My third remark, here also directly following the statement of my axioms, is the most fundamental. This set of axioms not only allows, but stimulates recognition of behavioral variety by a single object. I value this insight very much. Grounded in empathy, it is extremely simple to respect other 'objects' as subjects in their own right. Every social creature does so naturally as a participant in personal relationships. This respect is now extended by force of axioms to scientific activities. It consider it a worthy development of, for example, PEIRCE’s “scientific intelligence.”

16. Such an approach becomes second nature to a mathematician. For example, why separate one- and two-dimensional systems? Their integration is possible when the one-dimensional system is a special case of the two-dimensional system. What it takes is to fix the second variable at a specific value.
The axioms presented above together constitute the skeleton of an ontology. I call it *subjective situationism*. Questions about this situationism no doubt arise immediately. In the current paragraph I formulate three questions that are both obvious and logical to myself, and provide my answers.

First question: Does it not already exist? Or, how *innovative* is it? As an engineer I recognize that the evaluation of applications for patent rights gives some general direction for answering such questions. J.J. DE REEDE argues that (1937, p 115, my translation from the Dutch),

roughly, innovations may be sorted into two main classes. There are innovations which clearly manifest a distinct surplus when compared with the single nearest object previously known; the emphasis in the evaluation should then simply be upon this surplus. With other innovations it appears impossible to point out such a generally valid difference; there will be different differences, each depending on the particular object included in the evaluation.

Combining characteristics from the two main classes, more specific types of innovations result.

So, does subjective situationism uniformly stand out? Or should it be compared to a host of other theories, with each comparison highlighting one or more particular differences? As often practiced for patent applications, I adopt a mixed strategy. The wealth of intellectual ‘objects’ forces limitations upon any researcher attempting evaluation. I therefore can never really know for certain how original, or not, subjective situationism is as a theory. However, I can give some indications by looking at several other approaches.

Many theories deal with complexity, variety, subjectivity, etcetera. I am only aware, though, of a few other theories that *synthesize* the perspective of the knower (idealism) with what exists anyway (realism) more or less in the manner described here for subjective situationism. My capacity for recognizing related developments, however, has greatly improved after I reached my own results. It confirms the emphasis VAN PEURSEN (1993) puts on engaging in the *ars inveniendi*. I don’t think I can claim any of my ingredients as my original innovation. The more publications I study from the perspective of subjective situationism, the more I can acknowledge similar contributions. And I am happy to oblige whenever I make a related discovery.

But do I at least offer a unique synthesis? Is my configuration new? And, as a consequence, do the ingredients acquire new properties in their novel configuration (also read: situation)? I am equally unsure. For example, I learned about VOLOSHINOV’S *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language* (1929) after I thought I had actually completed the manuscript of this treatise for printing. This also applies to *Systematic Pluralism: A Study in Metaphysics* (1961) by MYERS. I believe my theory is still different from those theories in several important
ways. But there is practically never conclusive evidence that my synthesis is indeed original.

Why is it impossible to achieve certainty about originality, or the lack thereof? With an ongoing explosion of scientific publications, it is practically impossible to research all literature when trying to establish such a claim. Instead, I practice due diligence. I find confirmation that, indeed, situation is a widely used concept. As relevant for answering the first question, for example I learned about the so-called ontology of situations (B. Wolniewicz, 1991). It is a semantic theory that recognizes, exactly as situationism does here, situations as an ontological category. What is different, though, is that (p 842)

the concept of a situation [is related] to that of truth. […] Not the whole of reality is relevant to the truth-value of a proposition, but only some part of it. A situation is any such part capable of establishing the truth of some proposition.

As founders of such situation semantics with a strong orientation at logic are considered K. Jon Barwise (1942-2000) and John Perry. They have jointly authored Situations and Attitudes (1983). I believe their early situation theory, as it is also called, is indeed still formally truth-oriented. It is therefore a speculation in predominantly naive realism. As its label situation semantics indicates, they limit their concepts to semantics, only.

(My brand of) situationism is not developed starting from traditional formal logic. In fact, I regard any protracted formalization with suspicion because limiting attention to form is ultimately anti-realist. Barwise, however, sets out to design an improved approach to answer specific logical problems. He ends his launching article Scenes and Other Situations (1981) by remarking (p 31):

I hope to have shown how some mildly puzzling features of perception and [naked imperative] perceptual reports have a relatively straightforward explanation.

Together with Perry, Barwise subsequently broadened the range of the theory’s application. I see their situation theory as an attempt of (closer) integration of logical positivism with analytical philosophy annex natural-language philosophy. Next, I attempt the briefest of summaries of their theory. Any

17. I am referring to the lemma Situations that Wolniewicz contributed to the Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology (1991, pp 841-843; see also note 15, above).

18. Situations and Attitudes (1983). Its authors place the concept of attitude in their semantic framework, too. The difference between our approaches may be explained by their interest in the language system and how it produces meanings while I orient myself principally at behavior.

19. Elsewhere in this treatise I treat analytical philosophy as equivalent with logical positivism. This is of course a simplification (M.J. Charlesworth, 1959; see also the forceful understatements of B. Blanshard in Reason and Analysis, 1964; G. Radnitzky compares philosophies of science in Contemporary
more elaborate treatment of such a complex conceptual scheme is beyond my scope.\textsuperscript{20}

As what it has developed into, situation theory is now generally concerned with so-called information flow. Information is theorized as flowing from one particular situation to another. Language is supposed to fit the general pattern as just a special case; an utterance is a situation, too. The resulting situation (also read: interpretation by an agent) occurs because it has a type that is linked to the type of the originating situation. The concept of meaning entails the type-level relationship between situations. This is also called a constraint which 'directs' the information flow. The concept of attitude refers to the types of situation that the observing agent applies (Barwise, 1986, p 55):

\textit{In our theory, meaning is a product of constraints that hold between types of situations, constraints to which an agent is attuned.}

In situation theory, I encountered many ideas similar to subjective situationism as I present it here.\textsuperscript{21} Barwise, for example, states (1981, p 26):

When I look around I cannot see a single thing-in-itself, some sort of ideal physical object stripped of its properties and its relations with other objects. What I do see is a scene, a complex of objects having properties and bearing relations to one another. The properties and relations are every bit as important to what I see as the idealized thing-in-itself. In fact, what really counts is the whole complex of objects-having-properties-and-bearing-relations which constitutes the scene.

\textit{Schools of Metascience, 1968). But I detect the same underlying attitude. G. Markus calls it (1975, p 1) “the anti-subjectivist turn.” See also Voloshinov’s criticism of abstract objectivism in linguistics (1929), quoted in § 5.7.}

The occurrences of natural language used as models for analytical philosophy all seem cast from a strictly empirical mindset which of course predetermines an empirical outcome. Indeed, this makes many sentences problematic. By extending the scope to include situations, situation theory offers elegant solutions for several of those logical puzzles. But still, the scientific attitude does not yet really change.

\textsuperscript{20} I admit to other obstacles to a comprehensive treatment of situation theory. Despite disclaimers by its proponents to the contrary, details of the theory are expressed in a formal language that I do not find accessible. It only makes me concentrate harder on assumptions, skipping what are the difficult parts for me. But I do not accept that as a reason why I have so far not been able to construct a consistent structure for myself of situation theory. Probably, my assumptions and those underlying situation theory are (still) too far removed from each other. Though I recognize its improvement over previous systems of logic, it also seems to me that situation theory itself lacks consistency.

