Mead’s life-long interest in Romanticism is the least studied aspect of his work. As summarized in *Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century*, Meadian explorations in romantic philosophy and sociology provide a valuable insight into his substantive contributions. The present paper seeks to amplify this insight and explores its relevance to the interactionist tradition in sociology. Special attention is given to the Meadian claim that the modern notion of self first appears in the romantic literature. Mead’s emphasis on the interplay between the social structure and the structure of the self is linked to the romantic vision of the self as the microcosm of the social macrocosm. The current controversy over Mead and Chicago sociology is given a new interpretation in light of the dialectical premises inherent in the Meadian and romantic theories of self.

Some eighteen years ago Strauss (1964:xviii) observed that “the romantic writers had a profound influence upon Mead.” A decade later Gouldner (1973:349) drew attention to the fact that “it was largely through Mead’s influence that systematic Romanticism permeated one wing of the Chicago School of sociology, gave it its coherence and its unique character. . . .” Despite these intriguing suggestions, only scant effort has been made so far to explore systematically the continuity

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between the interactionist perspective in American sociology and early 19th century romantic thought. The purpose of the present paper is to partly close the existing gap. The space constraint does not allow a full-scale inquiry into the historical ties that bind these two disparate and yet philosophically allied movements. I will concentrate on one notion central to both romantic teaching and interactionist social psychology—the notion of self, which, according to Mead (MT:74), is “the dominant concept of the Romantic period.” In my discussion I draw on Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century—a much neglected book featuring Mead’s historical explorations—as well as on the original writings of the romantic thinkers.

Let me begin with the recapitulation of the Meadian theory of self; it can be condensed into the following set of propositions.

First, the individual emerges in his own field of experience gradually, indirectly, incessantly. The self he learns to claim as his own is not a soul affixed to a body, an entity apprehended in the act of introspection, but a cognitive construct which is embedded in history and which remains chronically problematic throughout the individual’s life. In Mead’s words, the self is “something which has a development.” It is a process that can be understood only in its genesis and evolution.

Second, the self is a social phenomenon; the individual discovers himself in the course of his interaction with other human beings. He assumes the standpoint of the alter ego, treats himself as others treat him, and thus becomes an object for himself. His relation to himself is mediated by a community which provides him with ready-made blueprints for self-objectivation. Mead uses the expressions “to take the role of the other” and “to take the attitude of the generalized other” to convey the idea that the individual becomes conscious of his self only as a member of society and remains its responsible member as long as he assumes socially defined selves.

Third, the self is a subject-object; its predicates are biographically acquired, situationally sustained, and self-consciously transcended. The subject is not bound to his public self; he can raise himself above himself, dispense with old identities and devise new ones. He can achieve this feat because society has endowed him with what Mead calls “mind”—the critical ability of the “I” to survey the whole social process in which it is implicated as a “Me.” Drawing on this ability, the individual is able not only to withdraw his commitment to an old self, but also to criticize the total social situation which calls for a given mode of self-objectivation.

Fourth, the social roles in which the ego presents itself to itself and to the outside world comprise the social structure. This structure is perpetuated by the continued allegiance of individuals to their social roles; it ceases to exist objectively when individuals fail to identify with these roles. As the old forms of self-objectivation fade away, so does the society that has brought them into being, and as the new forms of self-objectivation find their way into behavior, a new society is born. In Mead’s words, the self and society are “the two sides of the single process”—the process of social evolution. They can be understood only in terms of each other, for human societies perpetuate themselves in and through the selves of their individual members, while human selves derive their meaning
from a society (real or potential) that provides the individual with reference frames for self-objectivation.

THE SELF AS AN ENTITY AND A PROCESS

The first set of the above propositions is widely accepted in current sociological and non-sociological discourses. It is now more or less taken for granted that the self is a process rather than an entity, that the self evolves rather than being given at birth, that the self is a product rather than a cause of one’s action. Yet this way of looking at the self, according to Mead, is of relatively recent origin; it was firmly established only in the Romantic Era. “Romanticism turns about vivid self-consciousness. . . . That is what constitutes the romantic character of the period, the emphasis upon the self, making the self the center of reality, conceiving the world as that which the self sets up . . . .” (MT:74, 147).

Mead’s claim that the notion of self is central and in some sense unique to the Romantic period, needs to be examined more closely. The reverence for self-reflection has a long pedigree in the Western history; by no means is it confined to Romanticism. Cassirer (1964:123) saw in self-consciousness a “central problem” of Renaissance thought. Morris (1972:65) identified self-exploration as “one of the dominant themes” in the literature of the late-medieval Europe. Still other authors find evidence of sustained self-awareness in the soliloquies of Seneca, Marcus Aurelius, and St. Augustine. As we continue our discent toward the formative stages of Western civilization, we inevitably run into the Delphic “Know thyself,” from which we may safely conclude that self-discovery has been a leitmotief of Occidental culture since at least the times of Socrates. And yet despite this longstanding and pervasive belief in the primacy of the self as a subject matter of reflection, Mead is on firm grounds when he claims that Romanticism was a turning point in man’s quest for self-understanding.

The Delphic “Know thyself,” as Kon (1978:154) convincingly argues, was for Socrates and his contemporaries a reminder of man’s helplessness in the face of omnipotent Gods. “Know thyself” read as “know thy place,” “submit to your fate,” “do not try to escape your divinely appointed duty.” The famous motto had none of the connotations it later acquired in the writings of Schopenhauer, Feuerbach, or Kierkegaard. Rather it urged man to grasp firmly one’s true nature—eternal soul—with which one is equipped from birth, which stays forever fixed, and which has nothing to do with self-determination. “From the hour of their birth,” maintained Aristotle ([384–322 B.C.] 1941:1132), “some are marked out for subjection, others for rule,” and it is therefore incumbent upon each human being to act according to one’s predestination. This attitude was fully preserved in Christian theology that reasserted the soul’s immutability and immortality and encouraged the individual to acquiesce in his preordained station in life. Even the aggressive affirmation of the value of the individual by Renaissance thinkers did not signify the change in the classical attitude toward the self as something given and inescapable. This attitude persisted until the Reformation when the rhetoric of self-discovery was first supplemented and later supplanted by the rhetoric of
self-determination. The shift in the attitude was gradual, subtle, yet clearly discernible in the very language of philosophical and literary discourses.

Prior to the epoch of the Reformation the debates revolved around the nature of soul, its indivisibility, oneness, and immortality; the prime terminological tool employed by philosophers was the notion of soul. In the aftermath of the Protestant Revolution the discussion centers on the issue of self-identity, on the multiplicity and mutability of the human self, which with the onset of the Romantic Era replaces the notion of soul as the philosophers’ and writers’ favorite linguistic tool (Lyons, 1978:4).

