Contributors

Guido Baggio, Associate Professor, Roma Tre University, Italy.

Michela Bella, Post-doc Researcher, University of Molise, Italy.

Marie-Laurence Bordeleau-Payer, Affiliate Professor, Departement of Nursing Science, Université du Québec en Outaouais, Canada.

Matteo Bortolini, Associate Professor, University of Padova, Italy.

Filipe Carreira da Silva, Research Professor, Institute of Social Sciences of the University of Lisbon, Portugal; Fellow, Selwyn College, University of Cambridge, UK.

Baptiste Cornardeau, PhD Candidate, Institut des sciences juridique et philosophique de la Sorbonne (ISJPS), Université Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne, France.

Jean-François Côté, Professor, Department of Sociology, Université du Québec à Montréal, Canada.

Francis Douville Vigeant, Professor, Cégep de Lanaudière, Canada.

Roberta Dreon, Full Professor of Aesthetics, Department of Philosophy and Cultural Heritage, Ca' Foscari University, Venice, Italy.

Daniel R. Huebner, Associate Professor, University of North Carolina Greensboro, US.

Núria Sara Miras Boronat, Associate Professor Moral and Political Philosophy, University of Barcelona, Spain.

Andrea Parravicini, Assistant Professor, Department of Philosophy "Piero Martinetti", La Statale University of Milan, Italy.

Stephen Pratten, Professor of Economics and Philosophy, King's Business School, King's College London, UK.

Matteo Santarelli, Junior Assistant Professor, University of Bologna, Italy.

Bijan Warner, Director, Huron Consulting Group, US.

1. G.H. Mead and the materiality of ideas

Filipe Carreira da Silva

INTRODUCTION

Sociology has undergone many important changes since I published *Mead and Modernity* in 2008. My aim then was to provide readers with a comprehensive view of George Herbert Mead's ideas, organised around three main themes: democracy, science and social psychology. Each of these pillars, I argued, contained a significant contribution by Mead that linked his intellectual legacy to modern sociological thought. Over the years, many scholars have debated whether Mead's work can be so neatly organised, but I continue to argue that there is a fundamental unity to his writings. His ideas about democracy were not separate from his philosophical reflections on science or his pioneering theories of the self. Rather, they converged in a broader understanding of human agency and social organisation. Although rooted in the early twentieth century, these insights remain strikingly relevant to contemporary sociological discussions of political participation, institutional authority, and the scientific foundations of human consciousness.

In the years since the publication of *Mead and Modernity*, however, my perspective on Mead, social theory, and sociology itself has evolved. My teaching and research on the sociological canon have made me even more aware than before of its radical contingency, which nonetheless makes it no less central to the discipline. This contingency, however, does not diminish Mead's relevance; rather, it enhances my ability to revisit his theories with fresh insights. In *The Politics of the Book* (2019), Monica Brito Vieira and I explored how material conditions – such as publishing practices and the circulation of ideas – have shaped the sociological canon, including Mead's place within it.

This perspective emphasises that even foundational texts are subject to historical forces, a reality that invites us to recontextualise Mead's contributions for the present. Building on this evolving understanding, the current chapter takes a further step in this direction by focusing on Mead's lesser-known writings, particularly those that address the role of objects in the formation of the self. Although written over a century ago, these articles offer profound insights into how humans interact with the material world. Mead's exploration of objects – whether physical or symbolic – provides a critical framework for understanding how individuals navigate complex social environments. While Mead himself did not fully develop a theory of objects, his insights laid the groundwork for what I call the "materiality of ideas". This framework highlights how objects mediate social interactions, influence human agency, and embody larger political and cultural meanings.

By re-examining several of his early articles, I aim to uncover the continuing relevance of Mead's work for contemporary political and social theory. These texts are an invaluable resource for scholars interested in how objects shape social consciousness and individual identity. Mead's ideas of the self as emerging from social interaction, often tied to linguistic or symbolic forms, extend into the realm of material culture. In this sense, objects are not passive; they are active participants in the creation of social meaning. In the context of modern political movements, where symbols such as shoes, caps and clothing become focal points of identity and resistance, Mead's insights help us to navigate the complex relationships between individuals and the objects they use to define themselves.

To illustrate this argument, I present four empirical cases: the MAGA cap, the Palestinian keffiyeh, the French yellow vests, and feminist red shoes. These objects, while seemingly mundane in everyday life, have been imbued with significant political power in specific contexts. They transcend their materiality to become symbols of broader ideological movements – whether in support of populism, national identity or gender equality. Drawing on Mead, I show how these objects not only symbolise, but also participate in, the co-creation of political narratives. The cap and vest, for example, show how populist movements can simultaneously undermine and reinforce democratic norms. The keffiyeh, a piece of cloth, encapsulates the tensions between national identity and cultural resistance, while the red shoes powerfully illustrate how objects can challenge entrenched patriarchal structures.

Ultimately, what these illustrations show is that Mead's work remains an indispensable resource for sociologists today. His insights go far beyond the symbolic interactionism through which he is often interpreted. By going beyond the text of *Mind, Self, and Society* – a book compiled posthumously and not directly by Mead himself – we gain access to a richer, more nuanced understanding of his thought. Mead's published articles, particularly those dealing with objects and social consciousness, provide a valuable toolkit for analysing contemporary social phenomena. It is only by revisiting these lesser-known texts that one can fully appreciate the breadth and depth of Mead's contributions to modern sociology.

Before exploring Mead's little-known theory of objects and the articles in which he touched on it, it is first necessary to present the general architecture of his thought. I will use the metaphor of an intellectual edifice based on three main pillars.

MEAD'S INTELLECTUAL EDIFICE

The aim of this section is to show how George Herbert Mead, known in sociology above all for his intersubjective conception of human consciousness, was the main inspirational figure for the symbolic interactionism of Herbert Blumer, Howard Becker, and Erving Goffman, as well as for his membership in the gallery of classic American philosophical pragmatists alongside names such as Charles Sanders Peirce, William James, or John Dewey, actually produced a much broader and more sophisticated social and political theory than this image suggests. To use an

architectural metaphor, it's as if his work constituted an intellectual edifice resting on three pillars. The first is the pillar of science. This pillar establishes the criteria for a democratic community of communication, a community that reflects the social implications of the so-called "method of intelligence", i.e., the experimental scientific method. Second, we have the pillar of social psychology, closely associated with the previous one given the scientific character that Mead wishes to see associated with this discipline, and whose object is the social process of the formation of the individual. Finally, a theory of participatory democracy and social reform, whose ethical implications must be submitted to the sieve of science, constitutes the third and final pillar of an "edifice ambitiously projected but never finished", to use the words of Horace Thayer (1968, p. 235). These pillars are related to each other in a systematic (i.e., through interdependent conceptual relationships) and logically ordered way. With regard to the latter, the logical priority of the science pillar within Mead's system of thought is expressed in the fact that the principles of the scientific method are applied to solving specific problems in the other two fundamental areas, social psychology and democratic politics.