\textsuperscript{21} See note 20, above, why I experience obstacles to conduct a detailed synthesis. An attempt would undoubtedly pay off but it should be undertaken by an interdisciplinary group of “theory designers.”
He continues (p 27):

Any part of the way the world $M$ happens to be I call a situation in $M$. Scenes are visually perceived situations. The central notion in the theory is that of a scene or other situation $s$ supporting the truth of a sentence $\phi$ in $M$.

This legacy of formal logic has continued to determine the development of situation theory. Again, it is BARWISE himself who suggests in Logic and Information that (1986, p 41)

we logicians have suffered from the inventor’s paradox. That is, in investigating the semantics of ordinary language, we have been trying to do too little and so have not been able to do even that. We have been concerned solely with the truth conditions of sentences, the conditions under which a sentence can be truly asserted. We have not been concerned with the more general problem of accounting for how sentences can be used to convey information and, as a result, have not been able to get even the truth conditions right. [...] It is not attention to truth conditions that I want to call into question but the attempt to develop a theory of truth conditions or some other model-theoretic analysis of logic, inference, and linguistic meaning isolated from the flow of information.

BARWISE and PERRY add a fictional interview, with and conducted by themselves, to the 1999 reissue edition of Situations and Attitudes. Though the interview is playfully titled Shifting Situations and Shaken Attitudes, their “brand of realism” (p xlii) remains basically unchanged. Though the inventor’s paradox is not called upon this time, they indicate a yet wider scope (p lvii):

It’s just that what we need is a realist theory of action, one that relates action to information about the environment in which the action takes place.

This finally creates the position (also read: situation) from which to specify the essential difference between their situation theory and my subjective situationism. Apparently they are still influenced by logic as a truth-method that is independent of actors, i.e., universally valid. For BARWISE and PERRY are not sufficiently shaken to shift their axioms toward recognition of every actor’s uniqueness. I believe that the principle of subjectivity is absolutely necessary for a comprehensive theory of action. The actor’s environment is indeed crucial. But what about the actor himself? Both social and psychological (f)actors are required in an encompassing, richer explanatory system.

This assumption I actually find more realistic than what BARWISE and PERRY propose. In any case, it is ‘just’ a different “brand of realism.” The founders of situation theory maintain that “[i]t is not attention to truth conditions that [they] want to call into question.” My conceptual grounds are erected from the opposite opinion, i.e., an encompassing theory must, at least initially, discard explanations for narrower cases. For those are all too often too simplistic to account for greater complexity. That is why I neglect issues of metaphysical truth and falsity (PEIRCE) altogether. A theory should address relevant variety right from the start. As ground for a behavioral theory it should then be
taken that an act is essentially not aimed at being truthful, whatever that may mean, but simply at getting one’s way in an environment (SCHOPENHAUER). Acts are committed in all shapes and sizes. Regarding analytical philosophy it surprises me that the analysis of acts of so-called ordinary language concentrates on *anything but* ‘real life’ sentences. The model of study usually (still) is the propositional statement. The emphasis is put on how a reality external to both participants in communication is understood from it. It is not on why the sign is produced in the first place. Situation theory is right to draw attention to the context of a particular sentence. It would require a different axiomatic system, though, for it to be developed consistently into a more comprehensive theory such as subjective situationism.

Another difference can also be explained from the biases of both theories. Situation theory is ‘satisfied’ to differentiate between situations. It therefore operates at the level of the configuration of (BARWISE and PERRY, 1983, p 8) the basic building blocks of the theory; individuals, properties and relations, and locations. These are conceived of as invariants or, as we shall call them, *uniformities* across real situations; the same individuals and properties appear again and again in different locations. That is, a particular configuration of such building blocks suffices to specify a situation according to situation theory.

My purpose with distinguishing situations only starts with an awareness of such configurations. I assume a special kind of “uniformity” for an object (BARWISE and PERRY: individual). Placing an object in different situations allows for an unequivocal inventory of its correspondingly different behaviors. The behavioral differences are expressed through an object’s *situated* properties (including relations). Belonging to a particular object, a property is therefore not a “uniformity,” nor is any of its relations. On the contrary, they are special by definition of the situational differentiation of an object’s behavior. My conclusion is that subjective situationism, supported by the straightforward mechanism of situation/object recursion, yields more detailed models than situation theory.22

I repeat a particular emphasis of subjective situationism. As its point of departure it presents the ‘I’ as an active and subjective interpreter of reality. This includes the choice of situations as crucial activity. The axiomatic nature of the subject, too, allows for dynamics of what the ‘I’ understands as – existing as – situations.

When belief is substituted for “truth-value of a proposition” in the quotation from WOLNIEWICZ with which I started my discussion of situation theo-

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22. I have already admitted to experiencing difficulties with situation theory’s formalism. However, I understand enough to recognize that the additional behavioral details could easily be included. Could an “anchor” (DEVLIN, 1991) be used for that?
ry, an expression results appropriate for subjective situationism results:

[... N]ot the whole of reality is relevant to a [belief], but only some part of it. A situation is any such part capable of establishing a [belief].

Of course, this is again belief in its Peircean sense. Peirce, as already explained in the previous chapter, focuses away from metaphysical truth. It enables him to see that a belief is a proposition, but in a sense that is different from metaphysical truth. Rather, its utility is directed at conduct. In a collection of his essays, Barwise states in the Introduction that his "views of language and logic have changed considerably over that [intermediate] period" (The Situation in Logic, 1989, p xiii):

It now seems to me that the best way to understand what situation semantics is trying to do is to look at it as relaxing a certain simplifying assumption in the study of language and logic. The key insight, it seems to me, is that speech, writing, thought, and inference are situated activities. That is, they are activities carried out by intelligent, embodied, limited agents, agents situated in a rich environment that can be exploited in various ways. As such, these activities are always taken from an agent’s perspective within that environment, and they are about other portions, generally restricted portions, of that environments, portions to which the agent is somehow, directly or remotely, connected. And being activities, they have impact, they change the environment within which the agent operates. Indeed, if they had no effect, there would be no point in them. [p xiv] This way of looking at things shifts attention from truth to information. [...] The study of valid inference as a situated activity shifts attention from truth preservation to information extraction and information processing. Valid inference is seen not as a relation between sentences that simply preserves truth, but rather as a situated, purposeful activity whose aim is the extraction of information from a situation, information relevant to the agent.

I repeat my evaluation that "relaxing a certain simplifying assumption in the study of language and logic" is necessary but still insufficient for arriving at a consistent theory which Barwise so eloquently announces. A radical departure is required. Still, even though starting from different perspectives, I find the potential for convergence of the later situation theory of Barwise and my own subjective situationism promising. As I have already indicated, I don’t pursue it in this treatise. I restrict myself to taking an inventory of — what I recognize as — related developments. I aim to assess whether or not other (known) theories are (very) similar. The survey of situation semantics/theory confirms that I should continue to follow an essentially pragmatic, rather than semantic, orientation for my own theoretical design.23

A pioneer of situation theory in the philosophy of language may be considered Wittgenstein. He coins the phrase language game (1953). When this is

23. A simple way to contrast subjective situationism with situation semantics is to call the former: situation pragmatics.
read as a situation being a game field, with the language users as players, situationism is quite similar. WITTGENSTEIN also suggests (p 5) that one language game may be enveloped by another. This recursion is a prime characteristic of the metapattern, as the next chapter will show.

Building upon the work of BARWISE and PERRY, KEITH DEVLIN develops a preliminary mathematical treatment of situation semantics in his book Logic and Information, Volume I: Infons and Situations (1991).24 It revolves around the

24. DEVLIN also contributes the lemma Situation Semantics to the Handbook of Metaphysics and Ontology (1991, pp 840-841; see also note 15, above).

