

Tenacity: The Art of Letting the Science of ‘Informed Naivety’ Evolve

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ABSTRACT

This essay reclaims the transcendental “superorganism” concept advanced by Carl O. Sauer and Alfred Kroeber as a precursor to the meta modernist ideal of “informed naivety.” Drawing on Charles Sanders Peirce’s abductive logic and his notion of “tenacity,” the essay argues for a renewed academic ethos—one that embraces paradox, intuition, and cultural holism as vital traits for a more humane social science in higher education.

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Introduction

The Discontents of Reductionism

In the wake of postmodern skepticism and the rise of technocratic rationalism, the social sciences have often abandoned their transcendental roots. Sauer and Kroeber’s vision of culture as a superorganic entity a living, evolving whole greater than the sum of its parts was derided by critics such as Derek Gregory and the “new” cultural geographers as naïve, essentialist, or unscientific. Yet in the metamodern era, such naivety may no longer be a flaw, but a philosophical virtue.

The Superorganism and Its Critics

Sauer and Kroeber, working at the University of California, Berkeley, envisioned culture as a transcendent ecology of meaning, shaped by geography, history, and collective memory.

Their detractors, armed with structuralist and poststructuralist tools, dismantled this vision in favor of fragmented, deconstructed, and hyper-contextualized models. But what was lost in this shift was a sense of cultural wholeness, of ethical imagination, and of tenacious belief in the human spirit.

Informed Naivety

A Metamodern Reclamation

Meta modernism, as a post-postmodern sensibility, oscillates between irony and sincerity, skepticism and hope. Its concept of informed naivety the deliberate embrace of idealism despite knowing its limitations mirrors Sauer and Kroeber’s transcendentalism. Their superorganism was not a static essence but a dynamic field of cultural possibility. Informed naivety allows us to re-engage with such visions, not as dogma, but as ethical orientation.

Peirce’s Abduction and The Logic of Tenacity

Charles Sanders Peirce, the father of American pragmatism, introduced abduction as a third mode of reasoning distinct from

deduction and induction. Abduction is the logic of creative inference, of guessing the unseen from the seen. It is the logic of the poet, the geographer, the anthropologist. Peirce also spoke of tenacity the stubborn clinging to belief in the face of doubt as a necessary trait for intellectual progress.

In this light, Sauer and Kroeber’s superorganism was an abductive hypothesis: a poetic, intuitive model of culture that resisted reduction. Their tenacity was not ignorance it was epistemic courage.

Toward a Humane Social Science

to reclaim tenacity today is to resist the flattening of human experience into data points and algorithms. It is to defend the ethical imagination of scholars who dare to see culture as sacred, as interconnected, as meaningful. Informed naivety, abductive reasoning, and transcendental vision are not relics they are tools for rehumanizing academia [1-6].

Conclusion

Tenacity as Academic Praxis

Let us be tenacious not in clinging to outdated models, but in defending the right to imagine. Let us teach students not only how to critique, but how to care. In the spirit of Sauer, Kroeber, and Peirce, let us embrace the superorganism not as a doctrine, but as a metamodern metaphor for the living, breathing complexity of human culture.

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