My thesis is that the main aspects of Mead's work are encompassed within these three broad topics. Admittedly, given the systematic nature of his thought, some items can be associated with more than one pillar, but none is excluded from at least one of them. This results in a fundamental unity that is visible both in the internal coherence of each pillar and in the systemic coherence of the building as a whole. This unity stems from the fact that the scientific pillar logically precedes the others. In other words, it is from the perspective of a scientist that Mead analyses the social character of subjectivity as well as the "social and moral order". What's more, this theoretical system should be understood as a systematic endeavour to account for the societal shift towards modernity. Contrary to popular belief, Mead set out to analyse "modern times" not only from the perspective of a social psychologist interested in the logic of the development of human consciousness but also as a political scientist concerned with the economic, political, social and moral consequences of the processes of industrialisation, urbanisation and the expansion of state functions. As I have explained elsewhere, these pillars can be seen as Mead's responses to the "inescapable questions" raised by the modern condition for all thinkers operating within the horizon of modernity: "science", the "modern self" and "democracy" are some of the inescapable and defining themes of modernity in its many guises. One of the consequences of this thesis is the idea that the relative value of Mead's answers allows us to position him in relation to other sociological classics and ourselves (Silva, 2008). Therefore, the main aim of this chapter is to draw attention to the systematic order that unites the various pillars of Mead's intellectual edifice. If there is coherence in his thought, I believe that this will be reflected in the internal coherence of each of these three pillars as well as in the conceptual relationships that unite them.

My interpretation of Mead's thought operates on three different analytical levels. At the meta-theoretical level, my argument is that the history of theory and theory construction should be seen as different sides of the same coin. Contrary to what Robert Merton (1949 [1967]) and many others argue, this chapter aims to

demonstrate that historicism can be reconciled with presentism: theory building can and should be complemented by the conceptual history of the analytical tools with which it operates. In doing so, I distance myself from the foundationalist proposals that believe in the possibility of constructing knowledge in a "neutral" way by simply applying methodologies competently.[1] The definition of universal and ahistorical foundations for scientific knowledge is, in fact, a dangerous illusion. As Wittgenstein explained long ago, scientific discourse, like all human language, cannot simply "go on holiday" and separate itself from the contexts (disciplinary, national, local, etc.) in which it was created. From a theoretical perspective, my thesis is that the history of the reception of Mead's ideas in sociology can be described as a narrative in which "Mead the social psychologist" is the main actor, while the "scientist" and the "political scientist and activist" are barely mentioned. One of the purposes of this chapter is to show that this narrative, although rooted in sociology's image of itself, does not correspond to the truth. Finally, as far as my methodological strategy is concerned, I argue that a historical (or genetic) reconstruction should be complemented by a reconstruction based on topics or themes if we want to understand not only the multiple facets that make up any object of study, but also its development process. Indeed, much of the innovative character of my study of Mead's ideas derives from this methodological strategy. That said, we must acknowledge that other specialists in Mead's work have mobilised somewhat similar strategies. I refer to David L. Miller's (1973) pioneering analysis of the book *G.H. Mead. A Contemporary Re-examination of His Thought* (1997 [1985]) by Hans Joas, and the more recent studies by Gary Alan Cook and Andrew Feffer (see Cook, 1993; Feffer, 1993). In any case, as this text will show, the way in which I propose to complement a genetic reconstruction of Mead's ideas with a thematic reconstruction is clearly different from either of them.[2] Above all, it is different from the theoretical construction strategy favoured by Jürgen Habermas. As we shall see, Habermas's criticism of Mead as having underestimated the process of material reproduction in the most advanced industrial societies is more a consequence of his own theoretical-methodological strategy than a fault with Mead.

EXPERIMENTAL SCIENCE

My aim in this sub-section is to analyse Mead's conception of science from the point of view of its evolution over time, starting with the student notes from the "Logic of the Social Sciences" course that Mead taught in 1911 in Chicago, then moving on to the period between the publication in 1917 of the article *Scientific Method and Individual Thinker* and his last text, the 1930 Carus Lectures, published posthumously in *The Philosophy of the Present* (2002 [1932]). As I suggested above,

[1] On the subject of anti-foundationalism, see Silva and Vieira (2009).

[2] For a critical analysis of the work of these experts on Mead, see Silva (2007c), in particular chapter 8.

I believe that his conception of science should be understood as part of a broader theoretical project. In 1917, Mead develops precisely this idea when he argues that the success of the pragmatist scientific programme depends on a consistent explanation of the origin of human consciousness capable of dissolving the dichotomy that separates the psychic from the physical (see Mead, 1917, p. 206). In fact, in the following decade, under the influence of the British philosopher Alfred North Whitehead, Mead wrote a series of articles whose purpose was to analyse the process of reconstruction that he believed was associated with the growth of scientific knowledge. It should be noted that Mead's analysis of this reconstructive process can be seen as a variation on a theme that had already been the object of his attention in the mid-1890s, when he accepted John Dewey's invitation to work in the philosophy department of the then newly created University of Chicago. His late writings on the philosophy of science, around which I will develop my argument in this section, are, from this point of view, the last and best articulated version of Mead's efforts to analyse the relationship between human reflexivity and the reconstruction of experiential problems.

A preliminary version of Mead's analysis of this problem can be found in the aforementioned set of student notes from 1911. In this lecture, Mead presents a three-dimensional analysis of the logic of the social sciences. Our author begins with the epistemological status of the latter, then moves on to a discussion of the social nature of rationality and concludes with an analysis of the ethical and political implications of his proposal. If there is a central idea in this course taught by Mead, it is certainly the idea of dialogue, a notion that is omnipresent throughout his analysis of human consciousness and thought. It is in linguistic communication that we find the explanatory element necessary to understand the origin, development process and all the implications of rationality, that is, "intelligence", if we want to use the expression used by Mead himself. This explanation is exemplified, symptomatically, by dialogues between children and their parents or by the experimental scientist's way of reasoning. The problem-orientated nature of rational thought is seen as the socio-biological framework within which modern science should be understood.

For Mead, experimental science always operates with a mind that is social, insofar as inferential thinking includes common reference to symbols, whether in dialogues or discussions between two or more individuals, or in the thinking of each one of us. In other words, scientific rationality involves communication with ourselves and with other subjects. What Mead is introducing here is the notion of the "sociality of science", a distinctive feature of his thinking in the 1920s. As David L. Miller has already emphasised, the systematic nature of Mead's thought comes to the fore when considering the multiple applications of the principle of sociality (see Miller, 1973, pp. 188–206). What I want to discuss here is Mead's attempt to use his socio-psychological perspective on human intelligence to explore the reconstructive process associated with scientific knowledge, that is, the way in which both thought and scientific activity are explained in terms of the principle of sociality. This principle, contrary to what Miller suggests, should not be seen as the key to interpreting Mead's work. This is because it would be an unacceptable anachronism to interpret Mead's youth

in the light of a conceptual category that he created and developed in the final phase of his career. The evolution of Mead's thought should therefore not be understood by reference to the principle of sociality.

In any case, this principle is very useful in clarifying how the various aspects of his intellectual edifice are connected to each other. For example, Mead's attempt to link a social notion of the self to an experimentalist conception of science is best understood by reference to the principle of sociality. The latter refers to a process of adjustment between two distinct moments of reality: for example, *before* and *after* we manage to scientifically explain certain data. As long as this data is not explained, it lies "between the old system and the new" (Mead, 2002 [1932], p. 47) – in this period, the data is unintelligible. Only when the adjustment is complete do these events gain a past and belong to a new system. Still referring to the example above, adjustment occurs when a new scientific theory becomes capable of explaining the data: situations hitherto considered exceptional can now be explained, alongside all the things already explained by previous theories. In this sense, Mead argues that the relationship between the old and the new "is a process of logical reconstruction through which the new law emerges from the old exceptions to replace a structure that has become inadequate". Mead also emphasises that "in both processes, (...) the individual functions in his full particularity, but in an organic relation to the society which is responsible for him" (Mead, 1917, pp. 226–227). Both the old and new worlds are social worlds in two different senses: not only are reflective thought and the scientific method social activities, but also "the individual, in whose experience the problem and its solution must occur, presupposes the community from which he himself emerges" (Mead, 1938, p. 60).

