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The Language of
State Action

[1979]

THE LANGUAGE OF STATE ACTION

[1978]

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> "Language as a model! To rethink everything through once again in terms of linguistics! What is surprising, it would seem, is only that no one ever thought of doing so before... (Jameson 1972, p. viii)

> "The deeper justification for the use of the linguistic model or metaphor. . . lies in the concrete character of the social life of the so-called advanced countries today, which offer the spectacle of a world from which nature as such has been eliminated, a world saturated with messages and information, whose intricate commodity network may be seen as the very prototype of a system of signs. There is therefore a profound consonance between linguistics as a method and that systematized and disembodied nightmare which is our culture today." (Jameson 1972, p. ix)

To propose that we think of foreign policy *as a language* may seem preposterous. Yet that is the proposal which guides the following analysis. It stimulates a number of analogies which can help us conceptualize, or recast some controversies about, a wide range of important issues. In the study of foreign policy, these issues include: (a) the nature of explanation and understanding; (b) the epistemological issues surrounding the role of the modem world system or capitalist world economy in dictating state action; (c) the importance of domestic forces and motivation in shaping state action; (d) the competition between mercantilist or statist models of analysis and those which lie closer to a much maligned economic reductionism; and (e) the development of alternative ways of conceptualizing the domestic basis of state action — according

to social rules, and notions of competence, reference, meaning or context. Often enough, conceptual confusion and superficiality have been so rampant that many of these issues have not even been raised, let alone satisfactorily articulated. None of them has been satisfactorily resolved. For that reason, even a preliminary probe into uncharted territory may be of use.

1. We can characterize foreign policy in a variety of ways; each of these ways carries with it an implicit epistemology and style of explanation which fits it. Most common, perhaps, is to analyze it as a series of *events,* as *behavior,* and therefore as that species of objectified processes subject to technical control (Peterson 1975; Hermann 1971; Rosenau 1974). Behavioral explanation, or retrodiction, thus becomes the order to the day. It attempts to follow the trajectory suggested by the natural sciences, and during its attempt it is within range of all the criticisms launched against mechanical or "naturalist" models.

2. Foreign policies are even more appropriately cast as purposive actions, which in turn demand a different logic of interpretation than that which has played a domineering role in the literature on events. A purposive explanation is called for: one which acknowledges that significant actions are both intentional and pre-described. Because they are constituted by the purposes and self-understandings of state actors, these elements must be included in the explanation of practices. Actions are means to a specifiable set of ends for which actors have reasons, and therefore cannot be understood without reference to guiding purposes and reasons. We will need to start with purposive descriptions, with the "proto-interpretations" of the actors themselves; we begin with "interpreted actions," and must evolve an appropriate mode of interpretation (Andrews 1976, Taylor 1971). The retrodiction of behavior or the subsumption of events under covering laws will not provide this understanding; a more phenomenological or hermeneutic approach is needed. In many ways, such an approach will appear as an advance over purely behavioral accounts because of the fit between the mode of analysis and the characterization of the things which are to be explained. Recent work in the philosophy of action and the philosophy of the social sciences provides it with a relative-

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ly firm grounding in an alternative epistemology.

3. A purposive account carries with it its own debilities. In foreign policy stud-
ies, both the unitary actor model and the more disaggregated studies of
bureaucratic politics display these quite clearly. They arrest the analysis. We
may be able to render intelligible the specific choice of means (or action) by
setting it against a backdrop of definable purposes, but the purposes them-
selves are left free-floating. They either remain unintelligible, or else they are
taken for granted. The self-understandings of the actors can be probed with
the help of a hermeneutic or intentionalist interpretation, but, at that point,
such an interpretive account tends to ground to a halt on the surface. How
might that surface be penetrated, interpreted? — by reference to the
antecedent conditions which apparently caused or determined its appearance?
Or by reference to a broader context (of meanings, institutional practices, and
norms) which constitutes it and renders it intelligible? The former (causalist
or naturalist) mode of going beyond a purposive account would only recapit-
ulate the problems of a behavioral account — to isolate elements rather than
look at them as a whole, to think of meaningful actions as the culmination of
causes which are not integrated into the frame of reference of the state actors.

4. Yet the meaning or significance of a policy is not always revealed in the pur-
poses; those purposes may be opaque. A hermeneutics of restoration is not *sus-
picious* enough (Ricoeur 1976). It does not probe vertically in a way that
would make the purposes themselves intelligible. Perhaps the kind of intelli-
gibility which can be brought to those purposes is similar to the relationship
between ends and means which a purposive explanation would highlight: a
mutual entailment, a conceptual link, a normative requiredness or appropri-
ateness, the implication of a context into which ends fit. A *contextual inter-
pretation* is called for, which interprets the surface (of purposes and reasons)
against a frame provided by its social context. "To understand a particular
action, we must grasp the beliefs and intentions which motivated it, and this
further requires that we know the social contexts of practices and institutions
which specify what the action in question 'counts as,' what sort of action it is"

(Fay and Moon 1977). If actions are intended and reasoned, our purposive characterizations will acknowledge this, but an explanation will have to go beneath the action to uncover the structure of meanings and conventions which it can disclose.

Action is a text. Its understanding is "scenic" (Habermas 1970), for while intentions may specify what kind of action it is, conventions and contexts specify what kind of intention it is. They give to texts their coherence or sense. These will constitute and distinguish a state action, giving it the more internal criteria of intelligibility which allow us to see it not only as a purposive action but also as a communicative action. The notion of a fit between action and context parallels the fit between a pattern of policy and a domestic social context in the light of which that pattern would be intelligible. The fit is both meaningful and explanatory. A contextual interpretation would therefore assimilate and, at the same time, point beyond a purposive or hermeneutic account.

