Sociological theories may be grouped around two poles. The first presents us with a view of society as a network of human meanings as embodiments of human activity. The second, on the other hand, presents us with society conceived of as a thing-like facticity, standing over against its individual members with coercive controls and molding them in its socializing processes. In other words, the first view presents us with man as the social being and with society as being made by him, whereas the second view sets society as an entity over and against man, and shows him being made by it. It would be misleading to describe these two views as, respectively, “individualistic” and “collectivistic”. The difference between them is rather that between seeing society as the incarnation of human actions and seeing it as a reality which human activity has to take as given.¹

If, for example, we pursue two classical formulations of these two types of sociological theorizing, namely those of Weber and of Durkheim, it becomes clear that what is required is a comprehensive perspective which encompasses both by showing their interrelatedness. Certainly sociology deals with realities that are taken as given – with data, in the literal sense of the word. It is this aspect of sociological understanding which Durkheim’s formulation brings out. However, sociology will only accomplish its task if it studies not merely such giveness but the various processes of becoming giveness. The confrontation of the Weberian and Durkheimian formulations cannot be resolved by constructing a highly abstract edifice which can seemingly house both, but at the price of losing the problematics out of which the two formulations arose. The point is not to prove pre-established harmonies between all possible sociological formulations. Rather one must take seriously the objectivity of social existence in its relatedness to human subjectivity. This poses a fundamental problem of sociological theorizing: How is it possible that subjectively

¹ Weber and Durkheim may be taken as typical of these two poles of sociological theorizing. The polarity, however, is not simply between these two. The sociological theories of Simmel and Mannheim, for instance, may be placed close to the “Weberian” pole, those of structural-functionalism in Anglo-Saxon “cultural anthropology” and sociology close to the “Durkheimian” pole.
intended meanings become objective facticities? Or, to use terms appropriate to the aforementioned theoretical positions, how is it possible that human activity (Handeln) should produce a world of things (chooses)? This problem, however, is difficult to deal with in either Weberian or Durkheimian terms only, because these always refer to one or the other pole of what is a comprehensive process involving both poles in an inextricable interrelatedness. If we understand this process as involving both subjective productivity and objective product, men producing society and in turn being produced by it, then our theorizing will be propelled towards formulations of this dialectic in its totality. Indeed, it will become necessary to understand society as a dialectical process.²

It is as a result of such considerations that we believe in the usefulness for sociological theory of certain Marxian categories as well as of insights derived from the phenomenological analysis of social life. This does not imply any doctrinaire commitment. It is important, rather, to show how sociological theory can be enriched by streams of thought coming from outside the sociological tradition in the narrower sense. We are especially interested in this in terms of a sociology of knowledge understood as a centrally important segment of sociological theory dealing with the relation between consciousness and society. Furthermore, we would like to show how dialectical and phenomenological perspectives can be usefully combined in an understanding of human sociality.

We shall use the Marxian concept of reification (Verdinglichung) for an exercise in the sociology of knowledge understood in these terms. We are not concerned with an exegesis of Marx or with a history-of-ideas treatment of the later development of the concept. However, while our concern is systematic rather than historical, we feel obliged to give at least a brief outline of the history of the concept of reification. After this, we shall proceed to our own theorizing, hopefully freed from the burden of historical gratitude. The reader who is familiar with this conceptual development and with the relevant technical terms may decide to skip the historical section immediately following.

As we have implied in our introductory remarks, the concept of reification makes sense only within a dialectical perspective. Hegel made it clear that the dialectic is precisely the experience that consciousness makes with itself. The Hegelian notion of experience, as developed in The Phenomenology of Spirit, encompasses not only the dialectical movement that consciousness makes in its knowledge, but also in its praxis. It is this "all-encompassingness" that makes of the Hegelian philosophy the most ample philosophical totalization that we know of. In the Hegelian philosophy Spirit objectivates itself, alienates itself and recovers itself without respite. The dialectical movement that consciousness undergoes in itself, as much in its knowledge as in its object, is precisely what is termed experience. Therefore, the dialectic is, for Hegel, the manner of thinking that is designed to overcome all forms of rigidly