From the title of the paperback reprint of Logic and Information he drops the number indicating it as the first part of an encompassing publication. DEVLIN originally plans a second book (Preface to the paperback edition of Logic and Information, 1995, p xiii) “in which some of the details of the mathematical theory would be described.” My impression from later books by DEVLIN (1997, 1999) and from a book coauthored with D. ROSENBERG (1996) is that he doesn’t so much get “sidetracked” (as he explains in the Preface, 1995, p xiii) but gains the realization that such an endeavor is fruitless. Especially Goodbye Descartes (1997) manifests his grown awareness of issues beyond formal logic (p 191): “Whereas logic sets out to provide the theory of reasoning, the role played by logic and its extensions in studies of communication is very much that of a tool that is used in the analysis – just one tool among several.” In the same vein, he remarks that (p 180) “[t]he suggestion that much human activity is not based on rules has enormous implications for the logicians’ rule-based view of human thought.” But he stops well short of offering a fundamental redesign of situation theory reflecting his accumulated views. Though DEVLIN argues for a different perspective, he does not actually develop and apply it. While refraining from extending formalism, his now largely informal presentation of situation theory remains constant (p 207): “In many respects, situation theory is an extension of classical logic that takes account of contexts.” It sounds as if DEVLIN is unwittingly echoing for example VOLOSHINOV when he remarks that (1999, p 37) “the key to obtaining information is always to be found in the context, not in the representation.” To logicians, apparently (1997, p 278) “[i]t is all relatively new.”

Together with J. SELIGMAN, J. BARWISE continues on his path of formalization in their book Information Flow: The Logic of Distributed Systems (1997). However, the term situation does not serve their purpose any more for what becomes an increasingly mathematical treatment.

Other publications much in the same tradition that underlies situation semantics/theory are Conceptual Structures: Information Processing in Mind and Machine (1984) and Knowledge Representation: Logical, Philosophical, and Computational Foundations (2000) by JOHN E. SOWA. All such expositions are still firmly grounded in – and therefore defined by – logical positivism, analytical philosophy and philosophy of language from which the current treatise aims to establish a fruitful departure, at least at a metaontological level.

Early work on conceptual models for
concept of an infon, DEVLIN’s coinage for an item of information. At a formal level anyway, some correspondence might be established between his approach – and situation theory in general – and my own metapattern. Then again, comparing the metapattern with for example the graph-oriented formalism developed by A.F. PARKER-RHODES in Inferential Semantics (1978) probably shows up more interesting similarities. I don’t pursue such comparisons. My interest lies here with design of improved conceptual grounds. I am not engaged in a detailed criticism of traditional symbolic logic as a closed tool which often even counteracts application of more productive grounds. The tool of logic, however, is DEVLIN’s professed preoccupation (1991).

A genuinely different perspective is precisely what JOHN DEWEY (1859-1952) achieves much earlier. It is difficult, however, to discover his seminal ideas. Modern authors such as BARWISE, PERRY and DEVLIN regretfully do not refer to DEWEY who writes, for example in Logic: The Theory of Inquiry (1938, p 892) that

[i]n actual experience, there is never any such isolated singular object or event; an object or event is always a special part, phase or aspect of an enroving experienced world – a situation. The singular object stands out conspicuously because of its especially focal and crucial position at a given time in determination of some problem of use or enjoyment which the total complex environment presents.

He continues that (p 894)

discourse that is not controlled in reference to a situation is not discourse[…] A universe of experience is the precondition of a universe of discourse. Without its controlling presence, there is no way to determine the relevancy, weight or coherence of any designated distinction or relation. The universe of experience surrounds and regulates the universe of discourse but never appears as such within the latter.


25. The quotations are taken from Intelligence in the Modern World, John Dewey’s Philosophy (1939) edited by J. RATNER. The page numbers refer to his compilation. DEWEY’s original Logic: The Theory of Inquiry is published a year before.

As T. BURKE remarks in Dewey’s New Logic (1994, p 22): “In particular, the notion of a situation […] is a full-fledged technical notion in Deweyan logic. Dewey was able to employ this notion as a device for introducing factors of context as well as direct reference into logic and into his philosophical views at large.” My own device for precisely those purposes is the semiotic ennead, introduced in § 4.5.
And, according to DEWEY (p 895), one cannot decline to have a situation.

What surprises me – no doubt the surprise occurs because I am largely ignorant of the field – is to discover a parallel with molecular biology. In his engaging popular introduction *Signs of Life: The Language and Meanings of DNA* (1994), R. POLLACK applies a semiotic perspective (p 12), allowing us to argue for the validity of a multiplicity of meanings, or even for the absence of any meaning, in a stretch of the human genome.

He adds (p 118):
context is [...] critical to the meaning of a gene[...]. A gene may mean two completely different things in two different cells or even in the same cell at two different times.

And (p 138):
many traits worthy of study are not the result of one gene's expression but the combined consequence of many genes working together.

POLLACK therefore concludes (p 176):
above all, the human genome is multiple.

As I expect, situation is a recognized concept in the field of social psychology. L. ROSS and R.E. NISBETT, drawing on the work of K. LEWIN, write their book *The Person and the Situation* (1991) from their conviction (p xiv) the power and subtlety of situational influences on behavior. [...] that has been demonstrated through a host of celebrated laboratory and field studies is that manipulations of the immediate social situation can overwhelm in importance the type of individual differences in personal traits or dispositions that people normally think of as being determinative of social behavior.

But there is also the need to take into account the subjective nature of situational influence, that is, to recognize the extent to which people respond to their own “definition” or “construal” of the situations that stimulate [...] their behavior.

These two factors are both important for an explanation of meaning. They figure prominently in Part ii. Here, I merely report on related developments to what I call subjective situationism. In fact, ROSS and NISBETT already use situationism as a label (p 4) “to recognize the importance of situational factors in affecting behavior.” And they recognize the subjective element in what HOLZNER (1968) calls “reality construct.” So, ROSS and NISBETT do not restrict their situationism to objective “situational influences,” but they concentrate on human behavior. See also *Frame Analysis, An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974) by E.F. GOFFMAN.

26. The concept of frame is also applied in artificial intelligence annex cognitive science (M. MINSKY, 1975). Similar concepts have been developed, such as script (R.C. SCHANK and R.P. ABELOSON, 1975; R.C. SCHANK, 1984), schema (M.A. ARBIB, E.J. CONKLIN and J. HILL, 1987) and story (R.C. SCHANK, 1990).
I present situationism as a general ontology, that is, any behavior is considered as a collection of – dynamic and static – properties of a situational object. And through including processes of sign use my proposal for (subjective) situationism integrates the subjective experience that the sign user has of his objectified reality. This integration is essential. ROSS and NISBETT still maintain that (p 11)

the personal and subjective meaning that the actor attaches to [a] situation […] challenges the theoretical and practical value of the doctrine of situationism.

Again, conflict turns into synthesis on the basis of PEIRCE’s insight that the sign stands for an object. ROSS and NISBETT appear to consider situationism as a partial doctrine. Despite their recognition of “the subjective nature of situational influence,” ultimately it is ‘only’ about the existence of objective reality. A sociological concern with “emergence and relativity” already finds an expression with P. MCHUGH in Defining the Situation: The Organization of Meaning in Social Interaction (1968, p 4):

[A] society cannot be conceived to be socially organized without reference to the experiences of members, and […] the definition of the situation is a way of depicting those experiences.