5. Here, as a way of specifying the trajectory of a contextual treatment, the analogy with language becomes attractive. Certainly the characterization of state policy as intentional, meaningful, and rule-governed already points in this direction (Andrews 1975). Just as with language, instances of foreign action cannot be comprehended by being grouped together in terms of behavioral similarities, in a context-free fashion; instead, their "social use" or functioning within a social context should guide even our *descriptions* of what they are, not to mention the explanations that must rely upon these descriptions as their starting point. The context will specify what is to "count as" an instance of what; it provides us with an implicit code on which to hinge our characterizations.

Explanation would attempt to grasp the meaning of a pattern of purposive action: to make sense of it. If the aim is comprehension, one set of analogies then comes into view. Foreign policy projects itself as a text, a form of writing. At the same time, interpretation resembles reading, for meaning is not located within the text so much as it is produced by the shuttling back and forth between action and frame (Goffman 1974). Interpretation therefore

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aims at transparency: to uncover the relationship between action and context, or the translatability (but not the dissolving reduction) of action into context. That context would specify the meaning which is enmeshed within an underlying grid of convention. Language can serve as the model: context is the referent (Jacobson 1960).

6. If we can regard language as a quarry from which we might extract our concepts, perhaps the analogy can be pushed all the way into structuralism. For certainly there is a resemblance between a contextual explanation of an act and the approaches to language which have been dominant in the structuralist schools of criticism and social theory. Context, or at least one way of characterizing the relevant context, occupies a central role within the structuralist enterprise.[1]

What distinguishes the structuralist perspective is its insistence on locating elements of language within a larger system. The phenomena to be studied can be dichotomized, in Ferdinand de Saussure's terms, as *langue* (the language, the overall sign-system) and *parole* (speech, or individual utterances). The former comprises a structure against which instances of the latter are to be framed. Such a structuralism, with its determinedly holistic emphasis, will transcend the more atomized or disaggregative bent of empiricism. In order to show the interrelation of parts of a whole, it refuses to subsist on correlations of regularities found among the bits. The meaning of the part — or, in this case, the individual policy — can only be defined by "the postulation and repostulation of wholes" (Merleau-Ponty 1975).

Individual units are actually dissolved back into a total sign-system. By describing that system and specifying its workings, one can penetrate the opacity of the parts. The system's rules or laws prevail over the autonomy of its elements; the attention given to their individual properties is downgraded. At times, even their very independence becomes suspect. The system becomes that context or language in light of which individual instances can come to seem transparent. The focus of analytic attention shifts from individual phenomena to the self-regulating entity which overarches them. One locates instances in a relational system, rather than in a sequence of causes and effects

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or inputs and outputs. It is a synchronic rather than a diachronic movement.

7. One does not look for external causation, for, once this systemic perspective is constructed, the relevant factors are internal to the phenomenon at hand. The historical antecedents of the phenomenon cannot capture its signification. Its identity is defined by its place within a system, rather than by its history. And it is worth noting that Saussure's structuralist emphasis did come to the fore after the dominance of a more historical methodology in linguistic studies — where histories of individual language elements were charted or reconstructed. The structuralist project told us what these elements were to "count as." They asserted that identity was relational. The system itself was what distinguished or constituted the signs. Explanation would come through a synchronic study of the overall system seen as a functional whole.

Like the phonological system (whose study generated the "phonological revolution" which Levi-Strauss found so instructive for his structuralist anthropology (Levi-Strauss 1963)), the relevant rules of this system are both hidden (from the standpoint of the actors) and formalizable (from the standpoint of the analyst). They provide an unconscious infrastructure capable of supplying to the actors the crucial distinctions and meanings which are needed in usage and action. Motivation, and therefore explanation, will not be confinable to the conscious level at which a phenomenological account will operate; it may appear only when we construct or postulate a systemic whole.

This whole, in a similar way, will be a structure encompassing the signifiers (Saussure divided the sign into two parts: the signifier — or acoustic image, material form; and the signified — the concept, or mental representation). By stressing the arbitrary nature of the relationship between signifier and signified, the signifier itself is foregrounded. And the identity of those signifiers is relational.

The structuralist in fact projects a type of formalism in which "content" almost seems to disappear into a nexus of relationships; the interest lands upon differences rather than on individual properties — on a grid of relations among signifiers, on a system, which then runs the constant risk of being hypostasized.[2] The familiar emphasis on the subject is rejected. Neither cau-

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sation nor signification resides in the subject — or in the conscious frame of reference or articulations of actors. The subject is "decentered" (Foucault 1972), for the real guides for an explanation lie outside it: in systems of rules and relations. This may look something like a Copernican revolution.

8. What does this have to do with the study of foreign policy? Two things. First, it bears a striking resemblance to the recent focus on the modem world system (or world economy) as a preferred vantage point from which to view individual nations' policies and development. Second, the *limitations* of the structuralist approach relate fairly closely to the emphasis on domestic social structure in complementing a world system analysis. By extending the metaphor between language and state action, and by acknowledging some of its complexities, several of the conceptual puzzles which surround the analysis of foreign policy and world politics might be clarified. This is the task at hand. Certainly the sophistication with which crucial epistemological and theoretical issues have been posed by the structuralists (and their critics) might yield some insights for interpreting state action. At the same time, the familiar (or mainstream) models by which we study international phenomena are not so conceptually satisfying as to make this task seem irrelevant.