As seen from the vantage point of Locke and Hume, the issue of self-identity hinges upon the question of how the sense of personal continuity can be sustained in view of the glaring discontinuity in man’s conduct. In similar situations, the individual can display sympathy, indifference, hostility, and scores of other contradictory attitudes irreducible to a single spiritual substance. One man seems to act as if he had many selves. Personal identity, the authors concluded, is a product, or as Hume eventually came to believe, a fiction of self-consciousness. It stretches as far as one’s consciousness and memory can reach. Should the individual fail to apprehend some of his past deeds as his own, such deeds no longer belong to his self; should he start acting and perceiving himself in a fresh mode, he has a new self. “Nothing but consciousness can unite remote existences into the same person: the identity of substance will not do it. . . . So that self is not determined by identity or diversity of substance . . . but by identity of consciousness” (Locke, [1690] 1959:464, 465).

The polemics surrounding the question of self-identity brought to light several hitherto unappreciated aspects of the self as an object of thought and action. First, this object cannot be handled without violating the laws of thought, most notably the law of identity. The self possesses contradictory predicates, differs from itself on various occasions, and thus is clearly illogical. Second, the transition from the self at one moment to the self at another moment is disjunctive; it constitutes a jump, requiring no apparent link or contiguity between the two states of the self. Third, whatever identity the subject finds in his various manifestations is contingent upon his consciousness of self, i.e., it is consciously generated or accomplished by the subject who is free to identify or not to identify himself with any of his deeds.

An entirely new theory was needed to account for these unusual properties of self, a theory that would conceive of self as shaped in experience, infinitely malleable, and self-consciously transformed. In a daring metaphor symbolizing the break with the classical notion of substantive self, Hume ([1739] 1978:261) compared the selves coexisting in one person to members of a state, united and autonomous at the same time.

. . .I cannot compare the soul more properly to any thing than to a republic or commonwealth, in which the several members are united by the reciprocal ties of government and subordination, and give rise to other persons, who propagate the same republic in the incessant change of its parts. And as the same individual republic may not only change its members, but also its laws and constitutions; in like manner the same person may vary his character and disposition, as well as his impressions and ideas, without losing his identity.
The attitude projected through this metaphor was decidedly nonclassical. The individual adopting this attitude was expressly modern. It was this attitude that Mead detected in the Romantic thinkers and that led him to assert the uniqueness of the romantic self. What is unique about the romantic self is its problematic nature. The Romantic is weary of his familiar guises; he views them as appearances and longs for a new and truer self. His self is something of a paradox—it must be accomplished, and yet it cannot be accomplished once and for all; it is an ongoing revision of roles and masks with which the individual identifies and which he constantly transcends in his search for still other identities and predicates. The notion of the self entailed in this precept is that of a process: “The Romantic idealists came back to the process of the self. . . . The self was looked at not as a static affair; it was not conceived of in the medieval sense as a soul that was born into the world with the body and changed the body, a self that was endowed by a divine fiat. Rather, the self was looked upon as a certain process, something that is going on” (MT:87–89).

Not only was the self conceived by the Romantics as a process; it was also defined as an inner world commensurable with, and in some sense responsible for, the universe at large. Unlike his predecessors, the Romantic did not limit his task to ascertaining his place in the established scheme of things. His ambition was to demonstrate that the established scheme of things is what it is because of himself, that he partakes of their being, that without him the world may collapse. The borderline between the self and not-self, thus, became increasingly blurred; the self assumed enormous significance as a vital link in the world of objects, and the contemplation of the self was elevated to the status of paramount philosophical activity indispensable for a true understanding of objective reality.

Nothing is more to me than myself. . . . I take the world as what it is to me, as mine, as my property; I refer all to myself (Stirner [1845] 1971:41).

Attend to yourself; turn your attention away from everything that surrounds you and towards your inner life. . . . Everything that exists for the self, exists through the self (Fichte [1794] 1970:6, 31).

I can abstract from everything but not from myself. I cannot forget myself even when I am asleep (Kierkegaard [1839] 1959:51).

I must fix my eyes upon my true self, if each moment is not to slip away as merely so much time, instead of being grasped as an element of Eternity, and transmuted into a higher and freer life (Schleiermacher [1800] 1957:16).

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part Of me and of my soul, as I of them? (Bryon [1818] 1948:560).

I was often unable to think of external things as having external existence, and I communed with all that I saw as something not apart from, but inherent in, my own immaterial existence (Wordsworth, quoted in Rodway, 1963:141).

The egocentrism of these pronouncements is striking; perhaps because it is so transparent, it can be easily misinterpreted. It is fairly common to misconstrue the romantic thinkers’ preoccupation with their own selves as an autistic exercise, to mistake the romantic attitude for indifference to the outside world, to mislabel
the Romantic a narcissist. Narcissism is antithetical to the romantic approach—the former presupposing a passive attitude, and the latter an active one. The narcissist is hooked onto his familiar, comfortable self which he is afraid to lose; the Romantic, no matter how enamored with the self of the moment, is prepared to give it up and to try a new one. “The romantic attitude,” Mead (MT:75) observes, “is rather the externalizing of the self. One projects one’s self into the world, sees the world through the guise, the veil, of one’s emotions. That is the essential nature of the romantic attitude. The self-centered attitude may be one which is anything but romantic.”

For all his interest in the inner life, the romantic person has not lost touch with other humans. He is acutely aware of their existence and actively seeks communion with another soul. “I long for another world,” exclaims Schleiermacher (1957:78, 36), “I still have many new ties to form; my heart must beat to the law of new loves as yet unknown to me . . . so that my humanity may touch other humanity. . . . I must go forth and enter into manifold association with others in order to behold what types of humanity there are, which of them are still alien to me, which I can assimilate, ever determining my own being more decidedly by mutual give and take.” The Romantic has a gift of sympathy. He penetrates the worlds inhabited by other minds, appropriating them as his own. He is engaged in what Mead calls “role-playing.” One form of such role-playing is “a reconstruction of the self through the self’s assuming the roles of the great figures of the past” (MT:62). Journeys into history is the Romantic’s favorite pastime; they give him an opportunity to relive symbolically the lives of his predecessors. Such imaginary journeys to the past are supplemented by real journeys to far-away countries and exotic cultures which became immensely popular in the Romantic Era. In his pursuit of uncommon modes of self-objectivation, the Romantic even learns to empathize with ordinary things: the tin soldier, the old shoe, the ugly duckling come alive in the romantic literature, thanks to the genius of Hans Christian Andersen. The Romantic is constantly “taking the role of another, playing a part of another, taking the attitude of the community” (MT:95). His identity expands to absorb ever new determinations. A self enthusiastically embraced at one moment is doubted and discarded at the next. This mood of eternal search and self-doubt is epitomized by the Byronic character, Childe Harold.