Extending PEIRCE’s work on transcendentalism, I put subjective situationism forward as an overall doctrine. It encompasses variety of both objectified reality and subjective intelligence. In a similar vein, though it seems with a more limited concept of ontology, H. PARRET (1983, see especially p 8)27 writes of “semiotics as a paradigm.” E. LASZLO arrives at a synthesis as follows (1966, p 233):

[S]ince metaphysics presupposes realism and meaning presupposes scepticism, and scepticism and realism are non-contradictory, meaningful metaphysics is possible.


Systematic pluralism is an epistemological theory, although one of its consequences is that epistemology and metaphysics are one.

A consequence of subjective situationism, precisely, is that not just “epistemology and metaphysics are one” but equivalence holds for semiotics, epistemology and metaphysics.

One of the immediate, highly practical benefits of the elevated place for subjective situationism is that the concepts of situation and context need no longer be confused.28 For they have each been given a distinct position in the hexad of sign use. Elsewhere, the terms of situation and context are mostly


28. An even hyperbolic terminology is often used, for example by DEVLIN who writes (1999, p 71) “context situation.” The (more) rigorous distinction between situation and
used intermittingly, as if referring to equivalent concepts or, even, to an identical concept.

Often, the embarrassment of verification consists of admitting that one’s own contribution might, after all, not be all that original. Luckily, this is more than offset by the discovery of community at work. My search for theories related to subjective situationism has led to additional and often productive discoveries. From more general perspectives that I gained, I can also point out significant conceptual coincidences in and differences between disciplines.

Context this treatise supports is still generally lacking. In Discourse analysis (1983), G. Brown and G. Yule emphasize (p 27) “that the discourse analyst necessarily takes a pragmatic approach to the study of language in use. Such an approach brings into consideration a number of issues which do not generally receive much attention in the formal linguist’s description of sentential syntax and semantics. [...] the discourse analyst has to take account of the context in which a piece of conversation occurs.” Of course I agree with their emphasis. However, they continue to group the “issues” as “context of situation,” but fail to explain the nature, if any, of nonsituational context. They refer to (p 46) “preceding text” as “context.” The latter term also appears with K.J. Ondarra who sketches “a framework in verbal communication” (1997, p 46): “We will have to account for [utterances] in a given context bound context.”

In my ontological annex epistemological annex semiotic scheme (see especially Figures 2.7.4 and 4.5.2) derived from Peirce’s triad, situation is a concept along the realist dimension and context is a concept along the sign dimension. As such, situation and context are both different concepts and irreducibly related. And context and co-text may be treated as synonyms.

Context this treatise supports is still generally lacking. In Discourse analysis (1983), G. Brown and G. Yule emphasize (p 27) “that the discourse analyst necessarily takes a pragmatic approach to the study of language in use. Such an approach brings into consideration a number of issues which do not generally receive much attention in the formal linguist’s description of sentential syntax and semantics. [...] the discourse analyst has to take account of the context in which a piece of conversation occurs.” Of course I agree with their emphasis. However, they continue to group the “issues” as “context of situation,” but fail to explain the nature, if any, of nonsituational context. They refer to (p 46) “preceding text” as “context.” The latter term also appears with K.J. Ondarra who sketches “a framework in verbal communication” (1997, p 46): “We will have to account for [utterances] in a given context bound context.”

In my ontological annex epistemological annex semiotic scheme (see especially Figures 2.7.4 and 4.5.2) derived from Peirce’s triad, situation is a concept along the realist dimension and context is a concept along the sign dimension. As such, situation and context are both different concepts and irreducibly related. And context and co-text may be treated as synonyms.

29. Again, I acknowledge that similar answers have in fact been developed elsewhere, and earlier. Here, I especially refer to dialogical theory. Enjoying what I then believed was my completion of the manuscript, in the summer of 2000 I was browsing in a well-stocked bookshop where I literally saved a copy of A.H. Wold’s (editor) The Dialogical Alternative, Towards a Theory of Language and Mind (1992) from a hidden corner. I can only stand amazed, once more, at the difficulties a genuinely different, and definitely richer, theory encounters to get widely accepted. Why does Wold still deem it necessary to write, with unwarranted modesty, of an “alternative to mainstream models within linguistics, psycholinguistics, cognitive psychology and cognitive science” when the alternative is so clearly superior? At least, I find its merits easy to recognize after my own efforts at an anatomy of meaning (see especially Chapters 7 and 8). I am therefore happy to have learned about dialogical theory in time ‘in my world’ to acknowledge its precedence over what follows here, even when I don’t alter my treatise except for mentioning it right here (and in note 16 in Chapter 7 where I could still fit it in). Actually, unwittingly I may have made some fundamental contributions to dialogism. For as an ‘alternative’ subtitle for this treatise I can suggest: conceptual grounds of dialogical theory.

29a. This last-minute note serves to acknowledge another precedent. Pursuing my interest in significs, in the early spring of 2002 I discovered from De Hollandse Significa (Van Gorcum, 1990, originally published in 1985 in German as a Habilitationsschrift) by H.W. Schmitz how basically similar my anatomy of meaning (see Part ii) is to the concept of communication which L.E.J. Brouwer develops around 1900. Only much later would Brouwer learn about significs and join the Signifische Kring.

On the relevance of significs, see especially note 3 in Chapter 9. Not yet mentioned there, because I only read it shortly before my manuscript went to press, is V. Welby’s What is Meaning? (1903; reprinted in 1983, John Benjamins) in which she presents the first book-length exposition of significs.
which underwent quite separate developments. For example, DEVLIN does not seem aware of the work of ROSS and NISBETT, vice versa. And, as just another example, J. GREENBERG presents *The theory of social situations: An alternative game-theoretic approach* (1990) really without any reference outside his own field which is mathematical game theory.

What distinguishes much of science therefore is an incapacity to cross disciplinary boundaries (BLOOR, 1976). Situationism as a (more) general ontology can help to fruitfully integrate important contributions. From the wider perspective they are given an interdisciplinary turn.

Again, the first question is: Does subjective situationism already exist? No, elsewhere I have not discovered its configuration of concepts. Yes, for example, present are the beginnings of a formal resemblance with situation theory. And ROSS and NISBETT even use the terminology of situationism to indicate the foundation of their theory of social psychology.

When I take terminology as a point of entry, I wind up at information about the Situationists. In *Demanding the Impossible, A History of Anarchism* (1992), P. MARSHALL documents that the Situationists (p 549) came to prominence during the May-June events in France in 1968. [...] They originated in a small band of avant-garde artists and intellectuals influenced by Dada, Surrealism and Lettrism. [...] At first, they were principally concerned with the ‘supersession’ of art, that is to say, they wished like the Dadaists and the Surrealists before them to supersede the categorization of art and culture as separate activities and to transform them into part of everyday life. Like the Lettrists, they were against work and for complete divertissement. [...] Pseudo-needs would be replaced by real desires, and the economy of profit become one of pleasure. [...] Above all, they insisted that every individual should actively and consciously participate in the reconstruction of every moment of life. They called themselves Situationists precisely because they believed that all individuals should construct the situations of their lives and release their own potential and obtain their own pleasure.