9. In the study of international relations, a pronounced shift has led attention away from the interaction of single units in the economic sphere (whether firms or nations), and toward the overall global system. This represents a break with a more state-centered approach in which the analyst deals with disaggregated national terms. The transnationalization of the global environment which a liberal perspective sees occurring as a result of interdependence and modernization is seen in a related historical approach to be the continuing product of the development of capitalism as a modern world system in the period following the Renaissance and the break-up of world empire (Wallerstein 1974).

      Stress on the politics of international economic relations has partially given way to a stress on the capitalist economic system as a world-wide phenomenon. Once this "translation" of thought occurs, what appear on the sur-

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face as voluntaristic interactions might profitably be seen as the embodiment of a world system and its structural constraints. Nation-states are not separable systems of economic production. They are only parts of globe-girdling mode of production: the world economy as a single organic entity. A pattern of individually-motivated interactions is thus recast as the determinative quality of a single capitalist network, which impinges upon individual states through norms and incentives.[3]

10. The world system approach — brought into contemporary discussions most forcefully by the work of Wallerstein — parallels the theoretical project of the structuralists, as well as the underscoring of "totality" by Lukacs. (After all, the analogy between systems of exchange and systems of language was made years ago by Levi-Strauss in his structural anthropology of kinship systems.) Signification, and also the determination of key national and sub-national features, derives from the world system itself. A recent discussion of Levi-Strauss reveals the similarity of conception: "For he is concerned not with the meanings myths have for individuals who know only the myths of their own society but with the meanings myths might have within the global system of myths: within mythology as an institution" (Culler 1975).

      The same way of thinking could apply more generally — to signs, or communicative actions. A focus on the frame of reference of state actors would very closely resemble, and share the limitations of, a concern for "individuals who know only the myths of their own society." These are individuals who are trapped within the limits of a narrowly-gauged language as their actions are being guided by a system of global rules which is no more readily available to them than the full complexity of phonological rules are to competent native speakers. The context posited by structuralism is not one which we can find embodied in (or fully comprehended by) the subject itself: "Linguistics is not hermeneutic" (Culler 1975). It looks for a system overarching the policies or events, not a different context for each policy in the light of which particular state choices could be socially intelligible or "make sense."

11. If the *parole* or speech of state policy must be located within a larger con-

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text, in something like a sign-system or global system of myths, then the modem world economy might serve as that language (*langue*). By a series of historical transmissions, policy and national development or underdevelopment would be normalized by its place in that global totality. And the interdependent system of exchange and the world division of labor resembles the overall sign-system in another way, for it is conceptualized in such a way that its contractual principles do not seem readily modified by individual actions. Like the language (*langue*):

> "As a social institution, it is by no means an act, and it is not subject to any premeditation. It is the social part of language, the individual cannot be himself either create or modify it; it is essentially a collective contract which one must accept in its entirety if one wishes to communicate" (Barthes 1970).

12. The world system would enable us to postulate the content and the context, of policy. The moves between policy and referent would be lateral rather than vertical ones — just as they are in structuralist studies of language. Another facet of the analogy is relevant here. Among the distributional relations of linguistic units, as distinct from their integrative relations, a significant measure of homogenization would be expected. In a sense, the interrelations absorb the distinguishing features — "tout se tient," in Saussure's classic maxim.[4] This resembles the linguistic process of *neutralization*, where an individual differentiation of a unit ceases to be significant as it is cancelled out by the encompassing "syntagm" and the pressure which is derived from it. The most apparent analogy here is between state activity in the world system and the syntagmatic variety of distributional relations. The absorption of distinguishing characteristics into the dictates of the world economy again suggests the lateral nature of the relationships involved. What would be analogous to the paradigmatic axis — the axis of substitution, rather than combination — is neglected, as are the vertical relationships between state policy and domestic structure.

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13. In the analysis of language as a system, this draws sustenance from the "anti-humanism" of the entire structuralist project (Jameson 1972, p. 139-140), and its subordinating relocation of the subject as a relay point within a systemic grid. Substantialist thinking gives way to relational thought; "content" dissolves into pure relationism. Substance is reconceptualized into form, as the signifier (analogous to form) is emphasized over the signifieds (content). For that reason, language has been analogized to units of exchange, for in both cases the idea of distinguishing particularities would be out of place. Here is a situation "where a given unit of currency has the same function whether it be gold or silver coin, assignat or wooden nickel: in other words, where the positive nature of the substance used is not as important as its function in the system (Jameson 1972). The same would be true of a world system approach: the formalization of the rules of the system is rather indifferent to the substance of its elements. Extending the analogy, states would resemble currency — again, in different "denominations," depending on the role they occupied globally. The very concept of the nation-state as a source of value is problematicized.

14. This stress on the priority and formalizability of the signifier relates to the structuralist conception of models[5]—in which individual thoughts are determined or framed by a problématique or complex of problems and ideations and conceptual limits or "clôture." The uniqueness of a single overall system (a model, a *langue*, a world economy) is outlined, and everything resides within. The relationship of forms can be defined without reference to phenomena outside the system. The analyst's ability to locate a part within this model may be thought to be sufficient for its understanding; there are no obstructions to the analysis in the guise of relationships of a vertical or semantic or non-arbitrary kind (no such verticality is "imprinted" on the formalization of the signs). A single overarching grammar, or set of grammatical rules, sets the frame. For recent theorizing about the nature of the global political economy (about international regimes, and foreign economic policy, for example), the modern world capitalist system as it developed from the Sixteenth Century would provide that model. It projects the basic grammar within which

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national actions and developments can be understood.

