

# The Social Construction of Reality

A TREATISE IN  
THE SOCIOLOGY OF KNOWLEDGE

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# *I. The Foundations of Knowledge in Everyday Life*

## 1. THE REALITY OF EVERYDAY LIFE

Since our purpose in this treatise is a sociological analysis of the reality of everyday life, more precisely, of knowledge that guides conduct in everyday life, and we are only tangentially interested in how this reality may appear in various theoretical perspectives to intellectuals, we must begin by a clarification of that reality as it is available to the common-sense of the ordinary members of society. How that common-sense reality may be influenced by the theoretical constructions of intellectuals and other merchants of ideas is a further question. Ours is thus an enterprise that, although theoretical in character, is geared to the understanding of a reality that forms the subject matter of the empirical science of sociology, that is, the world of everyday life.

It should be evident, then, that our purpose is *not* to engage in philosophy. All the same, if the reality of everyday life is to be understood, account must be taken of its intrinsic character before we can proceed with sociological analysis proper. Everyday life presents itself as a reality interpreted by men and subjectively meaningful to them as a coherent world. As sociologists we take this reality as the object of our analyses. Within the frame of reference of sociology as an empirical science it is possible to take this reality as given, to take as data particular phenomena arising within it, without further inquiring about the foundations of this reality, which is a philosophical task. However, given the particular purpose of the present treatise, we cannot completely bypass the philosophical problem. The world of everyday life is not only taken for granted as reality by the ordinary members of society in the subjectively meaningful conduct of their

lives. It is a world that originates in their thoughts and actions, and is maintained as real by these. Before turning to our main task we must, therefore, attempt to clarify the foundations of knowledge in everyday life, to wit, the objectivations of subjective processes (and meanings) by which the intersubjective commonsense world is constructed.

For the purpose at hand, this is a preliminary task, and we can do no more than sketch the main features of what we believe to be an adequate solution to the philosophical problem—adequate, let us hasten to add, only in the sense that it can serve as a starting point for sociological analysis. The considerations immediately following are, therefore, of the nature of philosophical prolegomena and, in themselves, pre-sociological. The method we consider best suited to clarify the foundations of knowledge in everyday life is that of phenomenological analysis, a purely descriptive method and, as such, “empirical” but not “scientific”—as we understand the nature of the empirical sciences.<sup>1</sup>

The phenomenological analysis of everyday life, or rather of the subjective experience of everyday life, refrains from any causal or genetic hypotheses, as well as from assertions about the ontological status of the phenomena analyzed. It is important to remember this. *Commonsense* contains innumerable pre- and quasi-scientific interpretations about everyday reality, which it takes for granted. If we are to describe the reality of commonsense we must refer to these interpretations, just as we must take account of its taken-for-granted character—but we do so within phenomenological brackets.

Consciousness is always intentional; it always intends or is directed toward objects. We can never apprehend some putative substratum of consciousness as such, only consciousness of something or other. This is so regardless of whether the object of consciousness is experienced as belonging to an external physical world or apprehended as an element of an inward subjective reality. Whether I (the first person singular, here as in the following illustrations, standing for ordinary self-consciousness in everyday life) am viewing the panorama of New York City or whether I become conscious of an inner anxiety, the processes of consciousness involved are intentional in both instances. The point need not be belatedly

bored that the consciousness of the Empire State Building differs from the awareness of anxiety. A detailed phenomenological analysis would uncover the various layers of experience, and the different structures of meaning involved in, say, being bitten by a dog, remembering having been bitten by a dog, having a phobia about all dogs, and so forth. What interests us here is the common intentional character of all consciousness.

Different objects present themselves to consciousness, as constituents of different spheres of reality. I recognize the fellowmen I must deal with in the course of everyday life as pertaining to a reality quite different from the disembodied figures that appear in my dreams. The two sets of objects introduce quite different tensions into my consciousness and I am attentive to them in quite different ways. My consciousness, then, is capable of moving through different spheres of reality. Put differently, I am conscious of the world as consisting of multiple realities. As I move from one reality to another, I experience the transition as a kind of shock. This shock is to be understood as caused by the shift in attentiveness that the transition entails. Waking up from a dream illustrates this shift most simply.

Among the multiple realities there is one that presents itself as the reality *par excellence*. This is the reality of everyday life. Its privileged position entitles it to the designation of paramount reality. The tension of consciousness is highest in everyday life, that is, the latter imposes itself upon consciousness in the most massive, urgent and intense manner. It is impossible to ignore, difficult even to weaken in its imperative presence. Consequently, it forces me to be attentive to it in the fullest way. I experience everyday life in the state of being wide-awake. This wide-awake state of existing in and apprehending the reality of everyday life is taken by me to be normal and self-evident, that is, it constitutes my natural attitude.

I apprehend the reality of everyday life as an ordered reality. Its phenomena are prearranged in patterns that seem to be independent of my apprehension of them and that impose themselves upon the latter. The reality of everyday life appears already objectified, that is, constituted by an order of

objects that have been designated *as* objects before my appearance on the scene. The language used in everyday life continuously provides me with the necessary objectifications and posits the order within which these make sense and within which everyday life has meaning for me. I live in a place that is geographically designated; I employ tools, from can openers to sports cars, which are designated in the technical vocabulary of my society; I live within a web of human relationships, from my chess club to the United States of America, which are also ordered by means of vocabulary. In this manner language marks the co-ordinates of my life in society and fills that life with meaningful objects.