The volatility of the romantic self has something adolescent about it. Mead (MT:71, 70) takes special note of this fact, pointing out that “in the Romantic period a new self arose, an adolescent, self-conscious self.” The incessant search for a self and perennial doubts as to its authenticity are, on the other hand, “what make adolescence a romantic period.” Like an adolescent, the Romantic longs for novel experiences. He is eager to experiment with new identities, to assume new roles, to make fresh commitments, yet he is never completely identified with any of his selves. His forays into alien worlds give the Romantic a new perspective on his own universe and on his own self. Assuming one role after another, the Romantic gradually discovers himself as a universal being. No perspective is foreclosed to him, no self or attitude are completely alien. He discovers himself as a personality, as an individual charged with an extraordinary responsibility for the kind of self he chooses to be.
This is the sense in which Mead speaks about the discovery of the self in the Romantic period. The self then discovered was not a traditional substantive self stamped on the individual as his destiny, but the new and ever-changing self that comes into being through mutual give and take.

Europe discovered the medieval period in the Romantic period, then, but it also discovered itself. In fact, it discovered itself first. Furthermore, it discovered the apparatus by means of which this self-discovery was possible. . . . As a characteristic of the romantic attitude we find this assumption of roles. Not only does one go out into adventure taking now this, that, or another part, living this exciting poignant experience and that, but one is constantly coming back upon himself. . . . He has got the point of view from which he can see himself as others see him. And he has got it because he has put himself in the place of others (MT:63–64).

For centuries philosophers postulated an immaterial substance—a soul—that they hoped to unveil through an act of creative introspection. This ultimate reality supposedly hidden in the recesses of the human mind, however, continued to elude the inquirers. The quest for self-knowledge took a new direction in the Romantic Age. What the Romantics discovered was that the self is potentially infinite; no set of predicates can exhaust its universal nature; it is a structure that evolves gradually and changes incessantly with every new role assumed by the subject. The Romantics discovered this active, self-conscious self through role playing. The mechanism of role-playing was identified by Mead as central to the whole domain of self-consciousness. He analyzed it in great detail in his theory of self which he predicated upon this romantic thesis: “The self is something which has a development; it is not initially there, at birth, but arises in the process of social experience and activity . . .” (MSS:135).

THE SELF AS A PRODUCT OF SOCIAL INTERACTION

Another premise central to Meadian theory is that the self is a product of social experience. Communication with other humans is a precondition for the individual’s emergence as an object in his own field of experience. The human community provides a general context within which the self acquires its meaning; the structure of the individual’s self reflects the structure of his relations with other members of society. “The individual experiences himself as such, not directly, but only indirectly, from the particular standpoints of other individual members of the same social group, or from the generalized standpoint of the social group as a whole to which he belongs. For he enters his own experience as a self or individual, not directly or immediately, not by becoming a subject to himself, but only in so far as he first becomes an object to himself . . . and he becomes an object to himself only by taking the attitudes of other individuals toward himself within a social environment or context of experience and behavior in which he and they are involved” (MSS:138).

This thesis of Meadian theory can be traced to the romantic philosophy of self. “In every definite sense,” Mead (MT:147) urges, “we can speak of this philosophy . . . as one which is social in its character.” The ability to contemplate oneself is not innate, nor does it grow of its own accord as the individual matures. The
individual discovers himself by virtue of his association with other men. "A self . . . is so evidently a social individual that it can exist only in a group of social individuals" (MT:382). It comes into being with the help of "the thou, the alter ego" (Feuerbach [1841] 1957:82), or as Goethe (1949:159) put it, "One does not get to know that one exists until one discovers oneself in others."

Romantic theory established a vital link between reflexiveness and sociality. This link is typically lost to self-consciousness where the self appears as immediately given. This immediacy is an illusion of the mature ego. The individual does not become transparent to himself through an act of introspection or intuition. First, he has to take the role of the other, or in the words of Feuerbach (1957:2), "put himself in the place of another." "The self must be identified, in some sense, with the not-self. It must be able to come back at itself from outside" (MT:88). Only then does it emerge as an object in its own experience. Every time man addresses himself in a reflexive mode, he steps outside his present self and literally becomes another self. "Self-consciousness . . . has come outside himself. . . . It consists in the process of becoming an other to itself, i.e., an object for its own self" (Hegel [1808] 1967:229, 96). Variations on this theme abound in romantic literature:

The ego first steals its glance in the eye of a thou before it endures the contemplation of being which does not reflect its own image. My fellow-man is the bond between me and the world. . . . Without other men, the world would be for me not only dead and empty, but meaningless. Only through his fellow does man become clear to himself and self conscious. . . . A man existing absolutely alone would lose himself without any sense of his individuality in the ocean of nature (Feuerbach, 1957:82).

Man makes his life activity itself the object of his will and his consciousness. . . . It is only because he is a species being that he is a conscious being, i.e., that his own life is an object for him. . . . Man first sees and recognizes himself in other men. Peter only establishes his own identity as a man by first comparing himself with Paul as being of like kind (Marx, 1964:113; 1967a:52).

The self perceives itself at the same time that it is perceived by others. . . . Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself. . . . by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or "recognized" (Hegel, 1967:661, 229).

Through the alter ego the individual comes into contact with the whole community to which the ego and the alter ego belong. Both derive their self-predicates from a community that provides them with the universal means of self-objectivation, with language, and it is language that makes possible consciousness as truly human consciousness, i.e., as consciousness conscious of itself. "Language is as old as consciousness, language is practical consciousness, as it exists for other men, and for that reason is really beginning to exist for me personally as well" (Marx, 1963:19). "Language is self-consciousness existing for others" (Hegel, 1967:660). To the extent that the individual has successfully mastered the language of his community and learned to apply it systematically to himself, he is a species being—a full-fledged member of society, exercising reflexive, i.e., social, control over his own thought and action.