We can see here how Mead, in a very original way, links his social conception of human consciousness to his conception of experimental science. For Mead, the mind is the ultimate example of the application of the principle of sociality. In a characteristically pragmatist way, our author identifies human intelligence with the resolution of action problems. When our behaviour is interrupted or when we are faced with contradictory courses of action, a problem occurs. Solving it requires the creative reconstruction of the situation: several alternative courses of action must be considered by the individual before deciding which is the most appropriate to solve the problem. The process of adjustment, which the principle of sociality is supposed to be able to explain, takes on a particular form in this case. As the individual reflects on the various possibilities for action, he finds himself between two worlds: the old world (which he incorporates through the "*me*" and the "generalised other") and a new one, which emerges through the impulsive and unpredictable "*I*". Mead, in a clearly innovative way, is therefore suggesting the existence of a link between reflective thought and scientific knowledge. We better understand the processual nature of his conception of the social self as soon as we realise that the social order established by "me" and the new order inaugurated by "I" are deeply interrelated. The old world does not simply give way to the new world in a continuous and linear way. On the contrary, Mead insists, the principle of sociality shows how the new "me" needs to adjust to the old "me", just as the latter needs to adjust to the former. Similarly, the

data explained by Newtonian physics must adjust to (i.e., be explained by) Einstein's theories, insofar as these are more inclusive than Newton's (hence, scientific progress). In short, according to Mead, thought is no less than the "highest expression of sociality, insofar as it is what allows the organism to pass from one attitude to another through a phase that is a part of all these attitudes, but is also capable of reflecting on itself and responding to this phase" (Mead, 2002 [1932], p. 86).

SOCIAL PSYCHOLOGY

I would now like to briefly discuss the point of view from which Mead "attacks the problem of consciousness", to use his own expression. My thesis is that Mead approaches this problem from the perspective of a scientist. The scientific attitude, in turn, is very similar to the perspective of a "generalised other". The latter is itself similar to the attitude of the moral agent capable of making critical moral judgements. In this section, I will begin by discussing all the similarities between these different points of view. As we shall see, they all share an orientation towards abstraction, impersonality and objectivity.

Mead introduces the notion of the "generalised other" as an essential condition for the development of the human personality.[3] This concept refers to a set of social attitudes that are internalised by the individual. What explanation does Mead give for this process of internalising social norms? By rejecting the traditional Cartesian model of the subject as a passive receptacle of external social rules (thus replicating, at the socio-psychological level, the dichotomy between an inner subjective world and an outer objective reality), Mead opens the way to an alternative model according to which individuals are creative interpreters of social attitudes and norms. The concept of the "generalised other" allows him to explain how, during the so-called "play phase" in the process of child development, children learn to monitor their conduct by reference to the perspective of everyone else. When they play with each other, children take on the role not of any other child in particular (as they do when they play a specific role, such as when "playing Indians", to use the famous example suggested by Mead himself), but of each and every one of them – the organised set of these attitudes is the "generalised other". It is not hard to see that, for Mead, children's play phase is the prelude to their social life as adults. As they grow up, they gradually acquire the ability to internalise the attitudes of social groups, which they integrate into their own personalities. For Mead, the self participates in social life, not by acting out predefined social roles, but by interpreting and reformulating in its own mind the attitudes shared by each group.

How does this attitude of the "generalised other" relate to the socio-psychological mechanism of "assuming the role (or attitude) of the other"? The best answer to this

[3] One of the best analyses of the concept of the "generalised other" can be found in Dodds, Lawrence and Valsiner (1997).

question can be found in a posthumously published article entitled "Consciousness, Mind, the Self, and Scientific Objects" (Mead, 1982). First, Mead argues that self-consciousness is achieved when the subject acquires the capacity to become an object for himself: "The mind", writes Mead, "is that part of experience in which the individual becomes an object for himself when confronted with possible lines of behaviour" (Mead, 1982, p. 177). Associated with this capacity for self-objectification, Mead draws our attention to the presence of certain affinities in the organisms of the individuals involved in the "social act": for example, the social stimulus that is the vocal gesture must be heard and understood in a similar way by all of them (see also Mead, 1925, p. 270). Finally, our author emphasises the existence of a set of "common attitudes" available to individuals. Each of us is capable of taking on the role of everyone else – life in society can therefore be described as a "generalised environment" inhabited by "generalised organisms". Mead concludes as follows:

> The effect of taking on the role of everyone else is to eliminate the peculiarity of each one's environment and to replace each specific individual with an abstraction – a generalised individual, the thinker. (Mead, 1982, p. 178)

In short, the "generalised other" provides Mead with a socio-psychological explanation for: 1) abstract thought, 2) social control as rational self-criticism, and 3) self-consciousness. As for abstract thought, Mead identifies it with communicating with ourselves when we speak with the voice of the community to which we belong. An example can help us better understand what Mead has in mind. Consider a situation in which we make an offer on a second-hand flat. In doing so, we take on all the roles involved in this process, from the builder to the seller to the eventual previous owners. In this way, we can say that, for example, the flat in question is too expensive because we can place ourselves in each of the phases of construction, commercialisation and use. In this way, we respond to the whole community – this response acquires a universal character. In referring to the ability to engage in rational self-criticism through the "generalised other", Mead draws our attention to the incorporation of social expectations and norms through the "me". In this sense, social control is as much a source of social regulation of individual behaviour as it is the source of individuality (see Mead, 1997 [1934], p. 255). Finally, the intersubjective explanation proposed by Mead for the emergence of self-consciousness is closely related to our ability to assume the attitude of the "generalised other". Life in society requires the individual to take on a plurality of social roles and common attitudes. When the individual addresses himself from the perspective of the group, he becomes a "generalised other". To the extent that "the other and the self emerge together in the social act", the individual becomes a "self defined by reference to the social whole to which he belongs" (Mead, 2002 [1932], pp. 80–81).

The way Mead sees social psychology as a fully-fledged scientific activity stems from his conception of the relationship between the natural sciences and the social sciences. In both, given their experimental nature and problem-solving orientation (see, for example, Mead, 1906, p. 391), scientists are interested in the particular

insofar as it emerges as an exception to the universal. Solving the problem brings with it the disappearance of particular realities through the "universality of the law" (Mead, 1938, p. 634). In the case of the physical or natural sciences, the scientist frees his perceptions from the idiosyncrasies and perspectives of particular observers by discovering "uniformities valid for all observers and thinkers", argues Mead (Mead, 1938, p. 22). Similarly, in a social scientific psychology, the point of view to be adopted must be situated at the intersection of all the different perspectives on the object so that all the uniformities, essential for scientific experimentation, can be identified, without, however, losing the information relating to its particular character. Psychic events only become scientific data when they correspond to definitive conditions of objective experience.