The reality of everyday life is organized around the "here" of my body and the "now" of my present. This "here and now" is the focus of my attention to the reality of everyday life. What is "here and now" presented to me in everyday life is the *realissimum* of my consciousness. The reality of everyday life is not, however, exhausted by these immediate presences, but embraces phenomena that are not present "here and now." This means that I experience everyday life in terms of differing degrees of closeness and remoteness, both spatially and temporally. Closest to me is the *zone of everyday life* that is directly accessible to my bodily manipulation. This zone contains the world within my reach, the world in which I act so as to modify its reality, or the world in which I work. In this world of working my consciousness is dominated by the pragmatic motive, that is, my attention to this world is mainly determined by what I am doing, have done or plan to do in it. In this way it is *my world par excellence*. I know, of course, that the reality of everyday life contains zones that are not accessible to me in this manner. But either I have no pragmatic interest in these zones or my interest in them is indirect insofar as they may be, potentially, manipulative zones for me. Typically, my interest in the far zones is less intense and certainly less urgent. I am intensely interested in the cluster of objects involved in my daily occupation—say, the world of the garage, if I am a mechanic. I am interested, though less directly, in what goes on in the testing laboratories of the automobile industry in Detroit—I am unlikely ever to be in one of these laboratories, but the

work done there will eventually affect my everyday life. I may also be interested in what goes on at Cape Kennedy or in outer space, but this interest is a matter of private, "leisure-time" choice rather than an urgent necessity of my everyday life.

The reality of everyday life further presents itself to me as an intersubjective world, a world that I share with others. This intersubjectivity sharply differentiates everyday life from other realities of which I am conscious. I am alone in the world of my dreams, but I know that the world of everyday life is as real to others as it is to myself. Indeed, I cannot exist in everyday life without continually interacting and communicating with others. I know that my natural attitude to this world corresponds to the natural attitude of others, that they also comprehend the objectifications by which this world is ordered, that they also organize this world around the "here and now" of *their* being in it and have projects for working in it. I also know, of course, that the others have a perspective on this common world that is not identical with mine. My "here" is their "there." My "now" does not fully overlap with theirs. My projects differ from and may even conflict with theirs. All the same, I know that I live with them in a common world. Most importantly, I know that there is an ongoing correspondence between *my* meanings and *their* meanings in this world, that we share a common sense about its reality. The natural attitude is the attitude of commonsense consciousness precisely because it refers to a world that is common to many men. Commonsense knowledge is the knowledge I share with others in the normal, self-evident routines of everyday life.

The reality of everyday life is taken for granted *as* reality. It does not require additional verification over and beyond its simple presence. It is simply *there*, as self-evident and compelling facticity. I *know* that it is real. While I am capable of engaging in doubt about its reality, I am obliged to suspend such doubt as I routinely exist in everyday life. This suspension of doubt is so firm that to abandon it, as I might want to do, say, in theoretical or religious contemplation, I have to make an extreme transition. The world of everyday life proclaims itself and, when I want to challenge the procla-

mation, I must engage in a deliberate, by no means easy effort. The transition from the natural attitude to the theoretical attitude of the philosopher or scientist illustrates this point. But not all aspects of this reality are equally unproblematic. *Everyday life is divided into sectors that are apprehended routinely, and others that present me with problems of one kind or another.* Suppose that I am an automobile mechanic who is highly knowledgeable about all American-made cars. Everything that pertains to the latter is a routine, unproblematic facet of my everyday life. But one day someone appears in the garage and asks me to repair his Volkswagen. I am now compelled to enter the problematic world of foreign-made cars. I may do so reluctantly or with professional curiosity, but in either case I am now faced with problems that I have not yet routinized. At the same time, of course, I *do not leave the reality of everyday life.* Indeed, the latter becomes enriched as I begin to incorporate into it the knowledge and skills required for the repair of foreign-made cars. The reality of everyday life encompasses both kinds of sectors, as long as what appears as a problem does not pertain to a different reality altogether (say, the reality of theoretical physics, or of nightmares). As long as the routines of everyday life continue without interruption they are apprehended as unproblematic.

But even the unproblematic sector of everyday reality is so only until further notice, that is, until its continuity is interrupted by the appearance of a problem. When this happens, the reality of everyday life seeks to integrate the problematic sector into what is already unproblematic. Commonsense knowledge contains a variety of instructions as to how this is to be done. For instance, the others with whom I work are unproblematic to me as long as they perform their familiar, taken-for-granted routines—say, typing away at desks next to mine in my office. They become problematic if they interrupt these routines—say, huddling together in a corner and talking in whispers. As I inquire about the meaning of this unusual activity, there is a variety of possibilities that my commonsense knowledge is capable of reintegrating into the unproblematic routines of everyday life: they may be consulting on how to fix a broken typewriter, or one of them may have



some urgent instructions from the boss, and so on. On the other hand, I may find that they are discussing a union directive to go on strike, something as yet outside my experience but still well within the range of problems with which my commonsense knowledge can deal. It will deal with it, though, as a problem, rather than simply reintegrating it into the unproblematic sector of everyday life. If, however, I come to the conclusion that my colleagues have gone collectively mad, the problem that presents itself is of yet another kind. I am now faced with a problem that transcends the boundaries of the reality of everyday life and points to an altogether different reality. Indeed, my conclusion that my colleagues have gone mad implies *ipso facto* that they have gone off into a world that is no longer the common world of everyday life.

Compared to the reality of everyday life, other realities appear as finite provinces of meaning, enclaves within the paramount reality marked by circumscribed meanings and modes of experience. The paramount reality envelops them on all sides, as it were, and consciousness always returns to the paramount reality as from an excursion. This is evident from the illustrations already given, as in the reality of dreams or that of theoretical thought. Similar "commutations" take place between the world of everyday life and the world of play, both the playing of children and, even more sharply, of adults. The theater provides an excellent illustration of such playing on the part of adults. The transition between realities is marked by the rising and falling of the curtain. As the curtain rises, the spectator is "transported to another world," with its own meanings and an order that may or may not have much to do with the order of everyday life. As the curtain falls, the spectator "returns to reality," that is, to the paramount reality of everyday life by comparison with which the reality presented on the stage now appears tenuous and ephemeral, however vivid the presentation may have been a few moments previously. Aesthetic and religious experience is rich in producing transitions of this kind, inasmuch as art and religion are endemic producers of finite provinces of meaning.