"Species being" is the term that best conveys the romantic notion of man as a member of society. Coined by Feuerbach and extensively used by the young
Marx, this expression affirms the social nature of man. "The measure of the species is the absolute measure, law, and criterion of man. . . . To him his species, his essential nature, and not merely his individuality, is an object of thought" (Feuerbach, 1957:16, 2). Note that "social nature" is a figure of speech containing a contradiction. In the classical sense, nature is something inherent, ahistorical, insulated from man's will. The label "social" adds a dialectical twist to the customary usage; it suggests that "the essence of man is no abstraction inherent in each particular individual. In its reality it is an ensemble (aggregate) of social relations" (Marx, 1963:198). This precept runs contrary to the classical notion of human nature, which, since Plato and Aristotle, has been seen as determining man's place in society: " . . . Each one man must perform one social service in the state for which his nature was best adapted. . . . Each one ought to mind as his own business the one thing for which he was fitted by nature" (Plato [C470-350 B.C.] 1963:736). For the Romantics, the reverse is true: man's nature is a function of an historically specific system of social relations, a product of his society. "Take, as an illustration, the Hegelian doctrine of the social individual. We speak of him as having certain relations. He stands in his social group as a citizen, as a member of a family, of this or that group; and all these groups represent various social relations. We might speak of him as a point through which any number of social relations pass. Now, these relations of the man to the people about him are just what constitutes the man" (MT:332).

The romantic notion of man as a species being revolutinized the classical view of the relationship between the individual and society. It established the historicity of human nature. It also focused attention on the fundamentally social character of human consciousness which differentiates it from the unreflexive activity of other species. The subhuman organism is not aware of itself, of its relationship to other beings, whereas human consciousness inevitably involves the consciousness of one's self as simultaneously related to and distinct from other men. " . . . The animal has no 'relations' with anything, cannot have any. For the animal, its relation to others does not exist as a relation. Consciousness is therefore from the very beginning a social product, and remains so as long as men exist at all. . . . The human being . . . is not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society" (Marx, 1963:19; 1973:84).

The Romantics were not the first to realize that the self is, in a sense, a reflection of other selves. Some stunning insights into the social character of self can be found in La Rochefoucauld, Montaigne, Shakespeare, and even in the late Stoics. Yet Mead seems to be justified in his contention that the contemporary notion of the self as a product of social interaction has been fully established only in the Romantic Era. The self is social not only because it reflects the needs of the moment, because it can assume this or that mask depending on the others with whom it interacts; the self is social through and through because it has no objective being outside of its interaction with other selves, because it comes into being within a community, rather than merely adjusts to it, as the predecessors of Romanticism tacitly presupposed. To be conscious of one's self, in fact, to be conscious of anything at all, according to Romanticism, the individual must become another to oneself, see oneself from without, from the standpoint of the other—
a feat one can perform only as a member of society. This argument was further
developed by Mead in his theory of self-consciousness which is based on the
romantic idea that “the self . . . is essentially a social structure” and that “the
whole nature of intelligence is social to the very core” (MSS:140, 141). Mead’s
notion of social interaction, however, despite its affinity to that of his romantic
predecessors, is not identical with it.

The dominant form of interaction analyzed in the romantic literature is that of
psychic interaction; the individual remains passive as he contemplates his re-
fection in other human beings. In Mead’s theory the individual is understood (in
full agreement with his pragmatist assumptions) as a doer. Man learns to exercise
self-control by acting, in the course of practical behavior, rather than by figuring
out in his imagination what other people think of him.

Interaction, for Mead, is a collective process; it involves a number of individuals
related to each other in a systematic fashion. The self one acquires as a result of
interaction with others reflects the total social act that provides a stable back-
ground against which the individual can apprehend himself as a coherent, mean-
ingful whole. In the romantic treatment, the accent is on the communication be-
tween the ego and the alter ego, or in Mead’s terminology, between the individual
and the other. The content of this communication seems largely arbitrary, unless
it is understood as a part of a group interaction. The transition from taking the
role of the particular other to taking the attitude of the generalized other, which
symbolizes the emergence of man as a species being, remains largely unexplained
by the Romantics.

Finally, the romantic perspective on the genesis of the self is ontogenetic, rather
than phylogenetic. The emergence of the ego is made contingent on the pre-
existence of the alter ego—an assumption valid for the ontogenetic analysis and
unacceptable for the understanding of the historical genesis of the self. Other self
is here something to be explained, not presupposed. The Median analysis of the
conversation of gestures and of the symbolization process offers a perspective
that permits both phylogenetical and ontogenetical modes of inquiry.

THE SELF AS A SUBJECT AND AN OBJECT OF SOCIAL ACTIVITY

The third set of propositions pertaining to Mead’s theory refers to the peculiar
nature of the self as a subject and object in one’s experience. Mead addresses
the problem under the heading of the “I”-“Me” dialectics. The “me” represents
the self as it appears to an individual at a given moment; it is a conventional mode
of behavior, a role with which the individual identifies himself in a particular
situation. The “I” is a subject or ego insofar as it choses one or another mode
of self-objectivation. As a subject or “I,” the individual is free to forego his
customary appearances and commit himself to a new self. If the latter is in conflict
with the norms governing interaction in a given situation, he can seek to modify
them in accordance with his new self. “We are individuals born into a certain
nationality, located at a certain spot geographically, with such and such family
relations, and such and such political relations. All of these represent a certain
situation which constitutes the ‘me’. . . . Over against the ‘me’ is the ‘I.’ The
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individual . . . is not only a citizen, a member of the community, but he is one who reacts to this community and in his response to it . . . changes it . . . . The response of the ‘I’ . . . affects not only the self but also the social environment which helps to constitute the self; that is, it implies a view of evolution in which the individual affects its own environment as well as being affected by it” (MSS:182, 196, 214).

The Romantics gave a special prominence to the dual nature of the human self, to the fact that “man is himself at once I and thou” (Feuerbach, 1957:2), a “noumenon” and “phenomenon” (Kant, [1781] 1966:6), “a subject-object” (Fichte, 1970:99). The two aspects of the human self are dialectically intertwined, Mead (MT:78) points out, and can be separated only in abstraction. The task of dialectical reason is to understand the self as “at once the agent and the product of action; the active, and what the activity brings about; action and deed . . .” (Fichte, 1970:97).

One component of the mature ego is transcendental or noumenal self; another—an objective or phenomenal self. The former corresponds to the “I” and the latter to the “me” in Mead’s vocabulary: “The ‘I’ is the transcendental self of Kant . . . The self-conscious, actual self in social intercourse is the objective ‘me’” (SW:141). The transcendental ego is a thing-in-itself that can be grasped only indirectly, phenomenally: “I have no knowledge of myself as I am, but only as I appear to myself. . . . We know our own self as a phenomenon only, and not as it is by itself” (Kant, 1966:92, 91). The transcendental self inexorably escapes full objectivation; it makes appearance under various historical masks, none of which exhausts its potential universality. Because the transcendental ego can identify with any role, any object in the world, it is seen by the Romantics as commensurable with the whole universe. It is “a Self that is infinite, divine, absolute,” a self that is “causal, productive, creative” (MT:74, 102). By identifying itself with various social roles, the transcendental ego can comprehend the social universe in its entirety. As a subject, the individual can withdraw his commitment from any given role; he can reappraise his involvement in a given social act and affect its future course.