² An analogous formulation may be found in Jean-Paul Sartre, Critique de la raison dialectique (Paris, 1960), 107.
oppositional thinking – it is the attempt to think being and thinking together. Although Hegel never uses the specific term reification (Verdinglichung), it is quite clear that reification takes place at every stage in the history of consciousness as that form of immediacy wherein the object is experienced as an “in itself” over and against a subject. The history of Spirit is the history of Gestalten of consciousness, whereby natural consciousness makes the experience of the inadequacy of its reificational thinking, and is driven on to ever new and higher levels of thought forms on the road toward that type of absolute thinking whereby the complete dialecticality of thinking and being is made fully manifest in their complete unity. Therefore, for Hegel Spirit realizes itself through and as its own proper history: Man exteriorizes himself and loses himself in the things – in the loss the things are posited as “in-itself-others” – only to be returned to himself in thought. All alienation, and its attendant reificational thinking, is surmounted in the absolute knowledge of the philosopher wherein Spirit is fully transparent to itself and knows itself in its otherness while remaining with itself.3

The protest of Marx against the Hegelian system, out of which the concept of reification used in this article arose, takes two forms, the first an existential protest, and the second a protest against Hegel’s alleged confusion of objectivation and alienation. In the Economic-Philosophic Manuscripts Marx criticizes Hegel for having made of the actual and concrete ways to be of man “moments of motion”. Thus, our anguish, our suffering, the contradictions which make for our real and existential alienation become in the Hegelian system dialectic moments which are posited in order to be transcended – “moments, existences and modes to be of man, which have no value taken in isolation or apart, which dissolve and engender one another. Moments of movement”.4 Thus, Marx states, in their real existence the mobile essence of man and his products is hidden; this only appears in thought, in philosophy. As lived-through, the human and its objectivations are, in the Hegelian perspective, reifications, and this is why Marx accuses Hegel of confusing objectivation with alienation, and confusing reification with objectivity as such. From this point of view the Hegelian transcendental idealism becomes a mystification in that the only manner of de-reification is thought, in that the dialectic is only truly realized as knowledge.5

Just as much as Marx will denounce the absorption of man into thought forms, so too he will denounce the alienation of man in an objectivistic scientism which explicates man by nature and thereby loses sight of the fact that, one, there is not a nature without human signification, and two, that science itself is a human product.6 In a society of commodity production, which results in the quantification of the concrete qualities and determinations of the objects, man produces a nature which is a mathematically expressible manifold. This is a reification which finds its expression in an autonomous science, namely political economy. The social reality expressed in this political economy is a reality wherein man is related to his fellowmen only via the mediation of the commodity. The latter is an external thing which separates men

3 The exposition given here constitutes an extreme distillation of what is a difficult and rich argument presented in The Phenomenology of Spirit. For further elucidation cf. Alexandre Kojève, Introduction à la lecture de Hegel (Paris, 1947); Jean Hyppolite, Études sur Marx et Hegel (Paris, 1955); Carlos Astrada, Hegel y la dialéctica (Buenos Aires, 1956).
4 Karl Marx, Die Frühschriften (Stuttgart, 1953), 279. Our translation.
6 This formulation may also be found in Hyppolite, op. cit., 112.
as at the same time it artificially unites them as functions of the autonomous economic system. Labor, for example, becomes not the world-producing realization of the human faculties of man, but a thing, a power to be bought and sold on a quantitatively evaluating market. This is the essence of Marx's concept of the fetishism of commodities. It is very important that this is not misinterpreted as a rigid economic determinism. As a matter of fact, the Marxian texts point to economic determinism as having its roots precisely in the fetishism of commodities.7

It follows that there are two aspects of reification in Marx's thought. The first is the autonomization of objectivity in unconnectedness with the human activity by which it has been produced. The second is the autonomization of the economic which makes thing-relations of the human relations of production. Both these aspects have been developed in later Marxist thinking.8 However, we think it is important to understand that the autonomization of the economic is paradigmatic of the autonomization of the whole range of social relations. This is clearly brought out in the analyses of both György Lukács and Lucien Goldmann. In other words, there are not only fetishized commodities, but there is also fetishized power, fetishized sexuality, fetishized status. Just as the fetishism of commodities finds its theoretical expression in a reified political economy (or, to use a more contemporary term for this science, in reified economics), so the other species of fetishization are theoretically formulated and thereby mystified in reified political science, reified sociology, reified psychology and even scientific philosophy. As we shall show in more detail later, these theoretical reifications represent our knowledge of ourselves precisely as reified, and thereby exhibit the tendency to perpetuate and legitimate the pre-theoretical alienation and reification.