This attempt to reconcile the universal character of social psychology data and the particular nature of the human mind is revealed even more clearly when Mead discusses the relationship between the attitude of a "generalised other" and social control. If the science of the self (i.e., social psychology) presupposes such an abstract, impersonal and objective perspective – in such a way that the typical characteristics of human beings can be identified – does this mean that there is no room for individuality in the scientific social psychology proposed by Mead? On the contrary, by identifying social control with the self-critical attitude of the subject who adopts the perspective of the "generalised other", Mead suggests, in his 1928 lectures on social psychology, that social control is "actually constitutive of and closely related to that individuality, since the individual is what he is, as a conscious and individual personality, insofar as he is a member of society" (Mead, 1997 [1934], p. 255). In other words, there is no dichotomy between individual autonomy and social control. On the contrary, our individuality is ensured by the uniqueness of each individual perspective, by the singular contribution each of us makes to defining the common values we share – but which we always incorporate in an unrepeatable way.

DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

Among the first texts in which we can see Mead's preference for a scientific approach to solving political problems is the 1900 article, "Suggestions Towards a Theory of the Philosophical Disciplines". In this important article, Mead suggests that reflective thought can reconstruct a problematic situation in at least two different ways. We can approach a moral problem either deductively, by reaffirming old meanings that apply to the problem in question, or inductively by looking for new meanings. For example, poverty can be conceived either as a natural feature of human societies or as a social problem that requires a political solution. Mead considers the latter option to be superior in that it treats moral problems as opportunities to "grow morally", rather than as "chronic and destructive" conflicts (Mead, 1900, p. 15). What's more, this inductive method of moral reconstruction is very similar to the experimental method used by scientists: the moral agent must consider all the relevant values in the problematic situation, just as the scientist must take into account all the relevant facts

to produce a working hypothesis. A few years later, Mead reformulated this idea in "The Philosophical Basis of Ethics" (Mead, 1908). In this article, however, Mead no longer speaks of inductive and deductive methods, but of an "abstract external evaluation" and a "concrete evaluation" (Mead, 1908, p. 322). Despite this change in terminology, Mead continues to reject any recourse to a rigid, transcendent moral order. Mead identifies this latter approach with the attitude of the "pulpit", arguing that we should instead assume the attitude of the "scientific investigator" (Mead, 1908, p. 321). While abstract external evaluations are produced by reference to a fixed model of pre-existing actions, concrete evaluations have the advantage of confronting the moral agent with a dialectical process of moral reconstruction, as happens in experimental science. Comparing the task of an engineer building a railway line with the need of a moral agent to solve a moral problem, Mead argues that moral progress will only occur if the latter evaluates experimentally and, as a result, abandons or transforms old moral values (Mead, 1908, p. 320). Moral growth, like scientific growth, is a creative, intellectual process.

In an article published in 1913, "The Social Self", Mead associates this reflection on morality with his proposals on social psychology for the first time. This association is made through his conception of science as a problem-solving procedure. Comparing this text with previous texts, the main difference lies in the "essentially social character of the ethical end" (Mead, 1913, p. 378) and the process by which moral problems are supposed to be solved. Returning to the example of poverty, the intelligent resolution of this problem is identified with the good of the community as a whole. Mead now criticises as "egoism" what he previously called "deductive" and "external evaluation" methods of moral reconstruction. In any case, his preferred way of solving moral problems and ensuring moral growth remains an approach that does justice to all the values in question. By resorting to reflective analysis, Mead allows the moral problematic situation to be reconstructed in such a way that new selves can emerge. What science teaches us, he tells us, is that a new self can emerge from the resolution of a moral problem, a self whose interests are much more in line with the current interests of the community than those of the old self. Problems involving conflicts between moral values should therefore be seen as examples of moral reconstruction and growth. From this perspective, the logic of scientific reconstruction and moral reconstruction is identical. There is, however, a fundamental difference between the moral and scientific resolution of a problem. While scientific problems refer to interests that do not necessarily affect the human being, moral problems are related to "concrete personal interests in which the whole self is reconstructed in its relation to the other selves essential to its psychological structure" (Mead, 1913, p. 379). What "The Social Self" introduces is the psychological treatment of moral questions in the light of the method of intelligence. In this article, we can see how each pillar contributes to the functioning of Mead's system of thought: science contributes the method, social psychology offers the objective explanation of human subjectivity, and politics and morality provide the objective solution to the problems of the "social and moral order" of modern industrial societies.

In the article "Scientific Method and the Moral Sciences" (Mead, 1923), Mead develops what is certainly his best articulated proposal for a "psychology of ethics". The starting point is the identification of the domain of morality with social life, insofar as "morality has to do with the relations of intelligent subjects to one another and that this determined moral and social order is a world as it must become and will be" (Mead, 1923, p. 230). There is, however, a dichotomy between two attitudes towards the social and moral order in which human beings live. On the one hand, we have the religious or teleological attitude assumed by those whose ethical ends are predefined and who regulate their behaviour in the light of them. On the other hand, there is the scientific or mechanical attitude assumed by those who distinguish a moral order from a natural order known *a posteriori* (Mead, 1923, pp. 231–2). Mead emphasises the fact that humanity has been very successful in applying the scientific method to the natural order, while leaving the moral order outside the field of scientific analysis. Among the most negative consequences of this situation, he gives the examples of the First World War, a conflict triggered in his view by the particularistic and limited nature of the ends in dispute, and local politics, where decisions are rarely scientifically supported. Mead's position is unequivocal: "It would be a mistake to assume that the scientific method applies only to the definition and selection of the means of action, and that it cannot be used when the problem involves conflicting social values or ends" (Mead, 1923, p. 235).

Such a categorical statement seems, in the light of contemporary moral philosophy, rather difficult to maintain. Contrary to the faith in scientific progress shared by most of Mead's contemporaries, current thinking on morality aims at best to produce logically plausible arguments, avoiding any goals of producing laws or maxims. Today there are, of course, attempts to construct scientific moral philosophical theories, although this scientific character must be carefully distinguished from the knowledge produced by the natural sciences.[4] Nevertheless, I would like to emphasise once again that Mead's scientific approach to moral and social problems embodies an ethical ideal, the ideal of impartial resolution of moral problems, an impartiality inspired by the attitude of the scientist.

The ultimate goal of a science of politics and morality is to solve concrete ethical problems. The way in which this science relates to the scientific theory of the psyche was explained by Mead to his students of social psychology. In fact, the socio-theoretical basis of Mead's political and moral thought can be found in scattered passages throughout the famous *Mind, Self and Society* (Mead, 1997 [1934]). In this book, in which Charles Morris unfortunately unleashed his editorial creativity, Mead speaks of another attitude in which the socio-psychological mechanism of "assuming the role of the other" allows the individual to "enter into the attitudes of the group and to mediate them by making his own experience universal so that others can participate

[4] One example is Jürgen Habermas's "ethics of discussion", a research programme developed in partnership with Karl-Otto Apel since the mid-1970s. For a critical analysis, see Silva, 2002, pp. 117–133.

in this form of communication through him" (Mead, 1938, p. 257). Mead is referring here to the politician or statesman, whose ideal position is as universal as the community in which he lives. Democratic politics, "this great co-operative community in motion" (Mead, 1938, p. 188), depends on the level of participation and communicative interaction between citizens. The statesman is able to carry out social reforms to the extent that he is able to adopt the attitude of the "generalised other".[5] And this ability to assume the generalised attitudes of the constituencies from which he was elected provides our political representative with a "universe of discourse", in terms of which he can address political problems in an impartial manner (Mead, 1938, pp. 89–90). Just as a critical moral agent is able to make use of abstract thought to formulate a hypothesis about an alternative moral order, a politician must be able to resort to the method of intelligence to reconstruct social and political problems *intelligently*. Critical moral and political reflection depends on a point of view from which the "social and moral order" can be judged. This is the perspective of abstraction, impersonality and objectivity that distinguishes science from other human activities.