Nowhere, though, do I recognize my radical synthesis of situational objects as subjective interpretants. What already comes close in many respects is the remarkable Science and Sanity, an Introduction to Non-Aristotelian Systems and General Semantics (originally published in 1933) by ALFRED H.S. KORZYBSKI (1879-1950). His concepts include, among others, non-identity, non-elementalism, multiordinality, and structural differential. Especially using the meta-pattern technique, introduced in the next chapter, KORZYBSKI’s conceptual

30. Academically established scientists usually portray KORZYBSKI as an unscientific eccentric. I believe that proper acknowledgements are due. KORZYBSKI is rather more than a fool. Of course, his ideas are nonsense when viewed from a different perspective. Anybody’s ideas are. From the perspective of subjective situationism they make quite a bit of sense.
scheme may be mapped closely onto subjective situationism. It is just odd, with SHIELD’s (1999) analysis of homonymy in the philosophy of ARISTOTLE in mind, that KORZYBSKI is so outspokenly “non-Aristotelian.”31

How, and where, exactly all such theories correspond, and differ, still needs to be decided. My aim is to provide a starting inventory of references. This already suggests that synthesis across a wide range of disciplines constitutes a genuine opportunity for interdisciplinary scientific development. Drawing up only such a preliminary inventory of relevant work already reinforces my impression that ideas are hardly ever exchanged across disciplinary boundaries. The predominantly parochial approach to science is actually the main reason why taking inventory is both difficult and necessary. It is difficult because no interdisciplinary structure of references exists. Only by patient browsing do I discover many highly pertinent sources.32 Then, once the connection to a particular, existing discipline is established, intradisciplinary references abound again. In most cases, I don’t follow up on those. My interest is to point out where – some – boundaries can be productively crossed.

What matters for this treatise is that the ontological design is off to a start that promises a result with requisite variety. I cannot discover anything similar or, better still, more promising for conceptual grounds for information modeling. I therefore continue my development, including my terminology, of subjective situationism. The name evokes a strong ontological flavor which is precisely what I intend to communicate.

Second question: Why is it necessary? I present subjective situationism here, in Chapter 3, as the – ultimate – foundation for sign use. Such grounds entail a belief in the Peircean sense. The next chapter describes the metapattern as an

31. How also ARISTOTLE’s ideas have been reworked while they are handed over is documented in Aristotle Transformed, the ancient commentators and their influence (1990) edited by R. SORABJI.

32. I cannot recommend highly enough the practice of regularly visiting as wide a variety of used-book shops as possible. Again I refer to BLOOR (1976) and BARNES (1977) for support of my argument that books – that is, when they get published at all – fail to gain acceptance if they are perceived to be out of line with prevailing interests. What happens to such books? They usually get disposed of quickly, subsequently stocking the shelves of antique bookshops. Anyone looking for ideas that are literally out-of-the-ordinary is therefore well advised to optimize the chances of discovery by frequenting locations where their carriers naturally converge. Once a particular trail is discovered, it usually provides a new set of references. When I am too impatient to trust my luck visiting bookshops in person and possess a somewhat more specific clue, I can now quickly find almost any book through websites that sellers of second-hand books organize. Having the Internet available makes me all that more impatient.
external tool, or technique, for sign users. His own intelligence is of course an internal tool for sign use.

A user plus his tools has to match the variety of the purpose of his use. Quite simply put, life is the purpose of his sign use.

What is often extremely complex is the user’s life itself. Any external tool for sign use must contribute as much as possible to control life’s variety. Here, variety is meant in the sense that W.R. Ashby (1956) develops, leading to his well-known Law of Requisite Variety. It states that only variety can control variety. For example, when a car needs to be brought to halt within 50 meters but the brakes are not up to that task, the driver clearly lacks the control variety as required by the situation variety.

I follow the central tenet of Gestalt psychology. Stated in my own words it holds that, through his intellect, an individual sign user is equipped with the capacity to experience reality through something particular, a figure, standing out against a (back)ground. Experiencing nothing but an ocean of particulars would immediately overwhelm anybody. Making the distinction between figure and (back)ground is a powerful ordering mechanism.

But there are more ways for a sign user to organize information. For an example I take a bag of one hundred marbles. When I lay the marbles out along a straight line (also read: dimension), what results is a single row of 100 marbles long. I can also use a two-dimensional scheme. When I go about the task laying them out symmetrically, I end up with a matrix of ten by ten marbles. The point is that I first incur a cost by adding to the complexity of the structure of organization. But then it brings me a gain through a – geometric – decrease of the extension along the separate dimensions. Inversely, a so-called Cartesian product yields a set containing a number of elements that is equal to the result of multiplying numbers of elements of constituting sets.

Seen in this light, an ontology is generally an investment in basic cognitive organization. It may be compared to a properly laid out foundation of a building. Infrastructure is another generic term with similar implications. What I don’t want as a house owner, for example, is that every time I install a reading lamp I have to break down the entire house in order to tap in to the necessary energy supply. Electricity sockets are proactively constructed at certain likely

33. What is simple, and what is complex, is of course a relative measure. It should always be taken from the perspective of the individual sign user.


35. There is an ontology at work here, too. It is the assumption of a reality of which the sign user is both part and engineer/observer.

36. See, among others the chapter The Elimination of Metaphysics (pp 123-148) in Logical Positivism (1981) by O. Hanfling. The
locations for energy consumption. Too many sockets make initial design and construction overcostly. And too few are overcostly when resources need to be added at a later stage. The problem is of course that nobody is ever completely sure about what he needs in the future. That is why any foundation is a trade-off.

An ontology is really not different. For the purpose of business information modeling I find it a poor ontological design to assume reality to consist of absolute, mutually independent objects. For all variety must then be absorbed along just a single dimension. It may work for a very simple life but I think it is clearly insufficient for human survival in postmodern society.

I propose a more complex ontology. It comes at a cost. In return, I expect subsequent explanations for actual sign use – and life, in general – to become (much) simpler or, rather, (much) less complex. So, I don’t believe it is absolutely necessary to apply a richer ontology. I want to reach a higher level of comfort about my intellectual foundation. Subjective situationism offers a full extra degree of freedom for organizing interpretants. I am happy with my investment for I subsequently need to expend less effort during processes of sign use. So, (sign) engineering the rest of this treatise is greatly simplified, I believe, through my investment in this chapter presenting a more complex ontology. I hope the reader agrees from his observation perspective.

I avoid stating that subjective situationism is a necessary ontology. Such a claim would have a normative ring to it that contradicts the very axioms of this ontology. For the recognition of myself as subject helps to respect others as subjects, too. I believe it follows that everybody has to judge for himself what he finds necessary, or not.

Third question: But is it science? From my previous answer it is already clear that I find nothing more fundamentally scientific than speculations of an ontological nature (and on ontological nature). Like PEIRCE, I don’t believe in — my access to — metaphysical truth. There is also no such thing as metatruth, etcetera. At least, it is pointless to speculate on any truth. That is why it is always so important to make assumptions clear. And why it is so rational, again in the Peircean sense, to change assumptions (also read: beliefs) when they are no longer adequate for conduct (also read: life).

Logical positivists ‘believe’ that metaphysics and ontology are not science. They are completely right to state that a metaphysical expression cannot be verified. I even go further. The reason a proposition is metaphysical/ontological is precisely because it cannot be subjected to our experience. Rather, I project it into my experience, thus creating opportunities for further, correspond-
ingly organized experience. An axiom is an article of faith.

A thinker who paves the way for logical positivism is GOTTLOB FREGE (1848-1925). As M. HALLETT (1991, p 355) recapitulates FREGE’s position, the axioms of a science should be fundamental truths about the basic objects of that science. This leads to the position that one should know what the sense and the reference of a term are before one can frame axioms which contain that term.

DAVID HILBERT (1862-1943) recognizes this as an untenable belief about axioms. HALLETT continues that

Hilbert claimed that we don’t need to do this, that the axiom system as a whole acts as an implicit definition of the key terms in its own system.

I completely agree that fundamental interpretants are systemic, rather than absolute. Therefore, a system of axioms is an ontology. For indeed the “system as a whole” serves to provide a foundation for further sign use.

Maybe it takes the attitude of the engineer to radically think about ontology in terms of a tool. For example anthropologists, accustomed as they are to different cultures, professionally view religion as instrumental.

