particularly the question of whether Marcuse’s late turn toward the aesthetic dimension was a continuation of earlier tendencies, or a new beginning. Translated from the French, Martin- eau’s book exhaustively treats the French secondary literature on Marcuse. While the book is not an appropriate introduction to Marcuse, those with a specialized interest will find the treatment of the secondary literature, as well as the analysis of the development of several key concepts in Marcuse’s work, fruitful.

The most original aspect of the book is Martineau’s interpretation of Marcuse’s utopian vision in terms of the utopias of Rousseau, Fourier, Gracchus Babeuf (!), Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Mannheim (chapter 2). Yet, after a very sympathetic treatment of the utopian impulse in the work of several of these authors, including Marcuse, Martineau concludes in favor of Karl Popper’s piecemeal social engineering (pp. 86–87). This is certainly a defensible position. What is not so clear is how Martineau finally sees the value of Marcuse’s work, given this conclusion. Martineau concludes his chapter on Marcuse’s romantic aesthetics with the observation that “It is for each one of us to enlighten reality as best we may, for the flicker of shadows on the wall of the cave is perhaps all we shall ever know” (p. 87). This is hardly an inspiring defense, let alone criticism, of Marcuse.


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During the last several years there has been a resurgence of interest in functionalism. General theoretical concerns, sometimes pejoratively called “metatheory,” have assumed center stage in this revival. What is distinctive and refreshing about Michael Faia’s Dynamic Functionalism is the unrelenting effort to systematize a functionalist explanatory model and to demonstrate how that model and empirically specified variants of it can be rigorously tested.

The core of the book is divided into three parts. The first part, consisting of four chapters, identifies the distinctive elements of functionalism, which, according to Faia, comprise a unique form of analysis yet to be fully appreciated. The book’s first chapter clears the brush, shearing the core elements of functional analysis from the more peripheral ones. Faia maintains that the distinctive thrust of functional analysis is its commitment to explain social structures by reference to their consequences and a concomitant emphasis on feedback, self-regulation, cybernetic control, and circular causation. On the other hand, functional analysis does not presume any anthropomorphic teleology, assume that every structure has an identifiable function, adopt a logic of indispensability, or dictate that actors’ intentions be ignored. Chapter 2 specifies the notions of social survivorship and the mortality of social organizations and outlines a variation and selective retention model for analyzing how an environment selects out or reinforces specific social structures. Chapter 3 introduces the logic of the life table and employs several examples to demonstrate how life-table analysis contributes to our understanding of social survivorship. Part 1 concludes with chapter 4, where Faia discusses the dynamic character of functional analysis, its ability to explain linear and nonlinear social patterns, and the necessity for both time series data and the most sophisticated techniques to analyze such data.

Chapter 5, which introduces Part 2, discusses adaptation theories—i.e., theories that explain how changes in one part of a system help to resolve problems generated in another part—and describes the causal (and functional) logic underlying adaptation processes. Chapter 6 provides an introduction to time-series analyses, and demonstrates their utility for assessing functional hypotheses.

Part 3 tackles more general theoretical issues. Chapter 7 argues that the form of functionalist propositions represents the most advanced approach to sociological theorizing, and calls for social scientists to move toward a “functionalist culmination." Faia introduces his own definition of social science theory, and suggests that the widely noted convergence on the methods appropriate for the creation of theories can and should contribute to the formation of a single theoretical paradigm. The book concludes with an appendix that presents a historical and theoretical appraisal of functionalist analysis which commences with Spencer and concludes with Parsons.

In my estimation, this book makes a very important contribution to contemporary theory and methodology. It persuasively demonstrates how the potential of functionalist analysis has yet to be fully exploited. By outlining the core of functional analysis—feedback, self-regulation, the variation and selective retention model and adaptation processes—and coupling these core components of functionalist analysis with sophisticated statistical programs, Faia provides an essential corrective to the contemporary discussion of functionalism which has been heavily tilted toward general theorizing. Finally, though the arguments are not presented...
in sufficient detail, Faia indicates how at the levels of models and hypotheses, functionalism and its purported theoretical antagonists (e.g., Marxism) exhibit considerable overlap.