How can the concept of reification be used in a general sociological critique of consciousness, without the polemic and utopian trappings that have often accompanied it? We shall now proceed to give our own tentative answer to this question. First of all, however, it will be necessary to clarify some key terms in our argument, namely the following – objectivation, objectification, alienation and reification. This is especially important in view of the polemic use often made of the latter two.

By objectivation we mean that process whereby human subjectivity embodies itself in products that are available to oneself and one's fellow men as elements of a common world. This process, we must emphasize from the beginning, is anthropologically necessary. It has its roots in the fact that human subjectivity is not a closed sphere of interiority, but is always intentionality in movement. That is, human subjectivity must continuously objectivate itself. Or, in other words, man is a world-producing being.

7 This is developed most fully in the first volume of Das Kapital.
8 The most important recent development of the concept of reification is that by György Lukács in his Geschichte und Klassenbewusstsein (Berlin, 1923). Since the German edition is currently difficult to obtain, see the French translation by Kostas Axelos and Jacqueline Bois, Histoire et conscience de classe (Paris, 1960). See also Lucien Goldmann, Recherches dialectiques (Paris, 1959), 64 ff; Sartre, op. cit., passim; Joseph Gabel, La fausse conscience (Paris, 1962). The last work is particularly important for the psychological and psychiatric ramifications of the concept, but is beyond our present scope.
By objectification we mean the moment in the process of objectivation in which man establishes distance from his producing and its product, such that he can take cognizance of it and make of it an object of his consciousness. Objectivation, then, is a broader concept, applicable to all human products, material as well as non-material. Objectivation is a narrower epistemological concept, referring to the way in which the world produced by man is apprehended by him. Thus, for instance, man produces material tools in the process of objectivation which he then objectifies by means of language, giving them “a name” that is “known” to him from then on and that he can communicate to others. In the same way, of course, non-material products become part of human “knowledge”. The fact that objectification also applies to those segments of reality (namely, “nature”) that man has not himself produced need not interest us in this argument.

By alienation we mean the process by which the unity of the producing and the product is broken. The product now appears to the producer as an alien facticity and power standing in itself and over against him, no longer recognizable as a product. In other words, alienation is the process by which man forgets that the world he lives in has been produced by himself. It is especially important to insist on this definition because of the conceptual chaos brought about by a psychologistic misunderstanding of alienation. To say that man is alienated is not the same as saying that he is “anomic” or that he feels psychologically estranged. On the contrary, some of the most important examples of alienated consciousness can be taken from the magnificent nomoi of human history, such as the religious interpretations of the human world as merely a reflection of a divine world, the mythological microcosm that provided a near-perfect protection to its inhabitants against anomie – but doing so, of course, in a process of alienation. Nor is it necessary or even likely that an alienated consciousness is subjectively experienced as psychological conflict, anxiety or lostness. Psychological “health” is a function of the social situation. If the latter is defined in alienated terms, then only those who share this definition will be psychologically “healthy”. For instance, in a society that understands its institutions as an interaction between divine and demonic forces, an understanding of these institutions in other terms is likely to be allied with a psychologically “unhealthy” condition or will lead there if held on to stubbornly in the face of the socially acceptable explanations of the world.