All finite provinces of meaning are characterized by a turning away of attention from the reality of everyday life. While

there are, of course, shifts in attention *within* everyday life, the shift to a finite province of meaning is of a much more radical kind. A radical change takes place in the tension of consciousness. In the context of religious experience this has been aptly called "leaping." It is important to stress, however, that the reality of everyday life retains its paramount status even as such "leaps" take place. If nothing else, language makes sure of this. The common language available to me for the objectification of my experiences is grounded in everyday life and keeps pointing back to it even as I employ it to interpret experiences in finite provinces of meaning. Typically, therefore, I "distort" the reality of the latter as soon as I begin to use the common language in interpreting them, that is, I "translate" the non-everyday experiences back into the paramount reality of everyday life. This may be readily seen in terms of dreams, but is also typical of those trying to report about theoretical, aesthetic or religious worlds of meaning. The theoretical physicist tells us that his concept of space cannot be conveyed linguistically, just as the artist does with regard to the meaning of his creations and the mystic with regard to his encounters with the divine. Yet all these—dreamer, physicist, artist and mystic—also live in the reality of everyday life. Indeed, one of their important problems is to interpret the coexistence of this reality with the reality enclaves into which they have ventured.

The world of everyday life is structured both spatially and temporally. The spatial structure is quite peripheral to our present considerations. Suffice it to point out that it, too, has a social dimension by virtue of the fact that my manipulatory zone intersects with that of others. More important for our present purpose is the temporal structure of everyday life.

Temporality is an intrinsic property of consciousness. The stream of consciousness is always ordered temporally. It is possible to differentiate between different levels of this temporality as it is intrasubjectively available. Every individual is conscious of an inner flow of time, which in turn is founded on the physiological rhythms of the organism though it is not identical with these. It would greatly exceed the scope of these prolegomena to enter into a detailed analysis of these levels of intrasubjective temporality. As we have indicated,

however, intersubjectivity in everyday life also has a temporal dimension. The world of everyday life has its own standard time, which is intersubjectively available. This standard time may be understood as the intersection between cosmic time and its socially established calendar, based on the temporal sequences of nature, and inner time, in its aforementioned differentiations. There can never be full simultaneity between these various levels of temporality, as the experience of waiting indicates most clearly. Both my organism and my society impose upon me, and upon my inner time, certain sequences of events that involve waiting. I may want to take part in a sports event, but I must wait for my bruised knee to heal. Or again, I must wait until certain papers are processed so that my qualification for the event may be officially established. It may readily be seen that the temporal structure of everyday life is exceedingly complex, because the different levels of empirically present temporality must be ongoingly correlated.

The temporal structure of everyday life confronts me as a facticity with which I must reckon, that is, with which I must try to synchronize my own projects. I encounter time in everyday reality as continuous and finite. All my existence in this world is continuously ordered by its time, is indeed enveloped by it. My own life is an episode in the externally factitious stream of time. It was there before I was born and it will be there after I die. The knowledge of my inevitable death makes this time finite *for me*. I have only a certain amount of time available for the realization of my projects, and the knowledge of this affects my attitude to these projects. Also, since I do not want to die, this knowledge injects an underlying anxiety into my projects. Thus I cannot endlessly repeat my participation in sports events. I know that I am getting older. It may even be that this is the last occasion on which I have the chance to participate. My waiting will be anxious to the degree in which the finitude of time impinges upon the project.

The same temporal structure, as has already been indicated, is coercive. I cannot reverse at will the sequences imposed by it—"first things first" is an essential element of my knowledge of everyday life. Thus I cannot take a certain

examination before I have passed through certain educational programs, I cannot practice my profession before I have taken this examination, and so on. Also, the same temporal structure provides the historicity that determines my situation in the world of everyday life. I was born on a certain date, entered school on another, started working as a professional on another, and so on. These dates, however, are all "located" within a much more comprehensive history, and this "location" decisively shapes my situation. Thus I was born in the year of the great bank crash in which my father lost his wealth, I entered school just before the revolution, I began to work just after the great war broke out, and so forth. The temporal structure of everyday life not only imposes prearranged sequences upon the "agenda" of any single day but also imposes itself upon my biography as a whole. Within the co-ordinates set by this temporal structure I apprehend both daily "agenda" and overall biography. Clock and calendar ensure that, indeed, I am a "man of my time." Only within this temporal structure does everyday life retain for me its accent of reality. Thus in cases where I may be "disoriented" for one reason or another (say, I have been in an automobile accident in which I was knocked unconscious), I feel an almost instinctive urge to "reorient" myself within the temporal structure of everyday life. I look at my watch and try to recall what day it is. By these acts alone I re-enter the reality of everyday life.

## 2. SOCIAL INTERACTION IN EVERYDAY LIFE

The reality of everyday life is shared with others. But how are these others themselves experienced in everyday life? Again, it is possible to differentiate between several modes of such experience.

The most important experience of others takes place in the face-to-face situation, which is the prototypical case of social interaction. All other cases are derivatives of it.

In the face-to-face situation the other is appresented to me in a vivid present shared by both of us. I know that in the same vivid present I am appresented to him. My and his

"here and now" continuously impinge on each other as long as the face-to-face situation continues. As a result, there is a continuous interchange of my expressivity and his. I see him smile, then react to my frown by stopping the smile, then smiling again as I smile, and so on. Every expression of mine is oriented toward him, and vice versa, and this continuous reciprocity of expressive acts is simultaneously available to both of us. This means that, in the face-to-face situation, the other's subjectivity is available to me through a maximum of symptoms. To be sure, I may misinterpret some of these symptoms. I may think that the other is smiling while in fact he is smirking. Nevertheless, no other form of social relating can reproduce the plenitude of symptoms of subjectivity present in the face-to-face situation. Only here is the other's subjectivity emphatically "close." All other forms of relating to the other are, in varying degrees, "remote."