15. Quite a bit is missing from this perspective on language; even more is missing as we transfer it to the conceptualization of state policy within the world system. Some of this derives from the implicit identification of nation-states or state policies with speech (*parole*)—the individualized aspects of the sign system. They would represent mere *manifestations* of the system, as individuals select and actualize the possibilities inherent within a language of which they are the "transient document."[6]

It is not at all clear, for example, that the structuralists' downplaying of essence (or, in this case, the nation-state as an independent social unit) can be sustained. Their opposition to idealism may be carried too far. The subject does seem substantial, and not merely a series of relays which dissolves the actor into sheer relationality. Extreme variants of liberal theorizing (or fantasizing) at times approach the same perspective: where national political orientations are thought to be uniformly subordinatable to the dictates of the market, to a global structuralism, to a triumph of "interdependence." In a world economy approach, states are seen as the system's "concrete precipitates," rather than its "component units" (Gourevitch 1977).

16. A holistic orientation of this kind does not acknowledge the way meaning and differentiation are affixed at the national level. Like certain variants of economic determinism, it is curiously pre-semantic or pre-semiotic. It is as if all the relevant differentiation took place *through* the system (through its syntagmatic or combinatorial relations), rather than (in an analogy with literature) there being ways in which the paradigmatic/vertical axis protruded onto the syntagmatic/horizontal axis. For *domestic* signification will be vertical in just this way. As a form of individualized writing, it will be projected *onto* the syntagmatic relational operations of the sign-system/world-system in a way that creates a "thickening" or "palpability" (Scholes 1974, p. 26-31).

Now in dealing with systems of myth and the binary oppositions contained within them, the constructs one uses are aimed at structuring "differences" which are not themselves communicative. The method derives from

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Saussure's notion that language contained only differences, without positive terms. But in transferring this method to the study of action, we run the risk of mischaracterizing the things we wish to explain. (This is, as well, one of the most damning and frequently commented upon flaw in "naturalistic" accounts of foreign policy regarded as events or behavior.) With communicative actions — a category to which I am assimilating state action — "the structural and the semiological cannot be dissociated: the relevant structures are those which enable sequences to function as signs" (Culler 1975, p. 49). Formal differences are not only aspects of structural or systemic patterning; they are communicative as well.

17. The distinction is between: (1) a study of syntax — of the rules which govern units whose particularistic signification is ignored, at least for the moment, and (2) a study of semantics, of words or actions used as symbols — which cohere not only in an intellectual construction with a set of rules, but in a purposive and meaningful *game* which is played by actors for particular reasons. In the former, even semantic *description* of the units is bypassed, for that would demand reference to something like linguistic competence. It would depend upon a set of expectations and conventions which provide a standard by which we could particularize states, so that they could be described as more than occupants of global roles (core, semi-periphery, periphery) in a formalized system with abstracted rules. Signification of this kind would come from the domestic level. To the global syntactical relations, we would need to add domestically-grounded semantic configurations.

Are the linkages "arbitrary" or "unmotivated" in the linguistic sense? Are syntagmatic relationships all that we are concerned with? Conceptualizing state action as *symbolic* would suggest that the relationship is not arbitrary in quite so straightforward a way, but that the domestic structures of individual states provide another sign-system (*langue*) and a domestic "naturalization" against which particular actions gain meaning. A semanticist emphasis implies an appropriateness, rather than an arbitrary link between word and referent. What particularizes states (for example, their internal class relations) (Brenner 1977; Petras and Trachte 1978) will give meaning to their very insertion into

the world system at a particular point, as well as to the role which they occupy within it. Without a sensitivity to this element of domestic reference, to a signification which is not simply generated by our analytic construction of a system of rules which encompasses states, we are left with only a relatively abstract and static schema of grammatical imperatives.[7]

18. Constraints and opportunities may come from outside — from the world economic system, for example. From a description of those external conditioning factors, we might derive a grammar or a set of regularities which we could use to predict broad ranges of state behavior or developmental patterns. But to characterize foreign policy as purposive and significant (significative) action, and then to frame such a characterization in a contextual (or referential way), something additional is required. We will need to plumb the particular motivation of states. Questions of *usage* and *desire* need to supplement the charting of formal systems of rules. And while it makes sense to argue that the external environment provides a hierarchy of rewards and obstacles, it makes much less sense to argue that it is the source of motivation. Motivation — as a term so closely bound up with the nature of signification — is internal. The terms "context," "referent," and "motive" bear a family resemblance, and inform us that there is something more to be examined.

19. A systemic view always risks projecting a static description of its units, at the same time as it may shun the job of examining those units' internal constituents. Both a world economy approach and an international systems approach (concentrating on configurations of military power and its balancing within an overall framework of "self-help") are tempted to ignore the domestic sources of national policy.

A strategic system, if we regard it as an organized and even organic entity, might suggest that it is appropriate to postulate one characteristic motivation for states: that of protecting the territorial integrity and political sovereignty of the national unit. This is what can be called "basic security" (Andrews 1978). Beyond this alleged imperative, however, we are in the realm of "surplus security" — and need a specification of domestically-grounded

interests, purposes, and motives: of a *semantic* or vertical or paradigmatic dimension, in other words. Even where the rules of a system are "learnable" (Cowley and Laitin, p. 11) (in situations of tight bipolarity, for example), we still need to specify motivation beyond basic security. The traditional usage of "national security" will prove disabling precisely because it projects a context-free and invariant language,[8] seemingly independent of domestic particularity or dissensus.