The Romantics discuss the dual nature of the self in metaphysical language that tends to obscure their main point. This point, however, is a simple one: man is free. The entire argument should be read in the context of the romantic opposition to the mechanistic concept of man as an object in nature, governed by the law of empirical phenomena. If man were wholly accountable in mechanical terms, “freedom could not be saved. Man would be a marionette or an automaton . . . fabricated and wound up by the Supreme Artist; the self-consciousness would indeed make him a thinking automaton, but the consciousness of his spontaneity, if this is held to be freedom, would be a mere illusion” (Kant [1788] 1956:104–5). The mechanicians saw nothing repugnant in this picture, as La Mettre’s famous L’Homme Machine testifies. Eager to portray man as an aggregate of planes and levers, they saw in man just another machine, whose mechanism is yet to be fully understood. This theory left no room for freedom, and for that reason it was unaccetable to the romantic thinkers. The romantic theory was an attempt to save freedom by meeting “the paradoxical demand to regard one’s self, as subject to
freedom, as noumenon, and yet from the point of view of nature to think of one's self as a phenomenon . . .” (Kant [1788] 1956:6).

There is a hidden irony in the fact that the self is a subject and an object at the same time, that at any given moment it is more than it appears to be. Some post-Kantian Romantics extolled this irony as a fundamental principle of man's existence. Indeed, the individual posits himself as a definite self, as a true "me," but sooner or later he discovers that this is only a role with which he was mistakenly identified. When one contrives to "raise oneself above oneself" (Schlegel, 1967:86) and to grasp the "true" ego hidden under the appearances, one seizes upon a new objectivation that stands as little chance of representing the ego itself as the old one did.

To dramatize the gap between the ego and its contingent manifestations, the Romantic resorts to self-mockery, jests and other ironic devices designed to reassert his freedom of self-determination. The Romantic is an ironist when he turns the reflexive power with which society has endowed him against society itself. The individual is truly romantic when he assumes an ironic, i.e., critical attitude. The ironist is no longer geared to the reference-frames for self-objectivation provided by his native community. The selves he presents to the world do not command his unquestionable allegiance. The question he confronts is "what I allow to be made of me by the might of others, by the training of custom, religion, the law, the state" (Stirner, 1971:55). The individual adopting this attitude is a free being. He consciously separates himself from his species, "treats himself as the actual, living species; . . . as a universal and therefore free being" (Marx, 1964:112).

The critical attitude inherent in romantic irony is not confined to self-criticism; it extends to the whole society in which a given self is rooted. The ironist withdraws his commitment from a public self and thereby facilitates the downfall of the ossified social order. At the same time, he clears the ground for new ways of going about the business of life. "For the ironic subject the given actuality has completely lost its validity; it has become for him an imperfect form which everywhere constrains. . . . The ironist, on the other hand, has advanced beyond the reach of his age and opened a front against it. That which shall come is hidden from him, concealed behind his back, but the actuality he hostilely opposes is the one he shall destroy" (Kierkegaard [1841] 1965:278).

This sociologically relevant aspect of romantic irony usually escapes attention of the critics who see in it little more than the cult of arbitrariness and self-indulgence. The mechanism of irony is the mechanism of taking the role of the other pushed to its logical extreme, turned into an instrument of social criticism. As practiced by the romantic thinkers, irony is an attempt to transcend the present social order through an act of self-alienation that is, at the same time, an act of self-discovery and self-rejuvenation. The Romantic scrutinizes his public selves and his immediate environment; he does it playfully and facetiously, though his purpose is not to make fun of others, to scorn or moralize, but to enlighten. His first target is himself and the social situation in which his self is routinely anchored. "He is not inclined to fashion himself to suit his environment, so his environment must be fashioned to suit him, that is, he not only poetically produces himself
but his environment as well” (Kierkegaard, 1965:300). The manifest playfulness of the ironic attitude is a mask that conceals the seriousness of intent. “My kind of irony,” Tieck (quoted in Mandel, 1978:14) noted, “is not a mockery, derision, persiflage . . . rather it is the deepest earnestness bound together with true merriment.” “The romantic genius,” according to Schlegel (1967:86), “is not the matter of arbitrariness but that of freedom.” “The ironist raises the individual out of immediate existence,” Kierkegaard (1965:85, 339) explains, “and this is his emancipating function. . . . He who does not understand irony and has no ear for its whisperings lacks eo ipso what might be called the absolute beginnings for the personal life, lacks the bath of rejuvenation. . . . He does not know the invigoration and fortification which, should the atmosphere become too oppressive, comes from lifting oneself up and plunging into the ocean of irony, not in order to remain there, of course, but healthily, gladly, lightly to clad oneself again.”

Mead does not employ the notion of irony when he analyzes the dual nature of the self, nor does he share the romantic propensity to view the transcendental self as a willful agent determined to bend society to its will. He adopts a biologized version of the transcendental ego which he identifies with a spontaneous, impulsive element in human behavior. Yet Mead assigns as much importance as his predecessors to the fact that man “does get out of himself,” of his familiar guises, and responds in a novel and unpredictable fashion to the situation (MSS:219). Social conduct is irreducible to social environment; it transforms the environment according to the values of the “I.” The latter, in Mead’s words (MSS:214), represents “those values which are found in the immediate attitude of the artist, the inventor, the scientist in his discovery, in general in the action . . . which cannot be calculated and which involves a reconstruction of society, and so of the ‘me’ which belongs to this society.” The antimechanistic thrust of this idea is unmistakably romantic. The self in Mead’s theory is both the product of circumstances and the product of self-determination. Whatever freedom and responsibility man enjoys in the social world, he owes to the dual nature of his self, to the reflexive mechanism of intelligence with which society has endowed the individual and which helps to transform the very society from which it derives its power.

Human society, we have insisted, does not merely stamp the pattern of its organized social behavior upon any one of its individual members, so that this pattern becomes likewise the pattern of the individual’s self; it also, at the same time, gives him a mind, as the means or ability of consciously conversing with himself. . . . And his mind enables him in turn to stamp the pattern of his further developing self (further developing through his mental activity) upon the structure or organization of human society, and thus in a degree to reconstruct and modify in terms of his self the general pattern of social or group behavior in terms of which his self was originally constituted (MSS:263n).