I consider the concept of ontology privileged in the sense that constituting axioms are undicable. I do not at all argue that subjective situationism ought to be the privileged ontology. Again, I present it as a tool. When a better tool is available, it deserves, for my own good, that I apply it. In fact, I deserve that I apply it. This scientific attitude I find aptly summarized by PAUL FEYERABEND (1924-1994) who is popularly known by his slogan “Anything goes” (1975).

Fundamental improvements are most difficult to achieve. “Anything goes” is therefore particularly relevant when attempting to come to grips with essen-

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38. Against Method (1975). Writing on sociology in Abandoning Method, and referring to the 1970-article from which FEYERABEND later also takes the 1975-book’s title, D.L. PHILLIPS puts forward (1973, p 154): “The reason why method is so central to sociology, and the reason why it is the major factor which distinguishes the writings and assertions of the sociologist from those of the layman, is that sociology, like any other discipline, requires some explicit, shared, agreed on criteria for evaluating the work of those within the discipline. [...] By placing a heavy emphasis on correct method, all members of a scientific community are assured a kind of collective protection[.].” PHILLIPS continues (pp 156-157): “But concern with method also stylifies the individual, dampens his strongest passions, and molds him to the requirements for membership in the scientific community. Most of all, however, correct method may block him from confronting experience and restrict his imagination. It limits possibility, it prevents him from realizing what might have been, and while it provides security, it eliminates certain sources of excitement from his intellectual life.”
tial difficulties. E.T. GENDLIN puts it as follows (1962, p 20):

A new inquiry or step of investigation requires defining new variables. It is perfectly all right to term this portion of the scientific labor “prescientific.” It is not at all permissible to omit this portion of the labor from the total endeavor of science. The role of theory is different from that of testable propositions. Theory has the role of leading to testable propositions. […]

The requirement that one be “scientific” before one has devised variables is deadly. It means we can never extend science. It means that to get to our aim we must already be there.[]

Ontological speculation is really not vague. It should not be stigmatized as a past-time for drop-outs who are afraid of hard, decent scientific work. On the contrary, axiomatic speculation requires the courage to confront and respect life’s fundamental uncertainty, and not disregard it. I really don’t find it at all surprising that thinkers are mostly remembered, and considered great, especially on the merits of speculative contributions.

But doesn’t subjective situationism amount to an immorality? It would when situations are thought of as isolated fragments of experience. But that is not how they are assumed here. For the ‘I’ is a special kind of center.

3.5 a special kind of ontology

A measure of both elegance and instrumentality is reflexivity. It is to my engineering mind, anyway. So, to what extent does situationism apply to itself?

I focus on the relationship between I and not-I. According to situationism their relationship is not invariant. It varies, which should now be easy to accept, with the situation. The consequences however, are significant. For it may be imagined, as shown in Figure 3.5.1, that the I of situation a is completely disjunct from the I in situation b.

Figure 3.5.1.
The ‘I,’ and by definition ‘not-I,’ too, occupying different places in different situations.

This is not an unwanted property of the theory. But complementary to the appearance of ‘I’ in different situations, a continuity must also be assumed to exist. WITTGENSTEIN’S often-quoted view on what obviously separate phenomena may nevertheless have in common is appropriate here. There exists, he writes (1953, p 32e),

a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing; sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail. […] I can think of no better expression to charac-
terize these similarities than “family resemblances.”

[…] and this can be said to give [something] an indirect relationship to other things we call the same name.

[…] as in spinning a thread we twist fibre on fibre. And the strength of the thread does not reside in the fact that some one fibre runs through its whole length, but in the overlapping of many fibres.

Pertaining to ‘I,’ its place in the world can change significantly over time and as situations differ. Figure 3.5.2 indicates that a condition for continuity of ‘I’ is established when some of its properties ‘survive’ transfer from situation a to a subsequent situation b.

![Figure 3.5.2.](image)

Minimal overlap for continuity of ‘I.’

A shift such as Figure 3.5.1 depicts therefore lies well within the possibilities that subjective situationism allows. Why not? It is only required that consecutive existences of ‘I’ show minimal continuity in properties.]

39. With increasing situational variety, however, what feels as an enduring identity seems correspondingly difficult to maintain. Psychotherapeutic reports on postmodernity mostly emphasize – the potential of – personal suffering. In *Subject to ourselves: Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and Postmodernity* (1996) A. ELLIOTT writes that the (p 121) “confusion and loneliness connects directly to the surface-centredness of contemporary life, to postmodernity – with its fragments of mediated experience, its communicational and computational dislocation of human social relationships. […] This fluid, dislocating cultural experience is full of contradiction, particularly as regards self-experience. Postmodern culture inaugurates a multidimensional set of radically discontinuous social contexts, in which the fragmented and dispersed subject is wedged uneasily between reflexive self-actualization and capitalistic pressures that promote narcissistic, materialistic self-enclosure […] The inner core of the self is depleted, experience and meaning are torn apart.”

Closely related, the problem of scope is central to ethics, too. Though without an explicit metaphysics or ontology, in *The Abuse of Casuistry, A History of Moral Reasoning* (1988) A.R. JONSEN and S. TOULMIN argue from what I recognize as a situationist perspective. They differentiate between classical casuistry and situation ethics (p 272). What their terminology might confuse is that the former, not the latter, corresponds to situationism as I present it here. (p 13)

“[W]hen properly conceived (we claim), casuistry redresses the excessive emphasis placed on universal rules and invariant principles by moral philosophers and political preachers
With ‘I’ residing simultaneously in different situations\(^{40}\) its location is already a minimal shared property by default. The family resemblances WITTGENSTEIN suggests act as a persistent identity of the ‘I’ throughout its life. Indeed, I can always be held accountable for what I did – where ‘doing’ includes abstinence of action, too – in any situation. Inversely, subjective situationism makes me even more aware of my responsibilities. Actually, they now appear more explicitly in my situational beliefs. What is highly appropriate behavior in situation a may be unfit, illegal even, for situation b.

Radical application of subjective situationism implies that I can even use different ontologies for different situations. I would even turn it around, saying that a different – understanding by me of a – situation is called for whenever I favor a different ontology. I therefore agree with GENDLIN who argues in How Philosophy Cannot Appeal to Experience, and How It Can that (1997, p 5) this variety is not a problem to be solved. It is not an obstacle to be removed. That there are many schemes and centers, and that the organization from each can break down, is a central insight without which philosophy would be naive.

alike. Instead we shall take seriously certain features of moral discourse that recent moral philosophers have too little appreciated: the concrete circumstances of actual cases, and the specific maxims that people invoke in facing actual moral dilemmas. If we start by considering similarities and differences between particular types of cases on a practical level, we open up an alternative approach that is wholly consistent with our moral practice.” The purpose of their book is to present (p 10) “a real alternative […] to the subtle kind of tyranny […] of unchallengeable principles.” Casuistry is introduced as an age-old (p 10) “reasonable and effective set of practical procedures for resolving the moral problems that arose in particular real-life situations.” As another example of a situationally grounded argument, in The Ethical Dimension (1965) E. SHIRK explicitly presents “a contextual foundation for ethics.” Underlying the need for discrimination is that (p 14) “any kind of experience is subject to being ethically evaluated and assessed. Life itself involves the preference of some things above others; it is an evaluational interaction between man and his world. Everywhere and on all sides the human animal is constantly assessing, choosing, and selecting; for experience itself is composed of this very process.” It is the same unified approach that is characteristic of the anatomy of meaning presented in Part ii of this treatise.