MEAD'S THEORY OF OBJECTS

Mead's social pragmatism, particularly his writings on "social objects" and "social fusion", presents a nuanced understanding of how individuals and societies co-create meaning. His work emphasises that human cognition and social consciousness are deeply rooted in interaction, in which material and symbolic objects play an integral role. Mead's key contributions, particularly in his 1909 article "Social Psychology as Counterpart to Physiological Psychology" and his later essays, highlight the centrality of social objects in shaping human experience and the emergence of the self.

In "Social Psychology as Counterpart to Physiological Psychology", Mead argues that social psychology must take into account the relational and dynamic nature of social objects, which is essential for understanding human behaviour. Social objects, for Mead, are not merely passive objects or external stimuli; they emerge from the complex interplay of social relations and cognitive processes. These objects take on meaning only in the context of social interaction, where individuals take on the perspectives of others and develop shared understandings. This process of meaning-making is central to Mead's notion of the self, which emerges from the internalisation of the "generalised other" – the collective social attitudes of the group.

Mead expands on this argument in his 1910 article "What Social Objects Must Psychology Presuppose?" where he outlines the essential characteristics of social objects. He emphasises that social objects are both reflective and emergent. They are reflective in that they force individuals to engage in self-reflection, often prompting internal deliberation about the social roles and expectations associated with these

[5] Contemporary models of political representation have been developing this same notion, even if they do not refer to Mead's work. (See, for example, Saward, 2006).

objects. In addition, social objects are emergent, constantly evolving as they are reinterpreted and renegotiated within social contexts. Mead suggests that the fluidity of social objects reflects the broader process of social change, where meaning is never fixed but always subject to reinterpretation.

In "The Mechanism of Social Consciousness", published in 1912, Mead develops the idea that social objects are central to the formation of collective consciousness. He introduces the notion that social objects can catalyse collective consciousness, leading to what he later describes as "social fusion". Social fusion occurs when individuals, through intense social interaction, experience a fusion of their personal consciousness with that of the collective. In these moments of heightened emotional or social intensity, the boundary between the individual and society blurs, creating a shared collective identity. Mead associates this process with group solidarity, where individuals lose themselves in the collective and internalise its goals, values, and perspectives.

In 1913, in his influential essay "The Social Self", Mead elaborates on the importance of social objects in the development of the self. He argues that the self is not something that exists independently of society, but is a social product that emerges from ongoing interactions with others. The self is divided into two phases: the "I", which represents spontaneity and individual agency, and the "me", which is shaped by the internalisation of social expectations and norms. Social objects play a crucial role in mediating these two aspects of the self, providing the external reference points that individuals use to navigate their identities within the social structure.

Finally, Mead's 1925 article "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control" offers a deeper exploration of the relationship between the self, social objects and the mechanisms of social control. Here Mead emphasises that social control is not merely external coercion, but operates through the internalisation of social norms embedded in social objects. The "I", as the reflective aspect of the self, is shaped by these norms, allowing individuals to regulate their behaviour in accordance with group expectations. However, Mead does not present this process as passive conformity. Instead, he emphasises the dynamic interaction between the "I" and the "me", suggesting that individuals actively engage with social norms and reinterpret them in the light of their unique experiences.

Throughout these works, Mead emphasises that social objects are not static, but are constantly in flux, shaped by the interactions and interpretations of the individuals and groups who engage with them. This dynamic nature of social objects is central to his broader theory of social consciousness and the development of the self. By focusing on how individuals internalise and interact with social objects, Mead provides a framework for understanding the fluid and ever-changing nature of social life, where meaning, identity and social control are continually negotiated.

In conclusion, Mead's theory of social objects and social fusion provides a powerful lens through which to understand the relational and reflective nature of social interaction. Social objects are more than mere artefacts; they are central to the process of meaning-making and the development of the self. Through the concepts of the "generalised other" and the "I" and "me" phases of the self, Mead presents a

vision of human consciousness as deeply rooted in social interaction, where individual and collective identities are co-constructed and constantly evolving.

DISCUSSION

Mead's theory of social objects provides a sophisticated framework for understanding the emergence of meaning, identity and social control in human interactions. Central to his argument is the idea that social objects are not merely passive reflections of society, but active elements that play a crucial role in shaping individual consciousness and collective behaviour. By examining how social objects function within a network of social relationships, Mead's theory provides a comprehensive explanation of the dynamic interaction between the individual self and the wider social world.

For Mead, social objects are relational, emergent and reflective. A social object derives its meaning not in isolation but through its relationships within a social context. The meaning of an object is thus dependent on its role within a particular set of interactions. This relational quality of social objects means that they have no intrinsic meaning; rather, they acquire meaning through the collective processes of interpretation and engagement. For Mead, social objects are deeply embedded in the fabric of human interaction, and their significance lies in how they mediate relationships between individuals and groups.

The reflective nature of social objects is key to understanding how they shape identity. Mead argues that individuals engage in a process of self-reflection when they encounter social objects, as these objects often embody the attitudes, norms, and expectations of society. The self, in turn, is shaped by this reflective process, internalising the meanings associated with social objects as part of its ongoing development. This process is closely related to Mead's concept of the "generalised other", whereby individuals adopt the perspectives of the wider social community in order to understand their place within it. Social objects therefore act as mediators between the individual's internal consciousness and the external social world, allowing the self to navigate social expectations and norms.

Another important element of Mead's theory is the concept of social fusion, which refers to moments when individual consciousness merges with collective identity. In such moments, individuals experience a profound alignment with the values, emotions and goals of the group. Social fusion typically occurs in situations of heightened emotional intensity, where the boundary between the self and the collective becomes porous, resulting in a unified collective consciousness.

Social objects play an essential role in facilitating this fusion. According to Mead, these objects act as focal points that allow individuals to orient themselves towards the collective experience. During moments of social fusion, the "I" (the spontaneous, creative aspect of the self) and the "me" (the socially reflective part of the self) converge, resulting in a collective emotional and cognitive alignment. Social objects

thus act as catalysts for this process, uniting individuals around shared meanings and goals.

The process of social fusion highlights Mead's broader argument that the self is inherently social and fluid, continually shaped by interactions with others. Social objects are essential in this context because they provide the material and symbolic means by which individuals connect to the collective consciousness, enabling the formation of group identities and shared experiences. Mead also emphasises the reflexive and contested nature of social objects. As objects embody social norms, they force individuals to reflect on the claims they make. This process of reflection is not neutral or uniform, but is shaped by the individual's position within the social order and by the broader historical and cultural context. Social objects thus become sites of negotiation and contestation, where different meanings and interpretations are debated.

For Mead, the emergent quality of social objects means that their meanings are never static. Instead, they evolve over time as they are continually reinterpreted through social interaction. This dynamic nature of social objects is central to understanding how societies change and how new meanings emerge. As social objects circulate in different contexts, they are subject to reinterpretation, leading to the evolution of their symbolic meaning. This process of contestation ensures that social objects remain fluid and open to redefinition, which in turn reflects the ongoing nature of social life itself.