THE SELF AS A MICROCOSM OF THE SOCIAL MACROCOSM

The three basic tenets of Meadian theory considered above establish the self as a process, as a social structure, and as a subject and object of human activity. The final tenet to be discussed here concerns the dialectical relationship between the structure of society and the structure of self. Self and society, according to
Mead (MSS:227, 144, 309), are mutually constitutive; society enables the individual to think reflexively, and it is, in turn, perpetuated through the reflexive activity of its members; the transformation of society presupposes the transformation of the self, and vice versa: "Human society as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members; but its individual members would not possess minds and selves if these had not arisen within or emerged out of the human social process. . . . The organization and unification of a social group is identical with the organization and unification of any one of the selves arising within the social process in which this group is engaged. . . . Social reconstruction by the individual members of any organized human society entails self or personality reconstruction in some degree or other by each of these individuals, and vice versa. . . ."

The sociological theory that assumes the structural identity of self and society is a logical extension of Identitätsphilosophie, as romantic philosophy is also known. The latter presupposes the identity of self and not-self as a condition for reality's objective being. Man identifies himself with a thing and thereby transforms it into a meaningful object—a determinate thing, which functions in the capacity of a given object as long as the subject continues to identify with it. The reality is objective and meaningful insofar as it is brought into relation with the subject; its meaning is not inherent—it is socially defined and socially sustained. To be an object, in the romantic sense of the word, means to be an object of human and therefore social activity. "All the meaning of life is something that depends upon living beings, upon conscious beings, beings with eyes that paint the world in its colors, with ears that give it its resonance. It is this world that arises out of the individuals that live in it" (MT:90).

Social reality, then, is understood in romantic sociology as a special case of objective reality, i.e., reality that has no objective existence apart from the subjects who invest it with its meaning. The central thesis of Identitätsphilosophie is dramatically realized in the social domain, where objects exist so far as there are subjects prepared to identify with them. The individual identifies with a given role or class and thereby confirms its objective being. Society makes its way into objective being—becomes an object—through the self-consciousness of its members.

As seen in this perspective, the self is the true locus of society, a microcosm of the social macrocosm, a society conscious of itself. Society produces the individual, and it is at the same time produced by his conscious activity; the individual is the product and the producer of his society. The two belong together as parts of the same continuum, the continuum of the social consciousness.

. . . Just as society itself produces man as man, so is society produced by him. Activity and mind, both in their content and in their mode of existence, are social: social activity and social mind. . . . In his consciousness of species man confirms his real social life and simply repeats his real existence in thought, just as conversely the being of the species confirms itself in species-consciousness and exists for itself in its generality as a thinking being.

Man, much as he may therefore be a particular individual . . . , is just as much a totality—the ideal society—the subjective existence of thought and experienced society for itself (Marx, 1964:137–8).
The metaphor of the cosmos, extensively used by the romantic authors, is highly emblematic of their sociological thinking. Inspired by the image of the universe epitomized in its minute particles, this metaphor contrasted with the organic analogy on which classical sociology based its edifice. The familiar adage—the whole is more than the sum of its parts—tends to obscure the nature of the ties binding men to society. With equal validity one could say that a social whole is less than any of its individual members. The individual himself is a social being; he is richer than any particular social whole, for “he belongs to more than one world... traverses many systems and encircles many a sun” (Schleiermacher, 1957:47).

The individual belongs to various collective bodies, each of which depends upon its parts in a manner unparalleled in the physical universe of mechanical science: the parts of the physical body are oblivious of the life of the whole, while the parts of the social body carry in themselves a code of the whole and partake in its outward life. The social universe comes into existence as a meaningful whole when it is reflected in each of its individual parts.

This approach pulls the bottom out of the rigid dichotomy between the individual and society, between persons and institutions, between self and role. The romantic philosophers set out to overcome this dichotomy so characteristic of classical sociology through a synthesis of the opposites. The latter can be helpful abstractions if interpreted one through another, and useless, at best, if torn asunder and posited as independent entities. The state is a human affair, while the human being is a matter of state; the identity of the self is informed by society, but the unity of society is perpetuated in and through the self-identity of its members. Says Mead (MT:125), “...The Romantic philosophy pointed out that the self, while it arises in the human experience, also carries with it the very unity that makes a society possible.” Here are some variations on this theme:

Man is no abstract being squatting outside the world. Man is the world of man, the state, society. . . . Above all we must avoid postulating “Society” as abstraction vis-a-vis the individual. The individual is the social being. . . . Man’s individual and species life are not different, however much—and this is inevitable—the mode of existence of the individual is a more particular, or more general mode of the life of the species, or the life of the species is a more particular or more general individual life (Marx, 1967b:131; 1964:137–8).

Society is nothing but social life: an indivisible, thinking, and feeling person. Each man is a small society. . . . The folk is an idea. We have to become a folk. Each fully developed man is a small folk. The true folk-mindedness is man’s highest goal (Novalis, 1960:431-2).

Every individual is a system, and no other system exists. Everything is individual (Schlegel, 1963:89).

Society is a wave. The wave moves onward, but the water of which it is composed does not. . . . Society is an illusion of the young citizen. It lies before him in rigid repose, with certain names, men, and institutions, rooted like oak trees to the centre, round which all arrange themselves the best they can. But the old statesman knows that society is fluid; there are no such roots and centres; but any particle may suddenly become the centre of the movement, and compel the system to gyrate round it . . . (Emerson, 1961:64, 403).

The main thesis of romantic sociology can be summarized in this way: reason is social, society is rational. As one can readily see, this thesis has a strong
idealistic overtone incompatible with Meadian theory. Society, in the romantic
treatment, is primarily an affair of the mind and has no existence other than in
the consciousness of its individual members. For Mead, society is more than an
interplay of the minds; it is a behavioral process which is reflected in the minds
of its participants and, to some extent, modified by their conscious efforts. These
differences notwithstanding, Mead's theory, insofar as it assumes the continuity
of mind, self, and society, bears a striking resemblance to romantic social phi-
losophy. Mead's social psychology is, in effect, a behavioralized version of the
romantic teaching, where "subject-object relativity" is replaced with the "rela-
tivity of the living individual and his environment" and the "social mind" is
substituted for the "social act." The relativist element germane to the romantic
thought is fully preserved in Mead's behavioralist social psychology: "Nothing
can be an object in experience unless action is directed toward it, and nothing is
an object without the self or organism being also an object. . . . The organism,
then, is in a sense responsible for its environment. . . . Organism and environment
determine each other and are mutually dependent for their existence . . . ."
(NA:160; MSS:130).

In the sociological plane, this premise yields a proposition that humans create
a meaningful social world through their collective efforts and transform this world
in terms of their selves (MSS:130). The relationship between the individual and
his world, between self and society is, thus, a dialectical one: it is the relationship
of the micro- and macrocosms. The two exist and change simultaneously in the
course of historical evolution:

Thus the relations between social reconstruction and self or personality reconstruction are
reciprocal and internal or organic: . . . In both types of reconstruction the same fundamental
material of organized social relations among human individuals is involved, and is simply treated
in different ways, or from different angles or points of view, in the two cases respectively; or
in short, social reconstruction and self or personality reconstruction are the two sides of a single
process—the process of human evolution (MSS:309).