In the face-to-face situation the other is fully real. This reality is part of the overall reality of everyday life, and as such massive and compelling. To be sure, another may be real to me without my having encountered him face to face—by reputation, say, or by having corresponded with him. Nevertheless, he becomes real to me in the fullest sense of the word only when I meet him face to face. Indeed, it may be argued that the other in the face-to-face situation is more real to me than I myself. Of course I "know myself better" than I can ever know him. My subjectivity is accessible to me in a way his can never be, no matter how "close" our relationship. My past is available to me in memory in a fullness with which I can never reconstruct his, however much he may tell me about it. But this "better knowledge" of myself requires reflection. It is not immediately appresented to me. The other, however, is so appresented in the face-to-face situation. "What he is," therefore, is ongoingly available to me. This availability is continuous and prereflective. On the other hand, "What I am" is *not* so available. To make it available requires that I stop, arrest the continuous spontaneity of my experience, and deliberately turn my attention back upon myself. What is more, such reflection about myself is typically occasioned by the attitude toward me that

*the other* exhibits. It is typically a "mirror" response to attitudes of the other.

It follows that relations with others in the face-to-face situation are highly flexible. Put negatively, it is comparatively difficult to impose rigid patterns upon face-to-face interaction. Whatever patterns are introduced will be continuously modified through the exceedingly variegated and subtle interchange of subjective meanings that goes on. For instance, I may view the other as someone inherently unfriendly to me and act toward him within a pattern of "unfriendly relations" as understood by me. In the face-to-face situation, however, the other may confront me with attitudes and acts that contradict this pattern, perhaps up to a point where I am led to abandon the pattern as inapplicable and to view him as friendly. In other words, the pattern cannot sustain the massive evidence of the other's subjectivity that is available to me in the face-to-face situation. By contrast, it is much easier for me to ignore such evidence as long as I do not encounter the other face to face. Even in such a relatively "close" relation as may be maintained by correspondence I can more successfully dismiss the other's protestations of friendship as not actually representing his subjective attitude to me, simply because in correspondence I lack the immediate, continuous and massively real presence of his expressivity. It is, to be sure, possible for me to misinterpret the other's meanings even in the face-to-face situation, as it is possible for him "hypocritically" to hide his meanings. All the same, both misinterpretation and "hypocrisy" are more difficult to sustain in face-to-face interaction than in less "close" forms of social relations.

On the other hand, I apprehend the other by means of typificatory schemes even in the face-to-face situation, although these schemes are more "vulnerable" to his interference than in "remoter" forms of interaction. Put differently, while it is comparatively difficult to impose rigid patterns on face-to-face interaction, even it is patterned from the beginning if it takes place within the routines of everyday life. (We can leave aside for later consideration cases of interaction between complete strangers who have no common background of everyday life.) The reality of everyday life contains

typificatory schemes in terms of which others are apprehended and "dealt with" in face-to-face encounters. Thus I apprehend the other as "a man," "a European," "a buyer," "a jovial type," and so on. All these typifications ongoingly affect my interaction with him as, say, I decide to show him a good time on the town before trying to sell him my product. Our face-to-face interaction will be patterned by these typifications as long as they do not become problematic through interference on his part. Thus he may come up with evidence that, although "a man," "a European" and "a buyer," he is also a self-righteous moralist, and that what appeared first as joviality is actually an expression of contempt for Americans in general and American salesmen in particular. At this point, of course, my typificatory scheme will have to be modified, and the evening planned differently in accordance with this modification. Unless thus challenged, though, the typifications will hold until further notice and will determine my actions in the situation.

The typificatory schemes entering into face-to-face situations are, of course, reciprocal. The other also apprehends me in a typified way—as "a man," "an American," "a salesman," "an ingratiating fellow," and so on. The other's typifications are as susceptible to my interference as mine are to his. In other words, the two typificatory schemes enter into an ongoing "negotiation" in the face-to-face situation. In everyday life such "negotiation" is itself likely to be prearranged in a typical manner—as in the typical bargaining process between buyers and salesmen. Thus, most of the time, my encounters with others in everyday life are typical in a double sense—I apprehend the other *as* a type and I interact with him in a situation that is itself typical.

The typifications of social interaction become progressively anonymous the farther away they are from the face-to-face situation. Every typification, of course, entails incipient anonymity. If I typify my friend Henry as a member of category X (say, as an Englishman), I *ipso facto* interpret at least certain aspects of his conduct as resulting from this typification—for instance, his tastes in food are typical of Englishmen, as are his manners, certain of his emotional reactions, and so on. This implies, though, that these characteristics and ac-

tions of my friend Henry appertain to *anyone* in the category of Englishman; that is, I apprehend these aspects of his being in anonymous terms. Nevertheless, as long as my friend Henry is available in the plenitude of expressivity of the face-to-face situation, he will constantly break through my *type of anonymous Englishman* and manifest himself as a unique and therefore atypical individual—to wit, as my friend Henry. The anonymity of the type is obviously less susceptible to this kind of individualization when face-to-face interaction is a matter of the past (my friend Henry, *the Englishman*, whom I knew when I was a college student), or is of a superficial and transient kind (the Englishman with whom I have a brief conversation on a train), or has never taken place (my business competitors in England).

An important aspect of the experience of others in everyday life is thus the directness or indirectness of such experience. At any given time it is possible to distinguish between consociates with whom I interact in face-to-face situations and others who are mere contemporaries, of whom I have only more or less detailed recollections, or of whom I know merely by hearsay. In face-to-face situations I have direct evidence of my fellowman, of his actions, his attributes, and so on. Not so in the case of contemporaries—of them I have more or less reliable knowledge. Furthermore, I must take account of my fellowmen in face-to-face situations, while I may, but need not, turn my thoughts to mere contemporaries. Anonymity increases as I go from the former to the latter, because the anonymity of the typifications by means of which I apprehend fellowmen in face-to-face situations is constantly “filled in” by the multiplicity of vivid symptoms referring to a concrete human being.