40. It may, again, seem contraintuitive to allow simultaneous situations. But then, why not? The investment in the foundation is already made. It is a small extra effort to point out its availability. Whether it is ever put to ‘work’ is another matter. My own experience indicates that, sooner or later, such possibilities at the ontological level are always consummated. It must be remembered that an ontology is a tool, not a truth statement. When the tool is flexible, it pays to investigate what more opportunities it offers.

Metaphysical truth is local and inexhaustible, realized in an inexhaustible multiplicity of local metaphysical works, some affirming inexhaustibility, some denying it. What remains is to be able to say, somehow, if only aporetically, what the truth of aporia amounts to. This, however, is the task of metaphysics itself. In the metaphysical theory here, aporia is locality and inexhaustibility.

Because situationism accommodates – a multitude of – situational ontologies, it helps to consider it a metasituational ontology. In situationist terms this amounts to metaontology. H.A. Myers already develops a similar concept in *Systematic Pluralism: A Study in Metaphysics* (1961, p 7):

Systematic pluralism suggests, in place of the ladder of perfection, the figure of the metaphysical wheel, with an infinite number of spokes representing the systems which may approach the hub, the metaphysical object, from every possible point. The sciences and branches of knowledge, thus, are perspectives. [...] One of them is not more real than another experientially; and the truth or reality of one cannot be determined by another. They are perspectives of a metaphysical object, but this metaphysical object is no more real than they; indeed, when we come to talk about this metaphysical object, which at first thought might seem to be the reality behind the analytical perspectives of it, it in turn becomes a perspective.

See also S. Rosenthal (1986) on “perspectival pluralism.” The nature – pun intended – of metaphysical emphasis has therefore shifted (Myers, 1961, p 25):

Thus, although it was necessary to say when philosophy was in its beginnings that the permanent element in metaphysics is its object, vaguely expressed as Nature or the world of

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41. What might seem a paradox is that this treatise presents a reflexive ontology. That is, it is itself inevitably situational. For including situation as an operational variable, it is also metasituational, i.e., a metaontology.

Strictly specialized ontologies, that is, particular situational ontologies are actually extremely common. Attempts are easily recognizable when they are titled 'philosophy of ...,' or even 'ontology of ...' or 'metaphysics of ....' For example, D.R. Koepsell has written *The Ontology of Cyberspace* (2000). Contrary to my expectation upon starting his book, though, he does not deal with structure but remains fixed on separate object categories.

The subtitle *Law, Philosophy, and the Future of Intellectual Property* captures his particular interest more closely. He views the current ontological status of software legally problematic. It leads Koepsell to argue for eliminating the difference between patent law and copyright law. For (p 111) “a single intellectual property regime [...] copyright might serve as a model.” I agree with – the need and possibility of – a convergent design. I believe it is equally possible, however, to merge patent law and copyright law by extending one of the grounds for patentability from use or so-called technical effect to potentially commercial or economic effect, or even social effect.
being per se, it is now possible to say that the enduring element of metaphysics can be seen
as the formal structure of knowledge, the being as such of systems. [... T]he ontological
order [...] is not something outside experience, outside thought. It is rather the attempt to
express the permanent aspect of meaning and experience synoptically viewed. Hence the
criterion of truth comes more and more to be the systems of thought; propositions are
meaningful when they are homogeneous with a system; they are true when they agree with
the conditions of that system, false when they disagree with it. [...] Difficulty arises only
when each of the systems claims to be the only possible revelation of the essence of reality.
[... p 72] To think of reality as identical with one system is the cardinal error of modern sys-
tematic metaphysics. [... p 115] The problem of systematic knowledge, which ought to be
approached without prejudice, is too often overshadowed by an untimely interest in a highest
good, in an ultimate or highest reality, and in progress toward an ethical goal. [...] Reality may be approached from infinite points of view, but the world does not fall apart
into mere points of view. Every system approaches reality from an angle determined by
its categories, but every system is in the end a perspective of a world common to all. Each
and every system implies a world common to all, and systematic pluralism does
not mean an infinite series of atoms of knowledge falling into an epistemological void.
A situation, then, may be considered equivalent with a “system” as determined
by a unique collection of “categories.” Where I disagree with MYERS is
that he maintains a focus on truth and thereby on the requirement for “sys-
tem” as (p 26) “an impersonal rather than personal criterion.” He distinguish-
es truth from value (p 124):
The criterion of the truth of a proposition is the system of which it is a homogeneous ele-
ment; the criterion of the value of propositions is not an impersonal perspective; it is rather
the personal perspective, the individual himself.
From his own assumptions MYERS is of course right to predict (p 26) “when
the reference of propositions is purely personal, confusion reigns.” For he argues from the premise that philosophy is about knowledge in its own right.
Or? He also writes (p 142):
[If] individuals are active, there are marks of evaluation, not expressed in propositions, but
in action, in the attraction and repulsion shown by individuals toward things experienced.
Elsewhere MYERS criticizes the view that (p 145) “the only task of knowledge
is to get away from the personal perspective, that its only pitfall is the particularity of human beings.” And he remarks that (p 163) “[i]mpersonality, in
respect to knowledge, means universal personality in matters of meaning and value rather than lack of personality.” What MYERS does not do (yet), is reverse his approach and subsequently apply such insights as ground. In her book *Charles Peirce's Pragmatic Pluralism* (1994) S.B. ROSENTHAL argues for a similar position for PEIRCE.

But surely “perspectives” of a different order emerge when knowledge is radically seen relative to action, even instrumental for it (for action also read: behavior). With only personal and behaviorally relevant perspectives, the concepts MYERS proposes for truth and value in fact coincide. As I show in Chapter 6, the “prejudice” MYERS wants to avoid even acquires the nature of a knowledge ground through SCHOPENHAUER’s concept of the will.

My view of subjective situationism as a metaontology also resembles the antifundamentalist position of “metaphysical pluralism” which S. CLARKE outlines in *Metaphysics and the Disunity of Scientific Knowledge* (1998). As with MYERS, however, or consider for another example HAAS (2000), the concept of situation is not rigorously applied to ground differences.

Subjective situationism proves itself a vantage point for recognizing ontological suspicions in the same direction. For example42 M. PELÁEZ-NOGUERAS and J.L. GEWIRTZ (1997) suggest that behavior-analytic theory is undergoing a paradigm shift. It may be moving to a new stage, in which adventurous researchers wish to contribute toward solving everyday practical problems and toward a greater understanding of human interactions.

This statement concludes their own contribution, titled *The Context of Stimulus Control in Behavior Analysis*, to *Environment and Behavior* (1997) edited by D.M. 116

42. Another example is P.A. ROTH's *Meaning and Method in the Social Sciences* (1987). His subtitle reads *A Case for Methodological Pluralism*, with the main argument being that the case of methodological exclusivism is untenable. He makes no attempt at designing an explicit ontology, though. What stops ROTH short might be his idea that social sciences are essentially different from physical sciences.

He still seems to think that what he calls the unity-of-method thesis applies to the latter. I find that for example the different hypotheses of light-as-wave and light-as-particle, respectively, suggest situationism for physics, too.