From a capitalist world system approach, one might also deduce a pattern of motivation for individual states; in fact, if it is to answer the relevant questions, it will be tempted to project a *characteristic* motivation for all elements of the system. This may concern the maximization of the economic position of the national capitalist class within the overall system: thus using political power to help maximize profits (by expanding national resources and minimizing the uncertainties derived from the market). This characteristic motivation would assume that we could conceive of something like a nation as "a normative individual, chosen for her canonic generality, and who consequently represents a 'speech' which is fixed and devoid of all combinative freedom" (Barthes 1970, p. 27). Such a state would also be devoid of all unformalizable meanings or domestic linkages, so that rather than an idiolect or individual innovation, we would be dealing with a kind of institutionalized speech.

20. But what is striking is the way individual motivations are either assumed or are felt to be determined by the grammar of the system itself. The question of domestic motivation, and often even of national purpose, has been subordinated to the interest in predicting the regularities of development or of plotting a historical trajectory of determination.

Now one could claim that the world economic system was or is decisive in determining the nature of the domestic social formations involved within it: that the world market or division of labor largely shaped the domestic structures which would lay the foundation for any particularized national purposes. The role of different areas in the division of labor in the world economy would generate different class structures and modes of labor control or

surplus extraction which would lead, in turn, to differing politics and state policies. This would signal one exit from the analytic problem: the importance of the domestic sources of policy or development could be granted, but the sources of the relevant domestic referents could be found in the relational structure of the world system.

The problem, however, is that such claims are either not forthcoming or are not entirely convincing. Wallerstein's arguments along these lines seem to underestimate the degree of indeterminacy involved: class relations, for example, cannot be derived so schematically from the structure of the world market as it developed historically. We must distinguish between global determinants and the national motivations of state actors; between the *performance* of states and the *competence* derived from both global and domestic structures. Otherwise we may have an overall vantage point from which to analyze behavior, but no way to contextually interpret domestic motivation, and no assured means of analyzing the sources of system change.

21. One alternative to a systemic determinism — with its "humiliation" of the parts — would be highlight the importance of individual states. The setting does not transform actions into mere consequences; they remain projects. A "scenic understanding" need not imply scenic determinism; global rules do not dominate so coercively. States are not reducible to the status of ventriloquist dummies; rather, they have voices or an "internal coherence" of their own — and domestic motives and referents which underprop those voices. And the reference need not adhere to single decisions so much as to an overall *role* which the state takes in regard to its *domestic* social order (Andrews 1978). For purposes of explanation, we may have a decentered system, composed of politically autonomous units, each attempting to reproduce their particular domestic systems.

This would allow us to break out of a conception of a confining world grammar, or series of syntagmatic distributional relations, so that a semantic dimension might be brought into sight. At the same time, we will also want to defer a premature or mechanical reductionism, where we are catapulted from sign to referent (from policy to economic or class structure, for example)

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without giving full attention to the purposes and self-understandings of state actors. The state itself can be emphasized — as in statist or neo-mercantilist perspectives; but *at that point*, questions of underlying and particularizing domestic motivation come to the fore. And to answer these questions, the referential or semantic issues (which is one way to regard the issues involved with the domestic sources of policy) will have to be raised. This is the order in which it seems appropriate to proceed.

In this way, three major deformations can be avoided:

(a) the singular stress on the grammar of the world system, which downgrades the autonomy of individual units and makes striking presumptions about both the sources and motives of state action;

(b) the complementary emphasis on individual states, which acknowledges the importance of state purposes. Here one regards those purposes or "national interests" as a content (or "signified") of the systemic formalism, but fails to analyze the second-order domestic motivation (or referent) which underpins this surface state role (if we reinterpret it as a "signifier") (Andrews 1978; Gourevitch 1977; Katzinstein 1977; Gilpin 1975; Barthes 1972).

(c) a stress on the domestic referents which nevertheless resembles an overly rapid analytic movement from "word to referent," which leaves the relative autonomy of signs (of state activity, in other words) too far in the background. Here the danger is one of collapsing the distinction between competence and performance, relying on instrumentalist or elitist or "personnel" characterizations of the domestic sources of policy, or using a parsimonious predictive model which skirts the articulated purposes and reasons of state actors altogether.

22. If policy can be characterized as communicative action, as individualized instances or articulations of speech (*parole*), one question serves to stage the controversy: which is the relevant sign-system (or *langue*) on which we can

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base our explanation? A holistic world-economy approach enters at the level of the global system and develops a formal modelling of *parole* behavior based on "internal causation." The alternative to this systematizing would place its emphasis on the semantic dimension located within individual domestic systems. This would provide us with something like a *domestic structuralism.* Here, the subject (the autonomy or opacity of policy) is eroded: not from "above," as in a global systems approach, but from "below," by domestic norms. It would begin with policies and with "interpreted actions," but the analysis would work downward; the movement would be one of *depth,* rather than an attempt to ferret out lateral relationships or historical origins.

23. If we arrest this downward movement, often we are left with a fixed gaze on the surface (and the implicit suspension or "naturalizing" of the historical which is the site of one-dimensionality or of myth) (Andrews 1978; Shapiro 1972). Viewing state policies as signs, once we go beyond the pure relationalism of a system and acknowledge the substantialism involved, we will again gain a crucial advantage: "by taking linguistics as a model one may avoid the familiar mistake of assuming that signs which appear natural... have an intrinsic meaning and require no explanation" (Culler 1975, p. 5). They may have essences which obtrude, but as meaningful signs, they should be denatured. Such an analysis, as Barthes put it, takes us to where "the 'natural' begins to stir, to signify (to become once again relative, historical, idiomatic); the (abhorred) illusion of the self-evident chips, cracks, the machine of language starts up. 'Nature' shudders with all the sociality compressed, sleeping, within it" (Barthes 1977).