This, of course, is not the whole story. There are obvious differences in my experiences of mere contemporaries. Some I have experienced again and again in face-to-face situations and expect to meet again regularly (my friend Henry); others I *recollect* as concrete human beings from a past meeting (the blonde I passed on the street), but the meeting was brief and, most likely, will not be repeated. Still others I *know of* as concrete human beings, but I can apprehend them only by means of more or less anonymous intersecting typifications



(my British business competitors, the Queen of England). Among the latter one could again distinguish between likely partners in face-to-face situations (my British business competitors), and potential but unlikely partners (the Queen of England).

The degree of anonymity characterizing the experience of others in everyday life depends, however, upon another factor too. I see the newspaper vendor on the street corner as regularly as I see my wife. But he is less important to me and I am not on intimate terms with him. He may remain relatively anonymous to me. The degree of interest and the degree of intimacy may combine to increase or decrease anonymity of experience. They may also influence it independently. I can be on fairly intimate terms with a number of the fellow-members of a tennis club and on very formal terms with my boss. Yet the former, while by no means completely anonymous, may merge into "that bunch at the courts" while the latter stands out as a unique individual. And finally, anonymity may become near-total with certain typifications that are not intended ever to become individualized—such as the "typical reader of the *London Times*." Finally, the "scope" of the typification—and thereby its anonymity—can be further increased by speaking of "British public opinion."

The social reality of everyday life is thus apprehended in a continuum of typifications, which are progressively anonymous as they are removed from the "here and now" of the face-to-face situation. At one pole of the continuum are those others with whom I frequently and intensively interact in face-to-face situations—my "inner circle," as it were. At the other pole are highly anonymous abstractions, which by their very nature can never be available in face-to-face interaction. Social structure is the sum total of these typifications and of the recurrent patterns of interaction established by means of them. As such, social structure is an essential element of the reality of everyday life.

One further point ought to be made here, though we cannot elaborate it. My relations with others are not limited to consociates and contemporaries. I also relate to predecessors and successors, to those others who have preceded and will follow me in the encompassing history of my society.

Except for those who are past consociates (my dead friend Henry), I relate to my predecessors through highly anonymous typifications—"my immigrant great-grandparents," and even more, "the Founding Fathers." My successors, for understandable reasons, are typified in an even more anonymous manner—"my children's children," or "future generations." These typifications are substantively empty projections, almost completely devoid of individualized content, whereas the typifications of predecessors have at least some such content, albeit of a highly mythical sort. The anonymity of both these sets of typifications, however, does not prevent their entering as elements into the reality of everyday life, sometimes in a very decisive way. After all, I may sacrifice my life in loyalty to the Founding Fathers—or, for that matter, on behalf of future generations.

### 3. LANGUAGE AND KNOWLEDGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

Human expressivity is capable of objectivation, that is, it manifests itself in products of human activity that are available both to their producers and to other men as elements of a common world. Such objectivations serve as more or less enduring indices of the subjective processes of their producers, allowing their availability to extend beyond the face-to-face situation in which they can be directly apprehended. For instance, a subjective attitude of anger is directly expressed in the face-to-face situation by a variety of bodily indices—facial mien, general stance of the body, specific movements of arms and feet, and so on. These indices are continuously available in the face-to-face situation, which is precisely why it affords me the optimal situation for gaining access to another's subjectivity. The same indices are incapable of surviving beyond the vivid present of the face-to-face situation. Anger, however, can be objectivated by means of a weapon. Say, I have had an altercation with another man, who has given me ample expressive evidence of his anger against me. That night I wake up with a knife embedded in the wall above my bed. The knife *qua* object expresses my adversary's anger. It affords me

access to his subjectivity even though I was sleeping when he threw it and never saw him because he fled after his near-hit. Indeed, if I leave the object where it is, I can look at it again the following morning, and again it expresses to me the anger of the man who threw it. What is more, other men can come and look at it and arrive at the same conclusion. In other words, the knife in my wall has become an objectively available constituent of the reality I share with my adversary and with other men. Presumably, this knife was not produced for the exclusive purpose of being thrown *at me*. But it expresses a subjective intention of violence, whether motivated by anger or by utilitarian considerations, such as killing for food. The weapon *qua* object in the real world continues to express a general intention to commit violence that is recognizable by anyone who knows what a weapon is. The weapon, then, is both a human product and an objectivation of human subjectivity.

The reality of everyday life is not only filled with objectivations; it is only possible because of them. I am constantly surrounded by objects that "proclaim" the subjective intentions of my fellowmen, although I may sometimes have difficulty being quite sure just what it is that a particular object is "proclaiming," especially if it was produced by men whom I have not known well or at all in face-to-face situations. Every ethnologist or archaeologist will readily testify to such difficulties, but the very fact that he *can* overcome them and reconstruct from an artifact the subjective intentions of men whose society may have been extinct for millennia is eloquent proof of the enduring power of human objectivations.

A special but crucially important case of objectivation is signification, that is, the human production of signs. A sign may be distinguished from other objectivations by its explicit intention to serve as an index of subjective meanings. To be sure, all objectivations are susceptible of utilization as signs, even though they were not originally produced with this intention. For instance, a weapon may have been originally produced for the purpose of hunting animals, but may then (say, in ceremonial usage) become a sign for aggressiveness and violence in general. But there are certain objectivations originally and explicitly intended to serve as signs. For in-

stance, instead of throwing a knife at me (an act that was presumably intended to kill me, but that might conceivably have been intended merely to signify this possibility), my adversary could have painted a black X-mark on my door, a sign, let us assume, that we are now officially in a state of enmity. Such a sign, which has no purpose beyond indicating the subjective meaning of the one who made it, is also objectively available in the common reality he and I share with other men. I recognize its meaning, as do other men, and indeed it is available to its producer as an objective "reminder" of his original intention in making it. It will be clear from the above that there is a good deal of fluidity between the instrumental and the signficatory uses of certain objectivations. The special case of magic, in which there is a very interesting merging of these two uses, need not concern us here.