In "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control", Mead examines the mechanisms by which social objects function as instruments of social control. For Mead, social control operates not through external coercion but through the internalisation of social norms and expectations. Social objects are a primary means by which these norms are embedded in the consciousness of the individual. The "I", as an internalised aspect of the self, reflects the values and expectations of society, and social objects play a crucial role in shaping this reflective process.

Social objects are thus integral to the maintenance of social order. By providing individuals with tangible representations of societal norms, they help to regulate behaviour and align individual actions with group expectations. Mead's approach is not deterministic, however. The individual's engagement with social objects is active, not passive. The "I" introduces an element of spontaneity and creativity, allowing the individual to reinterpret and challenge the meanings associated with social objects. This ongoing interaction between the "I" and the "me" ensures that social control is not rigid but flexible, allowing for the possibility of social change.

Mead's theory of social objects provides a robust analytical framework for understanding how meaning, identity and social control are constructed and negotiated in human interactions. By emphasising the relational, emergent and reflective nature of social objects, Mead shows that these objects are not merely passive symbols, but active elements in the social process. Social objects facilitate the formation of collective identities, enable social fusion and serve as mechanisms of social control.

Mead's analysis of social objects underlines the dynamic and fluid nature of social life, where meanings are constantly negotiated and reinterpreted. His insights into

the reflective and contested nature of social objects provide a critical understanding of how social norms are internalised, challenged, and transformed through interaction. Ultimately, Mead's framework allows us to see that social objects are central to the construction of self and society, and provides a powerful tool for analysing the complexities of social life.

CASE STUDIES

As I have tried to show, Mead's theory of the self and social interaction provides a rich conceptual framework for understanding how individuals interact with objects in their environment. His central idea – that the self emerges from social interaction – encourages us to consider how material objects actively shape political identity, collective action and social meaning. In this section, I examine four distinct political objects, each associated with a specific social or political movement: the red MAGA cap, the keffiyeh, the yellow vest, and the red shoes used in feminist protests. These seemingly ordinary objects become powerful symbols through which individuals perform their identities and engage in collective struggles.

One of Mead's most influential insights is that the self is a social product, formed through interaction with others and the environment. Objects play a key role in this process, acting as mediators that both express and shape the identities of those who use them. Mead's concept of the "generalised other" helps us to understand how individuals internalise the meanings attached to objects such as the MAGA cap or the keffiyeh, and how these meanings are collectively negotiated within wider social groups. These objects do more than symbolise political identities – they serve as material anchors through which individuals experience their political selves and engage with the social world.

In modern politics, certain objects have acquired iconic status, transcending their materiality to embody broader social and political ideals. The MAGA cap, for example, has become synonymous with Donald Trump's populist movement, symbolising not only support for his presidency but also a broader alignment with nationalist and anti-establishment sentiments. Similarly, the keffiyeh, a traditional Palestinian scarf, has taken on new layers of meaning as a symbol of resistance and national identity, particularly in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In France, the yellow vest has become a visible symbol of grassroots resistance to economic inequality, while the red shoes used in feminist protests across Mexico have become a powerful symbol of the victims of femicide and gender-based violence.

Mead's conception of the embodied self, as well as his insights into social control and the role of objects in social interaction, provides a valuable framework for understanding how these objects function in political movements. These objects help individuals to perform their political identities, signalling their membership of a wider collective, while also shaping public perceptions of political movements. Whether worn or displayed, these objects become tools for collective action, creating spaces where individuals come together in solidarity and protest.

Through the case studies presented in this section, I briefly explore how each object – be it an item of clothing, an accessory or a pair of shoes – functions as a material manifestation of the social self. Each object serves as an entry point into the broader political landscapes in which it is embedded, helping to articulate political ideologies, grievances and aspirations. The MAGA cap, the keffiyeh, the yellow vest and the red shoes are not merely tools of expression; they become integral to the political movements they represent, shaping both individual identities and collective political action.

The following subsections provide analyses of four key objects: the red MAGA cap, the keffiyeh, the yellow vest and the red shoes. Each subsection explores how Mead's theory helps to explain the role these objects play in the formation of the self and the organisation of political action. Through these case studies, I aim to show how objects, through their material properties and social uses, come to embody broader social and political meanings.

The MAGA Cap: Populism and the Embodied Self

Introduced during Donald J. Trump's 2016 presidential campaign, the red MAGA (Make America Great Again) cap is perhaps one of the most recognisable political symbols in recent history (Bonikowski, 2017). Its reappearance in the 2024 presidential campaign only reinforces this fact. While its simple design – bright red with white lettering – suggests a straightforward message of support for Trump's populist platform, its cultural significance is far more complex. The MAGA cap functions as more than a political accessory; it becomes a material embodiment of Trump's populist ideology, encapsulating the grievances, hopes and identities of his supporters (Gest, 2016).

Mead's theory of the self provides a useful framework for understanding how individuals relate to the MAGA cap. For Trump supporters, wearing the cap signifies more than political allegiance; it is a way of performing their political identity in a public and highly visible manner. The cap serves as a material extension of the self, allowing individuals to express their alignment with Trump's nationalist and anti-establishment message. It also signals membership of a collective, giving the wearer a sense of belonging to the wider "Trumpist" community. This dynamic reflects Mead's concept of the "generalised other", as individuals internalise the symbolic meaning of the cap and use it to navigate their social and political environments.

Moreover, the MAGA cap plays a central role in the emotional landscape of Trump's populist movement. The cap has become a focal point for collective rituals, from Trump's rallies to street protests. These rituals imbue the cap with emotional resonance, creating a sense of shared experience and solidarity among supporters. In this way, the cap does not simply represent Trump's political platform, but becomes an active participant in the production of political identity and collective action.

The Keffiyeh: Nationalism, Resistance, and the Embodied Self

The keffiyeh, a traditional scarf commonly associated with Palestinian identity, has long been a symbol of resistance in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Renfro, 2018). While the keffiyeh originated as a practical piece of clothing used by farmers, it has since taken on new layers of political significance, becoming a global symbol of solidarity with the Palestinian cause. The keffiyeh is not only a symbol of national identity, but also an object that embodies the struggle for self-determination, resistance and solidarity (Massad, 2001).

Mead's theory of the self helps to explain how the keffiyeh functions as a material extension of political identity. For Palestinians, wearing the keffiyeh is more than cultural heritage – it is an act of resistance, a way of asserting their identity in the face of occupation and oppression. The headscarf becomes a tool through which individuals present their political selves, associate themselves with the broader Palestinian cause and express their solidarity with the struggle for national liberation. The keffiyeh thus functions as an embodiment of the "generalised other", representing the collective aspirations of the Palestinian people.

In addition to its role in shaping individual identity, the keffiyeh has become a powerful tool for collective action (Salem, 2008; Schwartz-DuPre and Scott, 2015; Shirazi-Mahajan, 1993). Worn at protests and political demonstrations, the keffiyeh serves as a visual marker of resistance, allowing individuals to express their allegiance to the Palestinian cause while creating a sense of unity among participants. Like the MAGA cap, the material presence of the keffiyeh in these protests helps to create a shared emotional experience, fostering solidarity and a sense of collective identity among those who wear it.

The Yellow Vest: Visibility and Grassroots Resistance

The yellow vest, an everyday safety item worn by motorists, became a powerful symbol of grassroots resistance in France during the Gilets Jaunes protests. What began as a protest against rising fuel prices in November 2018 quickly evolved into a broader movement against economic inequality and government neglect (Wilkin, 2020). The yellow vest is not just a symbol of protest; it is a material object that embodies the grievances and demands of those who feel marginalised by the French state.