In addition, my position is that the subjective nature of knowledge makes any such methodological distinctions between social and physical sciences counterproductive. There are many publications, notably by physicists themselves who acknowledge the fictional nature of their theories. Examples are *Ordnung der Wirklichkeit* (1942), *Physik und Philosophie* (1959) and *Der Teil und das Ganze* (1969) by Werner Heisenberg (1901-1976). Some other books that provide the argument that the (physical) world should literally be taken figuratively are *Physics as Metaphor* (1982) by R.S. Jones and *Inventing Reality, physics as language* (1988) by B. Gregory.
BEAR and E.M. PINKSTON. Not venturing beyond their idea of science, and still aiming at traditional truth-value, the editors elaborate as follows in their introduction to the chapter by PELÁEZ-NOGUERAS and GEWIRTZ (p 2):

We would like to find scientific principles that are always true, everywhere and every time, but contextualism teaches us (among others things) how unlikely it is that such principles exist. Almost every principle we know is true not everywhere, but only sometimes. There are places, and times, when some other principle is true instead. That does not mean the absence of lawfulness; it signals instead the operation of another law, one we should learn as well as the first. Thus, when we overstate a principle, such as, “Behavior comes under the control of stimuli that signal its functional consequences,” contextualism teaches us to restate it immediately as, “Behavior comes under the control of stimuli that signal its functional consequences, except when it does not.” That restatement recognizes reality; it also tells us to find the conditions “when it does not” and then understand why those conditions alter the principle. That will give us a new, larger, and more inclusive principle. That is the most valuable path science can take.

The ambition with the ontology of subjective situationism is even greater. It does not draw a line at scientific endeavors. A benefit is that the problem of the demarcation of science dissolves.

Subjective situationism is pluralism. It also is relativism but without loss of foundation for accountability and liability. The family resemblances underlying ‘I’ across situations see to that. The enriched foundation, with situation as a separate category, enables the sign user to consciously manage a much greater variety of superstructures. Thus, subjective situationism may profitably be used as a structured approach to postmodernism in all its variety. Isn’t postmodernism subjectively and dynamically situational through and through? It is more easily understood from the perspective of an ontology that postulates situation as a separate dimension for ordering experience. It is also easier to conceive in terms of situations that modernism and postmodernism are not opposites. Rather, the latter encompasses the former. For postmodernism requires a conceptual foundation at a deeper level than modernism. Similarly, situationism encompasses logical positivism. Special cases are – by the very nature of situations – necessary and should be applied where it can be done so responsibly and it is useful.

The dynamics of postmodernism consist of movements by which a boundary is attempted to be both instituted and transcended. It is difficult for a “scientific intelligence” to comprehend. What results is a more fundamental insight into complementarity of reality. So far, I have proposed that there is I and not-I. Can they be more than complementary? Can I be not-I, too? I don’t believe so (which is an essentially modernist view, of course; didn’t I just confess to the difficulties of a “scientific intelligence”? ). I and not-I are mutually exclusive parts of reality. But I cannot be all of reality. I also do not want to be
all of it for what, then, would I need situations for? My belief in situations precludes any idealist hyperbole. But I admit that I like to experience the reverse, i.e., that not-I is I. That is when the intellect takes time off. As a mathematician I am inclined to call it a situation with zero ontology. It is 'just' a special case derived from a general, more variable model. I describe in the next chapter how to construct practical information models inspired by (subjective) situationism. There it also becomes clear what the concept of information model implies in this treatise.

3.6 situations objectified, too

I have tried to show in the previous paragraph that postmodernism entails joint analysis and synthesis. The 'I' has a predisposition for differentiation. Differences make analysis possible. I disconnect(s) from not-I. Analysis, however, is oriented at conduct. And conduct, to which the 'I' equally predisposes, is an act of synthesis. It is simply how I reconnect to not-I.

This essential duality of analysis and synthesis may be generally presumed. It has led for example in § 3.5 to some extended notions about the relationship between I and not-I. Here, such duality is taken as a guide to inquire into the relationship between situation and object.

So far, situation has been treated as an ontological category, disjunct from object. Their difference serves analytical purposes well. But would it not help synthesis to presume that situation and object are similar, too?

It can, in fact, be quite simply included in situationism that situation is also an object. The resulting mixture of difference and similarity is, as always, hard to express. An appreciation of such synthesis-around-duality is probably helped by reformulating situation as background object, and object as foreground object. Such terminology is cumbersome, though. That is why I normally continue to speak about situation and object.

Subjective situationism is a realism in the sense that it presumes existence of one world: reality. I am living in this world. Subjective situationism is therefore an idealism, too, i.e., in the sense that I objectify reality. It is typical of postmodernism that no paradox is experienced by the assumption that a subject is the precondition, not of reality’s existence, but, rather, of reality’s objectification. Essential for subjective situationism is that subjective objectification is not limited to objects. What it holds is that I objectify dyads of foreground object and background situation, that is, of object proper and situation. It is

43. It is tempting to stress this point by writing completely disjunct. But the adjective disjunct of course implies that any overlap is absent.
impossible for me to experience an object without an enveloping situation. Equally impossible is to experience an objectless situation. They are inseparable, at least by definition of – the ontological tool of – situationism.

As a mathematician I am obviously invited by the objectified nature of situation to wonder about the implications when a situation is considered an object in its own right. Being an object, it clearly requires a situation in which it can occur. Actually, what accompanies such a level shift must be a change in point of view\(^44\) by the subject.\(^45\) One such recursive step is shown in Figure 3.6.1.

![Recursion in reality](image)

Figure 3.6.1.
Recursion in reality.

The objectification of – the category of – situation certainly yields an elegant mechanism for upward recursion. What does not feel\(^46\) right, though, is the prospect of an infinite series. For situationism to be productive as an ontolog-

44. Point of view is a long-established concept in narrative theory. See *Literary Terms* (1960) by K. BECKSON and A. GANZ. More recently it is expanded by the conceptual pair of perspective and voice. See *Contemporary Literary Theory* (1992) by J. HAWTHORN. My interpretation is that a particular perspective rules the overall interpretation – both the author’s intention and the reader’s meaning – of the story. Voice, then, pertains to a certain part played in the story. I highlight a similar distinction in the next chapter. In any constructed sign, perspective and voice meet. Loosely interpreted, perspective is an overall picture of reality in which pictures of interpreters are injected as voice. I frame their dyadic relationship in terms of sign and context.

45. As I said before, I don’t entertain any pretense at explaining intellectual behavior at the level of cognitive psychology. However, I do suggest joint areas of interest.

ogy, what can be pointed at as the ultimate situation, i.e., the situationless situation? My proposal is consistent as I start from subjective situationism as the foundation. The ontology is the boundary of upward recursion. When the visual direction of recursion as shown in Figure 3.6.1 is reversed, the recursive level shifts between situation and object may be generally sketched as in Figure 3.6.2.

The reversal leading to Figure 3.6.2 ‘automatically’ shows that downward recursion is also implied by subjective objectification of reality into dyads of situation and object. For in the other direction, what is considered an object at a particular level (n-1) appears as a situation at level n. When an object is seen as a property of a situation, and when a level shift turns a situation into an object, such downward recursion provides the opportunity for a progression of property identification. I do not propose an upper limit for n. It is possible

46. I am fully aware that it is, at present anyway, highly irregular for a researcher to bring his own feelings into scientific play. But that is really how it feels when I am developing speculative theory. I therefore take science seriously by reporting them faithfully. The scientific requirement for including subjectivity should become clear when the point of view (see note 44, above) is changed from logical positivism to encompassing subjective situationism.
to add details as the subject requires for his conduct.

Rounding up this stage of design of (subjective) situationism as a mathematically consistent system, the ontology itself constitutes the point of view at zero level. It consists of both the zero situation and the zero object. There 'exists' only a single instance of the zero situation, and thus of its situationist confluent, i.e. of the zero object.

In the next chapter I present the metapattern as a visualization technique. Differentiation of multiple behaviors of an object receives special attention, that is, an object's roles in different situations as already introduced in Figure 3.3.3. Rationally modeling such multiple behavior is, after all, the raison d'être of situationism.