Signs are clustered in a number of systems. Thus there are systems of gesticulatory signs, of patterned bodily movements, of various sets of material artifacts, and so on. Signs and sign systems are objectivations in the sense of being objectively available beyond the expression of subjective intentions "here and now." This "detachability" from the immediate expressions of subjectivity also pertains to signs that require the mediating presence of the body. Thus performing a dance that signifies aggressive intent is an altogether different thing from snarling or clenching fists in an outburst of anger. The latter acts express my subjectivity "here and now," while the former can be quite detached from this subjectivity—I may not be angry or aggressive at all at this point but merely taking part in the dance because I am paid to do so on behalf of someone else who is angry. In other words, the dance can be detached from the subjectivity of the dancer in a way in which the snarling *cannot* from the snarler. Both dancing and snarling are manifestations of bodily expressivity, but only the former has the character of an objectively available sign. Signs and sign systems are all characterized by "detachability," but they can be differentiated in terms of the degree to which they may be detached from face-to-face situations. Thus a dance is evidently less detached than a material artifact signifying the same subjective meaning.

Language, which may be defined here as a system of vocal

signs, is the most important sign system of human society. Its foundation is, of course, in the intrinsic capacity of the human organism for vocal expressivity, but we can begin to speak of language only when vocal expressions have become capable of detachment from the immediate "here and now" of subjective states. It is not yet language if I snarl, grunt, howl, or hiss, although these vocal expressions are capable of becoming linguistic insofar as they are integrated into an objectively available sign system. The common objectivations of everyday life are maintained primarily by linguistic signification. Everyday life is, above all, life with and by means of the language I share with my fellowmen. An understanding of language is thus essential for any understanding of the reality of everyday life.

Language has its origins in the face-to-face situation, but can be readily detached from it. This is not only because I can shout in the dark or across a distance, speak on the telephone or via the radio, or convey linguistic signification by means of writing (the latter constituting, as it were, a sign system of the second degree). The detachment of language lies much more basically in its capacity to communicate meanings that are not direct expressions of subjectivity "here and now." It shares this capacity with other sign systems, but its immense variety and complexity make it much more readily detachable from the face-to-face situation than any other (for example, a system of gesticulations). I can speak about innumerable matters that are not present at all in the face-to-face situation, including matters I never have and never will experience directly. In this way, language is capable of becoming the objective repository of vast accumulations of meaning and experience, which it can then preserve in time and transmit to following generations.

In the face-to-face situation language possesses an inherent quality of reciprocity that distinguishes it from any other sign system. The ongoing production of vocal signs in conversation can be sensitively synchronized with the ongoing subjective intentions of the conversants. I speak as I think; so does my partner in the conversation. Both of us hear what each says at virtually the same instant, which makes possible a continuous, synchronized, reciprocal access to our two subjectivities,

an intersubjective closeness in the face-to-face situation that no other sign system can duplicate. What is more, I hear *myself* as I speak; my own subjective meanings are made objectively and continuously available to me and *ipso facto* become "more real" to me. Another way of putting this is to recall the previous point about my "better knowledge" of the other as against my knowledge of myself in the face-to-face situation. This apparently paradoxical fact has been previously explained by the massive, continuous and prereflective availability of the other's being in the face-to-face situation, as against the requirement of reflection for the availability of my own. Now, however, as I objectivate my own being by means of language, my own being becomes massively and continuously available to myself at the same time that it is so available to him, and I can spontaneously respond to it without the "interruption" of deliberate reflection. It can, therefore, be said that language makes "more real" my subjectivity not only to my conversation partner but also to myself. This capacity of language to crystallize and stabilize for me my own subjectivity is retained (albeit with modifications) as language is detached from the face-to-face situation. This very important characteristic of language is well caught in the saying that men must talk about themselves until they know themselves.

Language originates in and has its primary reference to everyday life; it refers above all to the reality I experience in wide-awake consciousness, which is dominated by the pragmatic motive (that is, the cluster of meanings directly pertaining to present or future actions) and which I share with others in a *taken-for-granted manner*. Although language can also be employed to refer to other realities, which will be discussed further in a moment, it even then retains its rootage in the commonsense reality of everyday life. As a sign system, language has the quality of objectivity. I encounter language as a facticity external to myself and it is coercive in its effect on me. Language forces me into its patterns. I cannot use the rules of German syntax when I speak English; I cannot use words invented by my three-year-old son if I want to communicate outside the family; I must take into account prevailing standards of proper speech for various occasions, even

if I would prefer my private "improper" ones. Language provides me with a ready-made possibility for the ongoing objectification of my unfolding experience. Put differently, language is pliantly expansive so as to allow me to objectify a great variety of experiences coming my way in the course of my life. Language also typifies experiences, allowing me to subsume them under broad categories in terms of which they have meaning not only to myself but also to my fellowmen. As it typifies, it also anonymizes experiences, for the typified experience can, in principle, be duplicated by anyone falling into the category in question. For instance, I have a quarrel with my mother-in-law. This concrete and subjectively unique experience is typified linguistically under the category of "mother-in-law trouble." In this typification it makes sense to myself, to others, and, presumably, to my mother-in-law. The same typification, however, entails anonymity. Not only I but *anyone* (more accurately, anyone in the category of son-in-law) can have "mother-in-law trouble." In this way, my biographical experiences are ongoingly subsumed under general orders of meaning that are both objectively and subjectively real.