Mead's theory of the self offers valuable insights into how the yellow vest works within the movement. By wearing the vest, protesters signal their membership of a collective identity defined by opposition to economic injustice. The vest itself becomes a visible marker of this identity, allowing individuals to perform their political selves in public spaces. In Mead's terms, the yellow vest serves as a "generalised other", internalised by participants as a representation of their collective grievances and aspirations.

The high visibility of the yellow vest is key to its power as a political object. As an everyday item associated with safety, it has a unique symbolic resonance that

highlights the vulnerability of those who wear it. Its ubiquity makes it accessible to all, allowing anyone to participate in the protest simply by putting on the vest. This accessibility, combined with its visibility, helps to create a sense of solidarity among participants, enabling them to engage in collective action against the state. The yellow vest thus functions as a material embodiment of grassroots resistance, shaping both individual and collective identities within the movement (Chamorel, 2019; Clifton and de la Broise, 2020).

The Red Shoes: Feminist Protest and the Embodied Self

The red shoes used in feminist protests across Mexico have become a poignant symbol of the fight against gender-based violence (Htun, 2016), particularly femicide (Macaulay, 2021). As discussed below, these shoes are strategically placed in public spaces to represent the victims of femicide, making visible the often invisible violence that plagues Mexican society. The shoes serve as a material reminder of the lives lost to gender-based violence, transforming a common object into a powerful political statement.

Mead's theory of the self helps us to understand how the red shoes function as both a personal and collective symbol in these protests. For the families and communities of the victims, the shoes represent more than a visual statement; they embody the absence of the women who once wore them. By displaying the shoes in public spaces, protesters are able to perform their political selves, aligning themselves with the broader feminist movement and expressing solidarity with the victims of femicide. The shoes, like the other objects discussed, serve as material extensions of the "generalised other", embodying the collective demand for justice and an end to violence against women.

The red shoes also play a crucial role in collective action, as they are used to create powerful visual installations that attract public attention (Skelly, 2022). Arranged in public squares or along streets, the shoes create a haunting image that symbolises the lives lost to violence and the ongoing struggle for gender equality. These installations help to transform the shoes from everyday objects into political icons, shaping both individual identities and the collective feminist movement. Through their material presence, the red shoes embody the demand for justice and create a space for solidarity and protest against gender-based violence.

CONCLUSION

In contrast to mid-twentieth-century sociology, in which Mead was by and large interpreted through the lens of symbolic interactionism, twenty-first-century sociologists are expanding their engagement with Mead's ideas beyond the symbolic and linguistic realms. This chapter traces one such broadened engagement. Beginning with a series of key articles on objects, it shows how Mead's insights can be productively applied to the study of contemporary social and political phenomena.

In the mid-twentieth century, Mead's ideas were largely interpreted through the lens of symbolic interactionism, a framework that emphasised language, communication and social interaction in shaping human behaviour. However, contemporary sociology in the twenty-first century has begun to engage with his work in a more expansive way, moving beyond the purely symbolic and linguistic realm. This chapter has traced such an expanded engagement, showing how Mead's insights into the nature of objects, social interaction, and the formation of the self can be productively applied to contemporary social and political phenomena. By examining key political objects – the MAGA cap, the keffiyeh, the yellow vest, and feminist shoes – this chapter has explored how Mead's theoretical framework offers a deep understanding of the role that material objects play in shaping identity and collective action in contentious politics.

Mead's contribution to social theory has always been his insistence that the self is formed through interaction with others and the environment, a process that involves not only symbolic communication but also the material world. As I argue in *Mead and Modernity*, Mead's view of social life is inherently processual, with the individual and society engaged in an ongoing dialectical relationship. This processual view contrasts with the static interpretations often found in mid-twentieth-century symbolic interactionism, which focused on language and symbols but neglected the active role that material objects play in this dynamic. Mead's philosophy offers a broader understanding of how social life is lived, not just in the realm of discourse, but through embodied practices in which objects become integral to the formation of identity and the enactment of social control.

The key articles discussed in this chapter, particularly "The Genesis of the Self and Social Control" and "The Psychological Basis of Internationalism", provide a basic framework for understanding how objects mediate social relations. These works illustrate Mead's emphasis on the socially emergent nature of the self and the ways in which objects and social environments shape individual behaviour. Mead's concept of the "generalised other", which refers to the internalisation of social norms and attitudes, is central to this understanding. When individuals engage with political objects such as the MAGA cap or the keffiyeh, they are not only expressing personal identities, but also internalising and reflecting the broader social and political values associated with these objects. This interaction with objects becomes a way of performing the self within a collective, aligning personal identity with group membership.

This expanded interpretation of Mead's ideas is consistent with the contemporary shift in sociology towards a recognition of the materiality of social life. Objects, as this chapter has shown, are not passive bearers of meaning, but are actively involved in shaping human behaviour and social organisation. The MAGA cap, for example, functions not only as a symbol of Trump's populist movement but also as an object through which individuals experience and perform their political identities. Similarly, the keffiyeh, once a practical garment, has become a global symbol of resistance, embodying the aspirations and struggles of the Palestinian people. These objects do more than symbolise political ideals; they become essential tools through

which individuals negotiate their place in society, embodying both personal and collective identities.

Mead's insights into the role of objects in social interaction are particularly valuable for understanding contemporary contentious political movements. As discussed in the section on the yellow vest movement in France, the yellow vest became a symbol of grassroots resistance to economic inequality, but its power did not lie solely in its symbolic meaning. The vest's visibility and accessibility made it a tool for organising collective action, allowing individuals to express their grievances and participate in the movement. This is consistent with Mead's view that social control is not imposed from the outside, but emerges through the internalisation of collective norms, often mediated by objects.

Similarly, the feminist protests in Mexico, marked by the display of red shoes, illustrate how objects can become powerful symbols of social justice movements. These shoes, representing the victims of femicide, make visible the often invisible violence that women experience in society. The shoes, like the yellow vest, are not just symbols but active participants in the protests, creating a space where individuals can come together in solidarity and demand justice. Mead's theory of the self and social control helps to explain how these objects shape both individual and collective identities within the movement, making them central to the enactment of social change.

In this expanded engagement with Mead's ideas, contemporary sociologists are moving beyond the traditional focus on language and communication to include the material dimensions of social life. Mead's processual view of the self, which emphasises the continuous interaction between individuals and their environment, provides a rich framework for understanding how objects mediate social relations. This chapter has shown that Mead's insights into the role of objects in social life are not only relevant but essential for understanding the complexities of modern political movements.

Furthermore, Mead's work offers a critical perspective on how individuals negotiate their identities in response to social pressures, a process that is often mediated by objects. The objects discussed in this chapter – the MAGA cap, the keffiyeh, the yellow vest and the red shoes – serve as material representations of the generalised other, allowing individuals to navigate their social worlds by internalising the values and norms associated with these objects. This dynamic interaction between the self and objects is central to understanding how political identities are formed and how individuals participate in collective action.