The book is not without its difficulties, of course. The argument for an integrated paradigm and a functionalist culmination, for example, is not compelling, at least not to me. Overall, however, Faia’s book is an exciting and engaging work destined to generate controversy and, I hope, a more appreciative understanding of functionalism.


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In this most provocative book, Eugene Rochberg-Halton would have us critically confront the nominalist Cartesian assumptions upon which almost all social theory has been founded, with a reanimated pragmatism emphasizing the philosophical realism of Charles Sanders Peirce. This reconstructed pragmatic sociology (a term that Rochberg-Halton prefers over symbolic interactionism), according to the author’s argument, can be used in a comprehensive critique of modernity and the cultural nominalism upon which it is based. This book is comprised of two distinct parts: a rather technical analysis of Peirce’s pragmatism and semiotics, and an application of this analysis to a critical understanding and transformation of modernity.

The book begins with a general presentation of the “pragmatic attitude” as distinct from both the positivist and rationalist abstractionism characteristic of current social thought. Whereas positivism and rationalism seem to present opposite assumptions about the nature of reality, truth, and scientific inquiry, they in fact reflect the “split-brain thinking” of a nominalist worldview which posits the objective world as totally and irrevocably separate and distinct from the thinking subject. In such a world view, science is conceived as a fixed body of truth or “systematized knowledge.” Pragmatism, on the other hand, maintains the unity of the objective and subjective worlds, and so conceives of science as “inquisitive and imaginative human nature tempered through its observations and refined through the self-critical community” (p. 22). Against an instrumentalist interpretation of pragmatism which stresses meaning and action as aimed at short-sighted utilitarian goals, Rochberg-Halton teases out of Dewey, Mead, and particularly Peirce a pragmatic individual growing toward “concrete reasonableness”: that embodiment of intelligence which dwells within the self-critical community, as well as in each individual member of that community. Human action can never be thoroughly instrumentalized. Rather, because it is communicative, human action, even as it relates to the so-called world of objects, maintains an aesthetic quality Rochberg-Halton refers to as “qualitative immediacy.”

Rochberg-Halton examines the philosophical underpinnings of pragmatism in an extended discussion of Peirce’s semiotics as it relates to the more influential semiotics of Ferdinand de Saussure and particularly Charles Morris. At stake here is whether signs are to be viewed as arbitrary representations of a reality that only truly exists outside of signification (the nominalist position ascribed to both Saussure and Morris), or whether the sign and nature itself are general: a realist position that allows that the truth of an object lies not in “a successful apprehension of an object otherwise out of consciousness but [rather in] the product of the continuous scrutiny of preconceptions by the scientific community” (p. 77).

Having examined the central philosophical issues in the nominalist/pragmatist debate, Rochberg-Halton applies the analysis to modernity through a mixture of empirical studies and cultural criticism. While contemporary culture is seen as being characterized by a consumptive materialism in which objects are collected without any necessary relationship to the individuals who possess them, while the metropolis as both architecture and environment exists as totally estranged from the people who inhabit it, and while money mediates meaningless experiences of “ritual waste,” there are also signs of the “reanimation” of culture in the form of the “contemplative memories” associated with certain objects and environments, and the cultural criticisms of authors Herman Melville and Doris Lessing, musician George Rochberg, historian Lewis Mumford, and the art of the Vienna School of Fantastic Realism. These not only represent cultural critique, but point to the possibility of transforming the dead weight of cultural nominalism as well.

On the whole, this attempt by Rochberg-Halton to connect the discussion of philosophical assumptions with cultural criticism promises to breathe some much-needed new life into social theory. In particular, his analysis of Cartesian dualisms and fleshing out of the pragmatic alternative deserves considerable consideration from sociologists. Until now, these sorts of discussions have taken place only among Hegelian Marxists of various persuasions, and the restatement of these issues in language more available to the majority of