Because of its capacity to transcend the "here and now," language bridges different zones within the reality of everyday life and integrates them into a meaningful whole. The transcendences have spatial, temporal and social dimensions. Through language I can transcend the gap between my manipulatory zone and that of the other; I can synchronize my biographical time sequence with his; and I can converse with him about individuals and collectivities with whom we are not at present in face-to-face interaction. As a result of these transcendences language is capable of "making present" a variety of objects that are spatially, temporally and socially absent from the "here and now." *Ipsa facto* a vast accumulation of experiences and meanings can become objectified in the "here and now." Put simply, through language an entire world can be actualized at any moment. This transcending and integrating power of language is retained when I am not actually conversing with another. Through linguistic objectification, even when "talking to myself" in solitary thought, an entire world can be appresented to me at any moment. As

far as social relations are concerned, language "makes present" for me not only fellowmen who are physically absent at the moment, but fellowmen in the remembered or reconstructed past, as well as fellowmen projected as imaginary figures into the future. All these "presences" can be highly meaningful, of course, in the ongoing reality of everyday life:

Moreover, language is capable of transcending the reality of everyday life altogether. It can refer to experiences pertaining to finite provinces of meaning, and it can span discrete spheres of reality. For instance, I can interpret "the meaning" of a dream by integrating it linguistically within the order of everyday life. Such integration transposes the discrete reality of the dream into the reality of everyday life by making it an enclave within the latter. The dream is now meaningful in terms of the reality of everyday life rather than of its own discrete reality. Enclaves produced by such transposition belong, in a sense, to both spheres of reality. They are "located" in one reality, but "refer" to another.

Any *significative theme* that thus spans spheres of reality may be defined as a symbol, and the linguistic mode by which such transcendence is achieved may be called symbolic language. On the level of symbolism, then, linguistic signification attains the maximum detachment from the "here and now" of everyday life, and language soars into regions that are not only *de facto* but *a priori* unavailable to everyday experience. Language now constructs immense edifices of symbolic representations that appear to tower over the reality of everyday life like gigantic presences from another world. Religion, philosophy, art, and science are the historically most important symbol systems of this kind. To name these is already to say that, despite the maximal detachment from everyday experience that the construction of these systems requires, they can be of very great importance indeed for the reality of everyday life. Language is capable not only of constructing symbols that are highly abstracted from everyday experience, but also of "bringing back" these symbols and appresenting them as objectively real elements in everyday life. In this manner, symbolism and symbolic language become essential constituents of the reality of everyday life and of the com-



monsense apprehension of this reality. I live in a world of signs *and* symbols every day.

Language builds up semantic fields or zones of meaning that are linguistically circumscribed. Vocabulary, grammar and syntax are geared to the organization of these semantic fields. Thus language builds up classification schemes to differentiate objects by "gender" (a quite different matter from sex, of course) or by number; forms to make statements of action as against statements of being; modes of indicating degrees of social intimacy, and so on. For example, in languages that distinguish intimate and formal discourse by means of pronouns (such as *tu* and *vous* in French, or *du* and *Sie* in German) this distinction marks the co-ordinates of a semantic field that could be called the zone of intimacy. Here lies the world of *tutoiement* or of *Bruderschaft*, with a rich collection of meanings that are continually available to me for the ordering of my social experience. Such a semantic field, of course, also exists for the English speaker, though it is more circumscribed linguistically. Or, to take another example, the sum of linguistic objectifications pertaining to my occupation constitutes another semantic field, which meaningfully orders all the routine events I encounter in my daily work. Within the semantic fields thus built up it is possible for both biographical and historical experience to be objectified, retained and accumulated. The accumulation, of course, is selective, with the semantic fields determining what will be retained and what "forgotten" of the total experience of both the individual and the society. By virtue of this accumulation a social stock of knowledge is constituted, which is transmitted from generation to generation and which is available to the individual in everyday life. I live in the commonsense world of everyday life equipped with specific bodies of knowledge. What is more, I know that others share at least part of this knowledge, and they know that I know this. My interaction with others in everyday life is, therefore, constantly affected by our common participation in the available social stock of knowledge.

The social stock of knowledge includes knowledge of my situation and its limits. For instance, I know that I am poor and that, therefore, I cannot expect to live in a fashionable

suburb. This knowledge is, of course, shared both by those who are poor themselves and those who are in a more privileged situation. Participation in the social stock of knowledge thus permits the "location" of individuals in society and the "handling" of them in the appropriate manner. This is not possible for one who does not participate in this knowledge, such as a foreigner, who may not recognize me as poor at all, perhaps because the criteria of poverty are quite different in his society—how can I be poor, when I wear shoes and do not seem to be hungry?

Since everyday life is dominated by the pragmatic motive, recipe knowledge, that is, knowledge limited to pragmatic competence in routine performances, occupies a prominent place in the social stock of knowledge. For example, I use the telephone every day for specific pragmatic purposes of my own. I know how to do this. I also know what to do if my telephone fails to function—which does not mean that I know how to repair it, but that I know whom to call on for assistance. My knowledge of the telephone also includes broader information on the system of telephonic communication—for instance, I know that some people have unlisted numbers, that under special circumstances I can get a simultaneous hook-up with two long-distance parties, that I must figure on the time difference if I want to call up somebody in Hongkong, and so forth. All of this telephonic lore is recipe knowledge since it does not concern anything except what I have to know for my present and possible future pragmatic purposes. I am not interested in *why* the telephone works this way, in the enormous body of scientific and engineering knowledge that makes it possible to construct telephones. Nor am I interested in uses of the telephone that lie outside my purposes, say in combination with short-wave radio for the purpose of marine communication. Similarly, I have recipe knowledge of the workings of human relationships. For example, I know what I must do to apply for a passport. All I am interested in is getting the passport at the end of a certain waiting period. I do not care, and do not know, how my application is processed in government offices, by whom and after what steps approval is given, who puts which stamp in the document. I am not making a study of

government bureaucracy—I just want to go on a vacation abroad. My interest in the hidden workings of the passport-getting procedure will be aroused only if I fail to get my passport in the end. At that point, very much as I call on a telephone-repair expert after my telephone has broken down, I call on an expert in passport-getting—a lawyer, say, or my Congressman, or the American Civil Liberties Union. *Mutatis mutandis*, a large part of the social stock of knowledge consists of recipes for the mastery of routine problems. Typically, I have little interest in going beyond this pragmatically necessary knowledge as long as the problems can indeed be mastered thereby.