In conclusion, the twenty-first century has seen a renewed interest in Mead's work, with sociologists extending their engagement with his ideas beyond the symbolic and linguistic realms. This chapter has traced one such expansion, showing how Mead's insights into the role of objects in social interaction can be productively applied to the study of contemporary social and political phenomena. By examining key political objects through Mead's theoretical lens, I gain a deeper understanding of how material objects shape identity, social control and collective action. Mead's emphasis on the processual nature of social life, in which the self is continually shaped

by interaction with others and the environment, provides a powerful framework for analysing the role of objects in contemporary political movements. As the examples in this chapter have shown, objects such as the MAGA cap, the keffiyeh, the yellow vest and the red shoes are not merely symbols, but central to the embodied performance of political identity and collective action. Mead's work remains a valuable resource for understanding the material dimensions of social life and the complex ways in which individuals and groups negotiate their identities in response to social and political pressures.

REFERENCES

Bonikowski, B. (2017). Ethno-Nationalist Populism and the Mobilization of Collective Resentment. *The British Journal of Sociology,* 68(S1), S181–213.

Chamorel, P. (2019). Macron versus the Yellow Vests. *Journal of Democracy,* 30(4), 48–62.

Clifton, J. and de la Broise, P. (2020). The Yellow Vests and the Communicative Constitution of a Protest Movement. *Discourse & Communication,* 14(4), 362–82.

Cook, G.A. (1993). *George Herbert Mead. The Making of a Social Pragmatist*. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press.

Dodds, A., Lawrence, J. and Valsiner, J. (1997). The Personal and the Social. Mead's Theory of the "Generalized Other". *Theory and Psychology*, 7, 483–503.

Feffer, A. (1993). *The Chicago Pragmatists and American Progressivism*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.

Gest, J. (2016). *The New Minority: White Working Class Politics in an Age of Immigration and Inequality*. Oxford, New York: Oxford University Press.

Habermas, J. (1970). Towards a Theory of Communicative Competence. *Inquiry,* 13, 360–76.

Habermas, J. (1984 [1981]). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Reason and the Rationalization of Society, Vol. I.* Trans. T. McCarthy. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1986). *Autonomy and Solidarity.* P. Dews (ed.). London: Verso.

Habermas, J. (1987 [1981]). *The Theory of Communicative Action: Lifeworld and System: The Critique of Functionalist Reason, Vol. II.* Trans. T. McCarthy. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1996 [1967]). *On the Logic of Social Sciences.* Trans. S.W. Nicholsen and J.A. Stark. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

Habermas J. (1998 [1968]). *Knowledge and Human Interests.* Trans. J. Shapiro. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Habermas, J. (1991 [1976]). *Communication and the Evolution of Society.* Trans. T. McCarthy. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Htun, M. (2016). *Inclusion without Representation in Latin America: Gender Quotas and Ethnic Reservations*. Cambridge Studies in Gender and Politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Joas, H. (1990). The Democratization of Differentiation: on the Creativity of Collective Action. In J.C. Alexander and P. Stompka (eds), *Rethinking Progress.* Boston: Unwin.

Joas, H. (1991). The Unhappy Marriage of Hermeneutics and Functionalism. In A. Honneth and H. Joas (eds), *Communicative Action. Essays on Jürgen Habermas's Theory of Communicative Action* (pp. 97–118). Cambridge: Polity Press.

Joas, H. (1993). *Pragmatism and Social Theory.* Chicago: Chicago University Press.

Joas, H. (1996). *The Creativity of Action*. Cambridge: Polity Press.

Joas, H. (1997). George Herbert Mead and the Renaissance of American Pragmatism in Social Theory. In C. Camic (ed.), *Reclaiming the Sociological Classics* (pp. 262–81). Oxford: Blackwell.

Joas, H. (1997 [1985]). *G. H. Mead. A Contemporary Re-examination of His Thought*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
Macaulay, F. (2021). Feminicide as a Latin American Issue. In F. Macaulay (ed.), *Transforming State Responses to Feminicide: Women's Movements, Law and Criminal Justice Institutions in Brazil* (pp. 1–22). Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
Massad, J. (2001). *Colonial Effects: The Making of National Identity in Jordan*. New York: Columbia University Press.
Mead, G.H. (1900). Suggestions Towards a Theory of the Philosophical Disciplines. *Philosophical Review,* 9, 1–17.
Mead, G.H. (1906). The Teaching of Science in College. *Science,* 24, 390–7.
Mead, G.H. (1908). The Philosophical Basis of Ethics. *International Journal of Ethics*, 18, 311–23.
Mead, G.H. (1913). The Social Self. *Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods*, 10, 374–80.
Mead, G.H. (1917). Scientific Method and Individual Thinker. In J. Dewey et al. (eds), *Creative Intelligence: Essays in the Pragmatic Attitude*. New York: Henry Holt.
Mead, G.H. (1923). Scientific Method and the Moral Sciences. *International Journal of Ethics,* 33, 229–47.
Mead, G.H. (1925). The Genesis of the Self and Social Control. *International Journal of Ethics*, 35, 251–77.
Mead, G.H. (1938). *The Philosophy of the Act*. C.W. Morris et al. (eds). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mead, G.H. (1982). *The Individual and the Social Self: Unpublished Work of George Herbert Mead*. D.L. Miller (ed.). Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
Mead, G.H. (1997 [1934]). *Mind, Self and Society from the Standpoint of a Social Behaviorist*. C. Morris (ed.). Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Mead, G.H. (2002 [1932]). *The Philosophy of the Present*. A.E. Murphy (ed.). Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books.
Merton, R.K. (1949 [1967]). On the History and Systematics of Sociological Theory. In R.K. Merton (ed.), *On Theoretical Sociology* (pp. 1–37). Nova York: Free Press.
Miller, D.L. (1973). *George Herbert Mead. Self, Language and the World*. Chicago: Chicago University Press.
Renfro, E. (2018). Stitched Together, Torn Apart: The Keffiyeh as Cultural Guide. *International Journal of Cultural Studies*, 21(6), 571–586.
Salem, N. (2008). Transnational Resistance or Cultural Exotica? Interrogating the Multicultural Accommodation of the Kufiya. *Borderlands,* 7(3), 1–19.
Saward, M. (2006). The Representative Claim. *Contemporary Political Theory,* 5, 297–318.
Schwartz-DuPre, R.L. and Scott, S. (2015). Postcolonial Globalized Communication and Rapping the Kufiyya. *Communication, Culture & Critique*, 8, 335–355.
Shirazi-Mahajan, F. (1993). The Politics of Clothing in the Middle East: The Case of Hijab in Post-revolution Iran. *Critique, Journal of the Critical Studies in the Middle East,* 2(2), 54–63.
Silva, F.C. (2002). *Espaço Público em Habermas*, Lisboa: Imprensa de Ciências Sociais.
Silva, F.C. (2007c). *G.H. Mead. A Critical Introduction*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
Silva, F.C. (2008). *Mead and Modernity. Science, the Self, and Democratic Politics*. Lanham, MD: Lexington Books.
Silva, F.C. and Vieira, M.B. (2009). Plural Modernity. Changing Modern Institutional Forms: Disciplines and Nation-states. *Social Analysis*, 53, 60–79.

Skelly, J. (2022). *Skin Crafts: Affect, Violence and Materiality in Global Contemporary Art*. London: Bloomsbury Publishing.
Thayer, H. (1968). *Meaning and Action. A Critical History of Pragmatism*. Indianapolis: Bobbs Merril Company.
Wilkin, P. (2020). Fear of a Yellow Planet: The Gilets Jaunes and the End of the Modern World-System. *Journal of World-Systems Research,* 26(1), 70–102.