By reification we mean the moment in the process of alienation in which the characteristic of thing-hood becomes the standard of objective reality. That is, nothing can be conceived of as real that does not have the character of a thing. This can also be put in different words: reification is objectification in an alienated mode. If reification is thus linked to alienation, it becomes clear that it is applicable only to human reality and its products. It is applicable to the world as a total meaning structure and to all moments within it. The world,
insofar as it is a human world, is always socio-historical in character. Therefore, any social or historical phenomenon may be reified. It need not be, however. This points up an important difference between the first two and the second two of our four key concepts. Objectivation and objectification are anthropologically necessary. A priori, human existence cannot be conceived without them. Alienation and reification, however, are de facto characteristics of the human condition. They are not necessary to it a priori. While this may seem a fine distinction, its importance will, we hope, become clearer a little further on in our argument.

Having thus explicated our key concepts, we can ask quite simply: What does it mean that man produces a world?

Man is always directed towards that which is other than himself. That is, he is object-directed. That is, again, he is an acting being. To act means to modify the figure of the given in such a way that a field is structured which, to the actor, constitutes a meaningful totality. This totality is the presupposition for any particular meaningful action within it. In other words, the totality is broken up into finite provinces of meaning, each of which is the scene of particular types of action. While man, as an acting being, is constantly engaged in structuring the world as meaningful totality (since otherwise he could not meaningfully act within it), this process is never completed. Totality, then, is never a fait accompli, but is always in the process of being constructed. Therefore, the term totalization can be applied to this meaning-building process. The world, then, is the result of action, of man totalizing his experience as he engages in action.

Now, the human enterprise of producing a world is not comprehensible as an individual project. Rather, it is a social process: men together engage in constructing a world, which then becomes their common dwelling. Indeed, since sociality is a necessary element of human being, the process of world production is necessarily a social one. Man the world-builder and man the name-giver are possible only as manifestations of man the social being. Every human society can thus be understood as a world-building enterprise, that is, as world-building human activity.

The reality of such a world is given neither in itself nor once and for all. It must be constructed and re-constructed over and over again. That is, the world must be continuously realized, in the double sense of this word, as actualization and as recognition. To put this a little differently, the world remains real, in the sense of subjective plausibility and consistency, only as it is confirmed and re-confirmed. This, again, takes place in a social process – the world must be confirmed and re-confirmed by others. Just as the world cannot be constituted by the individual in isolation, so it is not inhabitable by the individual in isolation. Being in the world means, for man, being in the

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9 This term serves as the key concept of Sartre's above-quoted work.
world with others. This follows inevitably from the insight that the world is produced by means of a human enterprise that is social in character. As a product, this world possesses expressivity, that is, it manifests the intentionality of those who produced it. Because of this, it is possible for others to understand this world, that is, to understand the intentionality of those engaged in building or having built this world.

*What does this mean for that part of the world we call social structure?* This is not difficult to answer, on the basis of the above considerations. Social structure is a part of the objectivated, the produced world. Social structuration is part of the human enterprise of totalization. It follows, then, that social structure is *nothing but* the result of human enterprise. It has no reality except a human one. It is not characterizable as being a thing able to stand on its own, apart from the human activity that produced it. Any specific social structure exists only insofar and as long as human beings realize it as part of their world. In this capacity, however, social structure is essential to human existence. *A priori*, social structure can be understood as an expansion of the field within which life makes sense to the individual – even more than that, as the constitution of such a field, providing new modes of meaningful action for the individual. *A priori*, a social structure is an open horizon of possibility for all its members, a medium for the production of a world, while at the same time it is itself a produced moment of that world. Clearly, the relationship just described is a dialectical one. That is, social structure is produced by man and in turn produces him. In sum, man produces himself as a social being through social structure.

We would emphasize the *a priori* character of the propositions just made. We have tried to give a description of the essence of human objectivation as a social process on the level, so to speak, of pure possibility. Very different propositions emerge as we look at man's *de facto* situation in the world. On the level of pure possibility, social structure provides an open horizon for man's ongoing world- and self-realization. On the level of actual historical experience, social structure functions pretty much as the opposite of this, namely, as a narrowing of the horizons within which life is allowed to make sense. Social structure is encountered by the individual as an external facticity. It is *there*, impervious to his wishes, sovereignly other than himself, an alien thing opaque to his understanding. Furthermore, social structure is encountered as a coercive instrumentality. A social fact can be recognized, as against a purely individual fantasy, by the fact that it resists the individual. Society constrains, controls and may even destroy the individual.¹⁰ Through its agencies of social control, society surrounds the individual at each turn. But