ROMANTICISM AND CHICAGO SOCIOLOGY

My discussion has so far concentrated on the distinct components of romantic
theory and their integration in the Meadian concept of self. In this final section,
I wish to address the romantic theory as a whole; more specifically, I would like
to draw attention to the tension endemic to its basic premises. This tension is
very much in evidence in modern heirs of Romanticism, and it may, in part, explain
the current controversy about Mead's legacy and the Chicago tradition in soci-
ology.

Man, according to the romantic thinkers, is a self-conscious creature, and as
such, he presents a paradox: he is a product of social forces, an actor caught in
the socio-historical drama, and he is also a social force himself, an author of his
social world which he shapes and reshapes continuously according to the changing
notion of his self. Being human means to be at once an object in nature and the
subject of free will. The romantic philosophers undertook to integrate these two
conflicting perspectives in a coherent intellectual framework. An effort to rec-
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oncile freedom and necessity in one overarching scheme gives romantic philosophy its flavor, its raison d'être. It also accounts for a distinctly ethical—practical—appeal that the romantic teaching had in the Age of Revolution.

Although carried out chiefly in the domain of speculative thought, the romantic undertaking was not a purely speculative endeavor. It should be understood against the backdrop of the revolutionary transformations that European societies faced in the Romantic Era. Romanticism blossomed in the aftermath of the French Revolution. Quite appropriately, Mead (MT:65, 37) describes "the romantic period as the passage from the period of the revolution" and characterizes Kant, whom he saw as a major forerunner of the Romantic movement, as "the philosopher of revolution all the way around." The dilemma of the time, according to Kant ([1803] 1904:249), was "How can subjection to lawful constraint be combined with the ability to make use of one's freedom? . . . How shall I cultivate freedom under conditions of compulsion?" Kant's query echoed the profound ambivalence of the romantic thinkers toward the French Revolution.

The Revolution deprived the traditional social order of its sanctity and undermined the common perception of man as a victim of impersonal social forces. It demonstrated that the individual is more than "the child of . . . circumstances" (Emerson, 1968:30), that "circumstances make men as much as men make circumstances" (Marx, 1963:29), that "governments are more the effect than cause of what we are" (Coleridge, 1971:330). The French Revolution offered an individual a chance to change his position in society, to shed an old and to assume a new identity. Taking the role of the other, thus, became a practical possibility for an ever-growing number of men from different social strata. Hence, the familiar notion of man-taking-charge of his own destiny.

At the same time, the Revolution taught the Romantics a different lesson. It furnished ample proof that the social order is anything but mechanical, that the state is "an individual totality, of which you cannot select any particular side, . . . and deliberate and decide it in that isolated form" (Hegel [1837] 1956:46). There are limits to man's power and freedom vis-à-vis society; whenever he tries to impose his will on the community by force, mechanically, he is bound to be disappointed. For the relationship between the individual and society is organic. Social institutions are habits of thought and action, not independent entities hovering above individuals; they cannot be dismantled and replaced with new ones by fiat or revolutionary decree apart from real individuals who make them work; their change is gradual, it involves an intimate core of personality which harbors the program of the whole society, and it can be best described as "growth." As seen in this perspective, man is a social being; his thoughts and actions are social through and through; he belongs to a historical epoch and leaves a mark on it only if his thoughts and actions are in accord with the intrinsic logic of its organic growth.

The grand ambition of the romantic philosophers was to synthesize these antithetical positions. Their undertaking signified an important departure from the classical rationalist tradition. Alas, it was only partially successful. The failure to achieve a lasting synthesis is manifested in a persistent strain among the romantic thinkers. The more conservative of them layed a heavy emphasis on the
social origin of self and organic nature of society; others, with a more radical disposition, glorified freedom and saw in ironic self-transcendence a generic feature of man. Not surprisingly, contemporary scholars are divided on the question of the Romantics' political affiliation: some cast Romanticism as a conservative movement inspired by the failures of the French Revolution (Mannheim, 1971; Zeitlin, 1968), while others stress its affinity with the ideals of the Revolution and its radical implications (Breines, 1977; Löwy, 1981). Close examination reveals, however, that Romanticism does not yield to an unambiguous identification; it combines conservative and radical elements which are often asserted side by side, in the same work, by the same author. What else can we expect from the movement that aspired to incorporate "the very process of revolution into the order of society" (MT:361)?

The tension inherent in the premises of romantic theory was never fully resolved. It persisted into the 20th century and is clearly discernible in Mead's writings. In a most conspicuous way this inner strain has surfaced in the current debates about Mead's social psychology and his relation to Chicago sociology (Lewis, 1976, 1977; Blumer, 1977, 1980; McPhail and Rexroat, 1979, 1980; Lewis and Smith, 1980. See also the Symbolic Interaction special commemorative issue on Mead, especially articles by Lewis, 1981; Johnson and Shifflet, 1981; and Stewart, 1981). Space constraints do not permit a full-scale discussion of this controversy. Yet some of the key issues on which the traditionalist-Blumerian and objectivist-revisionist interpreters of Mead disagree deserve to be mentioned here, for they clearly reflect the dialectical tenets of romantic and interactionist thought.

The voluntaristic underpinnings of interactionist sociology come to the fore in the interpretation of Mead propounded by Blumer (1969) and Gouldner (1973). Following the radical current in the romantic tradition, the sociologists geared to this interpretation insist that "the self is not a passive recipient of outside forms but is, rather, an active and selective agent, changing itself as it acts upon and toward others" (Gouldner, 1973:348). Social conduct, for them, is: "a formative process in its own right," "conduct which is shaped by the actor" (Blumer, 1969:53, 63), "a wonderful putting on and taking off of character" (Goffman, 1959:121). The relationship between Romanticism, Mead's social psychology and Chicago sociology, as seen from this angle, is articulated by Gouldner (1973:348): "The major transmission belt for the saturation of the Chicago perspective by Romanticism was the social psychology of George Herbert Mead as developed by Herbert Blumer."

This interpretation is vigorously disputed by McPhail and Rexroat (1979) and Lewis and Smith (1980), whose reading of Mead is consistent with the conservative current in romantic thought. What is likely to be stressed in the works of these authors is that "the structure of society determines the structure of individual selves, not vice versa," that "social conduct is an expression of the objective meaning structure of the social group with reference to which it occurs" (Lewis and Smith, 1980:142, 141). Those favoring this interpretation tend to minimize Mead's influence on the Chicago School of sociology, arguing that "Mead
was a marginal figure in the intellectual history of Chicago sociology” (Lewis and Smith, 1980:189).