Such a model is synchronic in a way that resembles the systematizing of the global approach, but it takes the domestic level as its key. If we proceed by *layers,* an apparently self-sufficient or "natural" surface meaning (at the level of policymaking) becomes emptied at a second, underlying level. A taken-for-granted conception of the nation's interests can be reconceptualized as a symbol, which points to an underlying social formation of some specifiable type. Symbols of this sort are not self-sufficient. They overextend themselves, by standing for — or standing in for — another set of relations. The

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signtifications do not reside directly *in* the symbol (as a hermeneutic analogy might tend to imply); nor are they literal and uninflected by the domestic context in which they appear. They are particularized and "indexical." As a result, symbolic analysis will be a social analysis which takes account of these features — placing policies "in a new semantic row."[9]

24. Language such as "national security" and "the national interest" tends to deny, or represent a repression of, this underlying layer. It does not straight-forwardly disclose the aspects of domestic reference which are found in national policy. In high policy, for example, we might include here the attach-ment of state actors to a conception of "security" which extends well beyond the protection of territorial integrity and political sovereignty — tasks which might be thought to derive from the grammatical "imperatives" of the mod-ern state-system, or from the abstracted rules of a Realist theory. The more expansive conception of security characteristic of hegemonic powers, for example, can be regarded as *surplus security* — the securing or reproduction of the features of a particularized domestic social order.[10] The specific nature of policymakers' conception of "the nation" also suggests that "the national inter-est" cannot be made synonymous with the complexity of domestic motiva-tion. A *domestic paradigm* is involved, which comprises the policymakers' modelling of the domestic social order, or our own reconstruction of what may be an implicit or taken-for-granted (inherited) modelling on the part of state actors. It bears a relationship to the paradigmatic plane of language — where items are related to each other by potential substitution, thus, the degree to which their individual domestic orders provide a *differentiating* con-text.

25. By going beneath the taken-for-granted surface, or the plane of technical rationality which yokes together the ends and means of policy, we can inves-tigate the domestic signification of a pattern of policy. Because meaning derives from convention as well as intention, it may be disclosed by probing the relationship between state policies and domestic norms. A study of the surface would be followed by an activity of deciphering, by going beneath the

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official frame of reference or "critically exceeding the self-interpretation of act-
ing subjects" (Wellmer 1971). The relevant context or language (*langue*) is
domestic, articulated by social norms. For the context is not an external sys-
tem of other states and other market phenomena. It depends upon a set of
rules which enable the policy to function as a sign with domestic meaning
(and therefore to "make sense" and be plausible or appropriate or successful in
domestic social terms). These rules specify a form of policy "competence" to
which specific policies (or parole) stand as "performance." Poetics, for exam-
ple, depends upon notions of literary competence (Culler 1975): one's ability
to *naturalize* the forms of writing available to it in a different way than that in
which they are presented. A domestic "translation" of the sort being proposed
will likewise depend upon a domestic paradigm or notion of domestic com-
petence. This will show how an action *has been* naturalized by state actors, as
policies are related to particular conceptions of the domestic order.

26. These social norms provide a context that can make state purposes intel-
ligible. Rules are not merely *constraining* — as we might expect from a plu-
ralist or instrumentalist theory of the state. To adopt a related vocabulary, they
are not regulative rules, constraining forms of state behavior of which they are
independent. Instead, they are constitutive rules and distinctions (Taylor
1971; Searle 1969, pp. 33ff). They specify what policies "count as" in the
domestic context, and what policies are appropriate for doing one thing rather
than another, or playing one domestic role rather than another. The very char-
acterization of state action as having a domestic character — the translation
of foreign policy into a domestic language — is logically dependent on these
rules. They constitute state purposes and are not simply a set of obstacles pres-
suring state actors into actions in the way that causal antecedents will deter-
mine future courses of behavior. They generate meaning, just as "the seman-
tic structure of a language may be regarded as a conventional realization of a
series of sets of underlying constitutive rules . . . (Searle 1969, p. 37).

27. To stay strictly on the purposive level, never looking at the domestic
underpinnings or translatability of policy is not sufficient. But neither is it suf-

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ficient to conceptualize the link between state and civil society as a set of causal arrows. In those cases, one customarily finds a substantial degree of state autonomy from direct public constraints or direct (instrumentalist) class pressures and is then tempted to ignore the question of domestic motivation altogether. What drops from sight is the question of *what* the state is using its relative autonomy for, and why.

Constitutive rules define a second-order relationship between foreign policy purposes and underlying domestic social purposes toward which those state ends are means. Those rules distinguish or differentiate the policy. For the study of comparative foreign policy, these paradigmatic relations between state and society, between policy as signifier and domestic paradigm as signified, between state *parole* and domestic *langue,* determine the "functional contrasts" of substitution and similarity.

28. The "first-order" signifier[11] suggests the component parts of the world system itself — a series of signs related to each other in a combinatorial or syntagmatic fashion, but without a semantic/vertical/paradigmatic dimension of any decisive importance. States are merely subordinate signifieds, *through which* the system conveys meaning. One can maintain an interior focus on the sign because it is global and all-encompassing. Without clearly articulated boundaries, context is everything — for everything is apparently contained within the interior.

A statist or neo-mercantilist focus would reconceptualize the states as signifiers in their own right. This may reestablish the states as positive terms within a system of signifiers, but, at the same time, it fails to give them a signified or content. The domestic sources of policy are withheld from view. The purely lateral relationships of a world system are arrested, yet no vertical or semantic relationships appear in the analysis to complement it.