The social stock of knowledge differentiates reality by degrees of familiarity. It provides complex and detailed information concerning those sectors of everyday life with which I must frequently deal. It provides much more general and imprecise information on remoter sectors. Thus my knowledge of my own occupation and its world is very rich and specific, while I have only very sketchy knowledge of the occupational worlds of others. The social stock of knowledge further supplies me with the typificatory schemes required for the major routines of everyday life, not only the typifications of others that have been discussed before, but typifications of all sorts of events and experiences, both social and natural. Thus I live in a world of relatives, fellow-workers and recognizable public functionaries. In this world, consequently, I experience family gatherings, professional meetings and encounters with the traffic police. The natural “backdrop” of these events is also typified within the stock of knowledge. My world is structured in terms of routines applying in good or bad weather, in the hayfever season and in situations when a speck of dirt gets caught under my eyelid. “I know what to do” with regard to all these others and all these events within my everyday life. By presenting itself to me as an integrated whole the social stock of knowledge also provides me with the means to integrate discrete elements of my own knowledge. In other words, “what everybody knows” has its own logic, and the same logic can be applied to order various things that I know. For example, I know that my friend Henry is an Englishman, and I know

that he is always very punctual in keeping appointments. Since "everybody knows" that punctuality is an English trait, I can now integrate these two elements of my knowledge of Henry into a typification that is meaningful in terms of the social stock of knowledge.

The validity of my knowledge of everyday life is taken for granted by myself and by others until further notice, that is, until a problem arises that cannot be solved in terms of it. As long as my knowledge works satisfactorily, I am generally ready to suspend doubts about it. In certain attitudes detached from everyday reality—telling a joke, at the theater or in church, or engaging in philosophical speculation—I may perhaps doubt elements of it. But these doubts are "not to be taken seriously." For instance, as a businessman I know that it pays to be inconsiderate of others. I may laugh at a joke in which this maxim leads to failure, I may be moved by an actor or a preacher extolling the virtues of consideration, and I may concede in a philosophical mood that all social relations should be governed by the Golden Rule. Having laughed, having been moved and having philosophized, I return to the "serious" world of business, once more recognize the logic of its maxims, and act accordingly. Only when my maxims fail "to deliver the goods" in the world to which they are intended to apply are they likely to become problematic to me "in earnest."

Although the social stock of knowledge appresents the everyday world in an integrated manner, differentiated according to zones of familiarity and remoteness, it leaves the totality of that world opaque. Put differently, the reality of everyday life always appears as a zone of lucidity behind which there is a background of darkness. As some zones of reality are illuminated, others are adumbrated. I cannot know everything there is to know about this reality. Even if, for instance, I am a seemingly all-powerful despot in my family, and know this, I cannot know all the factors that go into the continuing success of my despotism. I know that my orders are always obeyed, but I cannot be sure of all the steps and all the motives that lie between the issuance and the execution of my orders. There are always things that go on "behind my back." This is true *a fortiori* when social

relationships more complex than those of the family are involved—and explains, incidentally, why despots are endemically nervous. My knowledge of everyday life has the quality of an instrument that cuts a path through a forest and, as it does so, projects a narrow cone of light on what lies just ahead and immediately around; on all sides of the path there continues to be darkness. This image pertains even more, of course, to the multiple realities in which everyday life is continually transcended. This latter statement can be paraphrased, poetically if not exhaustively, by saying that the reality of everyday life is overcast by the penumbras of our dreams.

My knowledge of everyday life is structured in terms of relevances. Some of these are determined by immediate pragmatic interests of mine, others by my general situation in society. It is irrelevant to me how my wife goes about cooking my favorite goulash as long as it turns out the way I like it. It is irrelevant to me that the stock of a company is falling, if I do not own such stock; or that Catholics are modernizing their doctrine, if I am an atheist; or that it is now possible to fly non-stop to Africa, if I do not want to go there. However, my relevance structures intersect with the relevance structures of others at many points, as a result of which we have "interesting" things to say to each other. An important element of my knowledge of everyday life is the knowledge of the relevance structures of others. Thus I "know better" than to tell my doctor about my investment problems, my lawyer about my ulcer pains, or my accountant about my quest for religious truth. The basic relevance structures referring to everyday life are presented to me ready-made by the social stock of knowledge itself. I know that "woman talk" is irrelevant to me as a man, that "idle speculation" is irrelevant to me as a man of action, and so forth. Finally, the social stock of knowledge as a whole has its own relevance structure. Thus, in terms of the stock of knowledge objectivated in American society, it is irrelevant to study the movements of the stars to predict the stock market, but it is relevant to study an individual's slips of the tongue to find out about his sex life, and so on. Conversely, in other societies,

astrology may be highly relevant for economics, speech analysis quite irrelevant for erotic curiosity, and so on.

One final point should be made here about the social distribution of knowledge. I encounter knowledge in everyday life as socially distributed, that is, as possessed differently by different individuals and types of individuals. I do not share my knowledge equally with all my fellowmen, and there may be some knowledge that I share with no one. I share my professional expertise with colleagues, but not with my family, and I may share with nobody my knowledge of *how to cheat* at cards. The social distribution of knowledge of certain elements of everyday reality can become highly complex and even confusing to the outsider. I not only do not possess the knowledge supposedly required to cure me of a physical ailment, I may even lack the knowledge of which one of a bewildering variety of medical specialists claims jurisdiction over what ails me. In such cases, I require not only the advice of experts, but the prior advice of experts on experts. The social distribution of knowledge thus begins with the simple fact that I do not know everything known to my fellowmen, and vice versa, and culminates in exceedingly complex and esoteric systems of expertise. Knowledge of *how* the socially available stock of knowledge is distributed, at least in outline, is an important element of that same stock of knowledge. In everyday life I know, at least roughly, what I can hide from whom, whom I can turn to for information on what I do not know, and generally which types of individuals may be expected to have which types of knowledge.