Interestingly enough, both groups of sociologists find the justification for their position in Mead’s writings. Both insist on the authenticity of their version of Mead’s social interactionism. And both, in my opinion, tend to overlook the dialectical tenets of Meadian theory which absorbed the conflicting assumptions of romantic philosophy.

This is how Mead (MT:361) defined the key problem of society in chapter XVI of Movements of Thought, after he completed his exposition of Nineteenth century romantic thought and began to define its relevance to the Twentieth century social science: “That is the problem of society, is not it? How can you present order and structure in society and bring about the changes that need to take place, are taking place? How can you bring those changes about in orderly fashion and yet preserve order?” This question, Mead (Ibid.) points out, is a direct outgrowth of the French Revolution and of the Romantic movement that sought to safeguard revolutionary ideals without recourse to revolutionary violence. A theory that holds the individual to be simultaneously a product and a producer of society is a sociological counterpart of this movement. Whether or not Mead succeeded in reconciling the contradictory premises is debatable. What seems to be clear is that he continued the search for a dialectical synthesis initiated by his romantic predecessors.

Reflexiveness and self-transcendence are patently intraindividual phenomena, and yet they are social in their origin and form. Society is external and intraindividual in its immediate mode of existence, and yet it is inexorably linked to the individual’s extraordinary capacity to take the role of the other and interact with himself. These, according to Mead, are the two sides of the same socio-historical process. Any interpretation of Mead’s theory that ignores the dialectical facet of his thought is bound to be one-sided.

The interpretation that starts with the individual fully equipped with self-consciousness and reflexively plotting his action in society does not do justice to the Meadian premise according to which “for social psychology, the whole (society) is prior to the part (the individual), not the part to the whole; and the part is explained in terms of the whole, not the whole in terms of the part” (MSS:7). The critics of this interpretation, on the other hand, tend to forget that Mead’s writings contain not only social psychology but also a sociology which is incompatible with the classical approach that postulates society as a reality sui generis or an entity existing independently of and prior to individuals. Mead asserted this thesis repeatedly and with great urgency. “Society,” he pointed out, “exists in the social nature of its members, and the social nature of its members exists in their assumption of the organized attitudes of others”; “it is only the organization of a group as the attitude of the individual organism toward itself that gives rise to the self, and it is the activity of the self . . . that is responsible for the peculiar organization of a human community”; and finally, “human society as we know it could not exist without minds and selves, since all its most characteristic features presuppose the possession of minds and selves by its individual members” (SW:341; PA:625; MSS:227). Society qua human society presupposes self-con-
sciousness as much as self consciousness presupposes society. The circle involved in this reasoning is neither unintended nor vicious—it is a hermeneutical circle that entails an affirmation of antithetical statements of equal validity and that reflects a never-ending quest, endemic to Western civilization (Weigart, 1975:58), for a social order compatible with dignity and freedom of its individual members. Sociologists associated with the Chicago School are among the heirs of this intellectual tradition.

Just as their predecessors, they may have a tendency to (over)emphasize one side of the coin: some (Faris, Park) showed a greater concern in their research with the influence of social environment on the formation of human personality; others (Thomas, Blumer) pursued the reverse flow of determination from the individual to society. Yet none of them denied the validity of the opposite perspective, and all (to various degree) strived to live up to the aspirations of their romantic predecessors. This dialectical orientation is still a trademark of the sociologists who, regardless of their geographical affiliation, substantive differences, and personal disagreements, remain faithful to the spirit of the Chicago tradition in American sociology.

NOTES

1. Gouldner’s programmatic article on romanticism and sociology (1973) is still perhaps the best introductory statement on the relevance of the issues involved. Gouldner urged a series of studies on the romantic influence in the social sciences and would have probably extended his own research, had it not been for his untimely death. The relationship between romantic philosophy and interactionist-interpretative sociology is discussed in Shalin (1978, 1983). The role of the German intellectual tradition in the formation of Meadian thought is analyzed in Joas (1980, 1981).

2. The following abbreviations of Mead’s works are adopted in this paper: MT stands for Movements of Thought in the Nineteenth Century (1936); MSS for Mind, Self, and Society (1934); PA for Philosophy of the Act (1938); and SW for Selected Writings. George Herbert Mead, a collection of essays by Mead edited by A. J. Reck (1964).

3. In my discussion of Romanticism I follow the tradition established by Josiah Royce (1899) and George Mead (1936), who tied romantic philosophy to the movement initiated in Germany by Kant, Fichte, Schelling, Schlegel, and Hegel and continued in other countries, including the USA, where it was championed by the members of the Concord School led by Ralph Waldo Emerson. This approach raises a number of methodological problems that cannot be fully addressed here. The most serious one is how we go about identifying a romantic philosopher proper. It should be stressed that the term “romantic” as used in this paper is not a property of a thinker, but a predicate that we assign to an author on a particular occasion without claiming that he is a bona fide Romantic. Romanticism, then, is conceived here as a discourse. Different thinkers participated in the romantic discourse, borrowed from it idioms and meanings, and variously contributed to its development. The important implication of this precept is that a writer can make recourse to alternative discourses, that he contributes to conflicting currents of thoughts and appears in more than one disguise. Thus Kant’s rigorism, Hegel’s objectivism, and Marx’s materialism are incompatible with the romantic discourse. At the same time, Kant’s relativism, Hegel’s dialectical method, and Marx’s treatment of reification are distinctly romantic. For further discussion see Barzun (1961:9), Furst (1969:60), and Caponigri (1970:8).

4. Kierkegaard employs the terms “romantic” and “ironic” as interchangeable: “... I use the expressions: irony and the ironist, but I could as easily say: romanticism and the romanticist” (1965:292).

5. Characteristically, Mead invokes Leibnitz’s metaphor of a monad reflecting the universe—a metaphor favored by the Romantics—when he discusses the relationship between the individual and society (MSS:201).
6. Thus Hegel and Marx, the two thinkers strongly influenced by the romantic thought, sided toward the end of their intellectual careers with the conservative view that society, as well as nature, is governed by "natural laws . . . working with iron necessity to inevitable results" (Marx, 1967a:8). Stirner, Emerson, and Kierkegaard, on the other hand, became progressively disenchanted with the Hegelian objectivism and turned to an opposite extreme. "I am the creative nothing," exclaimed Stirner, "the nothing out of which I myself as creator create everything" (1971:41). In his pursuit of "the whole of freedom, freedom from everything" (Ibid.:115) Stirner and other existentially-minded Romantics tended to confuse the freedom of self-objectivation with the freedom from self-objectivation.

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