At this point, to come closer to a comprehension of policy, we can posit a domestic paradigm which is implicit or articulated in the policymakers' world view. This functions as the relevant "second order" signified which is attached to the signifier of policy. The distinction between signifier/policy and signified/domestic paradigm thus assimilates the word/referent relation-

ship within the internal coherence of the policy framework itself. It interiorizes it.

29. The analysis can therefore emphasize the signifying of policy. It need not proceed from signified "up" — to stress the fixed meaning of policy by reference to a single set of domestic interests. In fact, the attachment to a "final signified" — like that of the unconscious, or the mode of production, or ruling political coalition — may stimulate an overly-rapid reduction of signifier to signified, or policy to referent. Bypassing the actors' frame of reference can only be justified if we accept the legitimacy of a rather sharp break between our explanatory concepts and those which are employed by the relevant actors themselves. Yet this is precisely what is hard to accept; an alternative procedure is concretized in the idea of the domestic paradigm. We simply do not have the freedom implied by a "naturalist" perspective, where concepts can be developed and actions classified without regard for the way actors undertake these same tasks. Such a dizzying and often mechanical vertical move may deny what one variant of the theory of the state has called the relative autonomy of state action,[12] and, on a linguistic level, what has been called the "surplus of signifier."[13] State policy may be more than a representation; it may resemble an articulation and modelling of otherwise "formless, sprawling" referents (Jameson 1972, p. 131-135).

30. Criticizing reductionism has long been fashionable in intellectual circles. Yet we should keep in view the equally obtrusive stumbling blocks in other directions—in the path which a global structuralism has followed, and the counterposed path taken by those who ascribe policies to the autonomy of state power. In both cases, one finds an overestimation of the signifiers. (This is true whether the signifiers constitute the world system itself, or the interior focus on state actors: holism, on the one hand; a statist perspective, on the other.)

Even the notion of a domestic paradigm—perceived as the second-order signified (or content) inscribed in state policy—may appear too limited, or shallow. It may continue to reinforce idealist tendencies, isolating the

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state in a theoretical way from society, without ever really getting outside of the heads and concepts of the policymakers.[14] In a sense, the very idea of a domestic paradigm suggests that the concept of a more direct representation of societal forces has become problematical. This may occur because of a "decline of the referentials," and a new "self-referentiality" on the part of the state (Andrews 1975; Lefebvre 1971; Shapiro 1970). Or it may be due to the prominence of the state's articulations of social reality as the state assumes more prominence, as both the pluralist and the instrumentalist variants of the theory of the state seem less persuasive. In either case, the stress on the domestic paradigm, or signified, may oversubjectivize the relationship between the state and society — a criticism which has also been levelled against the structuralist theory of the capitalist state.

31. At this point, it is worth recalling that there are always *three* elements involved in the linguistic metaphor: not only a signifier and a signified but a *referent* as well. Even signifieds (or domestic paradigms) remain forms of meaning; they should not be wielded analytically in such a way that their pointing" function drops from sight. Possibly the original (hermeneutic) focus on the subject — on the state actors — has the effect of dissolving the referent, by making the policymaking system look relatively self-enclosed, as if "in the field of the subject, there is no referent."[15]

That is, the constitutive rules of a domestic paradigm may enable us to translate a foreign policy into domestic terms and thus perceive it as domestic social action, as the actualization of a domestic social role. But even these rules or distinctions will function symbolically in relation to a domestic social order. The analytic process is not a reduction but a projection — a reading *through,* a transparency.

32. For the signified is itself atop a signifying system of its own. It can be reformulated as a *signifier,* pointing beneath it to a deeper organization at the domestic social level. Without this underlayer, it might remain an "undefined mass of concepts, which could be compared to a huge jellyfish, with uncertain articulations and countours."[16] Without this deeper political formation and

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reinforcement, there would be too little *solidity* to the signified. It would be a concept shifting or floating on the surface, contaminated by an undue reliance on idealist assumptions.

Referents may be sought: first, to find out if, and in what way and to what degree, the policymakers' modelling of the domestic social order involved in the domestic paradigm is congruent with the domestic frame. Second, we will want to know how this particular "official" conception arose historically or became consensual, or at least how it is being reinforced in the time period under investigation and how fragile the relevant process of non-decision and legitimation has been.[17] The underlying referent — the domestic social *system,* the historical process by which political conflict evolves or is repressed or preempted — would be another layer existing beneath the paradigm. As in systems of myth, it may be rent with contradictions, to which the "binary oppositions" of the domestic paradigm or the trajectory of national policy are an attempted response.

33. Examining this referent will help in another way. It can provide an understanding of the reasons why (and the method by which) the signification of state policy is systematically distorted or occluded. At those junctures, a more surface-oriented hermeneutics will prove inadequate, for it cannot grasp the meaning of those distortions; it is relatively helpless before the attempts of policymakers to *naturalize* a particularized domestic social action. The process by which the referent is "desymbolized"— a process of hegemony and legitimation, in this case—will be related to the *partiality* of state policy, for this is generally the aspect most in need of being naturalized (Habermas 1975; 1971; 1970; McCarthy 1973).[18] Depoliticization may also be required, for desymbolization involves a refusal to allow political forms to be experienced as the projection of a particularized (and therefore problematic) content; it often implicates the need to keep the understanding of social action at a relatively shallow level. Uncovering the latent structure, or the relevant context in which policy is embedded, will therefore require more than a surface reading. It suggests the value of a persistent critique: in which the explanation of communicative action inspires us to look at the reasons or systemic imperatives

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behind its distortion. The task

> "is not to redouble the text's self-understanding, to collude with its object in a conspiracy of eloquence. Its task is to show the text as it cannot know itself, to manifest those conditions of its making (inscribed in its very letter) about which it is necessarily silent. It is not just that the text knows some things and not others; it is rather that its very self-knowledge is the construction of a self-oblivion" (Eagleton 1976).

34. The process of interpretation can thus proceed in layers — not by chronology, and not by the depiction of causal arrows. From the global organization of signifiers to the emphasis on the state; from state policy regarded as a signifier to the concept of the domestic paradigm by which national policy models the particular features of the domestic system it attempts to reproduce.

The sign has a "double functionality" (Jameson 1972, p. 145ff; Barthes 1970, Section IV) or identity, a duplicity: "Every figure . . . carries its translation . . . like a *watermark* or a palimpsest, under its apparent text."[19] Actions are organized by their place in the code of the global system (which they then signify) as well as by their relationship to a domestic paradigm which motivates them. As well, that domestic paradigm, or signified, has a double functioning: to articulate or point to a particularized conception of society, and to "carry" a meaning from below, from a domestic social formation (or referent). This domestic system forms a language, a system of contractual values from which the state selects and actualizes. It is no more open to easy modification than the global system (or sign-system) — no more than states can exist in mid-air, capable of transforming or improvising their domestic contexts. For understanding foreign policies, that domestic order will eventually have to be examined: to specify its features or physiognomy, and its historical formation (both by global currents and domestic conflicts), and, finally, to grasp the process of political coalition-building and maintenance by which certain domestic paradigms are attacked and superceded while others are able to survive intact. At this point, the layering comes full circle: connecting the surface with the context. The comprehension of state purpos-

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es in a contextual way begins to verge on the examination of the domestic pre-conditions of policy. The analysis of motivation joins with the analysis of legitimation.

NOTES

1. The literature on this subject is forbiddingly vast, often provocatively contentious, and sometimes stylistically inaccessible. Four recent introductions have alleviated some of the problems of mapping a path into the literature, both by the lucidity of their exposition and the comprehensiveness of their bibliographies. See Jameson (1972); Scholes (1974); Culler (1975); Hawkes (1977). Anyone exploring this area for its relevance to the social sciences will be indebted to them; my own work assuredly reveals that debt.

2. This is Jameson's critique. Jameson (l972).

3. We might see this as "downward causation." but the structuralist stress on part/whole relationships and internal systemic causation might be more appropriate. Duvall and Rudrud (1978); Cowhey and Laitin (1978); Ruggie (1978), and Petras and Trachte (1978).

4. To extend and complicate the analogy, it might be admitted that the integrative relations among linguistic units are much more differenti-ated. The parallel, in statecraft, would be toward the distinguishing features of the "roles" that states occupy in the world system; these do depend on state differences, especially in so far as roles and state power are interrelated.

5. Jameson (1975) stresses this in Part 3. Also relevant here is Thomas Kuhn's work, and Jacques Derrida's idea of "deconstruction" — see the latter's *Of Grammatology,* Derrida (1976), translated after ten years.

6. Barthes (1970), p. 18; also note his discussion of "idiolects" on p. 21.

7. 1 would add that this has also been a failing in much of the early work on international "regimes" and "regime change.'

8. This can have disturbing domestic consequences going well beyond the problem of legitimation. See, for example, Bruce Andrews,

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"Privacy and National Security," in William Bier, ed., *Privacy* (in press).

9. As the Russian Formalist Viktor Shklovsky put it; cited in Jameson (1972), p. 60.

10. Andrews, "Surplus," *cited.* Also, compare John R. Searle (1969), pp. 26-28 on definite and indefinite "referring expressions" and pp. 86-90 on "identifying descriptions."

11. See Barthes' *Mythologies* (1972) for the fullest development of this spatial metaphor, derived from the work of Hjelmslev.

12. The best recent discussion is Fred Block, "The Ruling Class Does Not Rule: Notes on the Marxist Theory of the State" (1977).

13. See Andrews, "Surplus" (1978). Also: Bruce Andrews, "Text and Context" in Steve McCaffery, ed., "The Politics of the Referent" (1977); Jameson (1972), p. 130ff, and Jeffrey Mehlman, "The 'Floating Signifier': From Levi-Strauss to Lacan," in *French Freud: Structural Studies in Psychoanalysis* (1972).

14. See Jameson (1972), pp. 105-6 for a related criticism of structuralist thinking. Wellmer's (1971), pp. 77-78, distinction between an effective grammar of a language and a manifest grammar ("an 'apparent' usage serving legitimation purposes") intersects the argument at this point. Wellmer goes so far as to assimilate theorizing to phases in an historical process of language criticism.

15. Barthes, *Roland Barthes* (1977), p. 56; italicized in the original.

16. Roland Barthes, cited in Jameson (1972), p. 145.

17. Here, an ethnomethodological perspective — where rules are found to be "worked out" by an ongoing process of interaction between actors — would parallel a stress on the role of political conflict and coalition-building in determining and institutionalizing, perhaps at a much earlier point, the relevant domestic paradigm. See, for example, Gourevitch (1977), p. 47: "Reductionism is not the only alternative to structure. Showing how politics and institutions affect struggles between social forces is also possible, and preferable." Compare Gosta Esping-Andersen, et al., "Modes of Class Struggle and the Capitalist

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State" (1976), on "political class analysis."

18.   Compare Culler, *cited*, on "vraisemblance"; Bruce Andrews, "Representation & Irresponsibility in Foreign Policy," paper presented at the Annual Convention of the International Studies Association," March 1977, #13-18; and Andrews, "Privacy" (in press).

19.   Genette, cited in Scholes (1974), p. 161; emphasis added.

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