¹⁰ We have intentionally used almost verbatim Durkheimian formulations here in order to stress the point made in our opening remarks. These formulations are developed most fully in *Les règles de la méthode sociologique*. 
through its agencies of socialization, society also penetrates into the consciousness of the individual, molding the latter into a socially desired shape. Thus, for instance, society as law coerces the individual from without, society as conscience coerces him from within. Finally, this pervasive regulative functionality of social structure takes on an almost automatic character. If socialization has been successful even to a degree, the individual acts within the socially prescribed channels with a minimum of reflectiveness. Indeed, it is possible to argue that social structure must provide these taken-for-granted regulative channels unless it is to collapse into chaos, with social institutions in their unreflected automaticity serving as a substitute for the biologically given instincts in which man is relatively underprivileged.

The external, coercive and automatic character of social structure can be readily seen by looking at any of its institutional complexes – say, the family, the economy or the state. But it can already be seen in the most fundamental social objectivation of all, in language. Here even an ideologist, who will interpret the aforementioned three institutional areas in terms of, say, a God-given natural law, will probably concede that language is nothing but a human product – or, at the least, that any particular language is. Yet language is experienced by the individual as an external facticity – things are that as which they are named. And language regulates the individual in near-automatic fashion, forcing itself upon him with a minimum of reflection on his part, it furthermore coerces him in many ways (from the educational system that teaches him “correct” language down to the ridicule imposed on “incorrect” language by his peers) in the event that he has not learned his lesson fully.

What we have just proposed are commonplaces of sociology and social psychology. However, under the perspective presented here, they have far-reaching consequences, for if one accepts these propositions, then the de facto institutionalization of human actions and the institutional world produced thereby – that is, social structure – are seen to be a movement whereby human actions are alienated from the actor. In other words, alienation and sociation are de facto linked processes. In the course of sociation (simply understood here as the ongoing realization of social structure) horizons are narrowed and human possibilities become non-human or supra-human facticities. Founded on this process there emerges a world that is taken for granted and that is lived through as a necessary fate.

Anthropologically, this process is a paradoxical one. For we are in a situation in which we express our world-producing essence in producing a world that denies this. That is, we ourselves produce the world from which we are alienated. This is important to bear in mind: however much alienation may modify the results of our world-producing, the fact remains that it is we ourselves who are continuing to produce this world. As will be explained a little

11 Cf. Arnold Gehlen, Urnensch und Spätkultur (Bonn, 1956), 7 ff.
12 Cf. Sartre, op. cit., 63.
later, this fact already indicates at least the theoretical possibility of reversing
the alienating movement.\textsuperscript{13}

Alienation, to repeat, is a rupture between producer and produced. It
prevents his recognition of himself in a world he has created. This world now
exists in estranged externality and he himself exists in estranged externality
from himself. These existential circumstances found a consciousness of both
world and self wherein the two are perceived as atomistically closed and mutu-
ally exclusive. Thus, in producing an alienated world, the human is devalued
and a humanity is produced that is characterized by inert objectivity. This
consciousness is reifying consciousness and its objects are reifications.

As we now proceed to look more closely at the social phenomenon of reification,
it will be convenient to distinguish between three levels of consciousness. First,
there is direct and pre-reflective presence to the world. Secondly, founded on
the latter, there is reflective awareness of the world and one's presence to it.
Thirdly, out of this second level of consciousness there may in turn arise
various theoretical formulations of the situation. We may, then, distinguish
between the pre-reflective, the reflective, and the theoretical level of conscious-
ness. Reification may occur on the last two levels. It is important to stress,
however, that the foundations of theoretical reification lie in the pre-theoretical
reification of the world and of oneself.

Social situations provide the occasions by which certain expressions are
alienated from the expressive intention of their performer and are changed
into reifications. For example, a person performs a gesture, an expression of
some particular intention of his own, which gesture is named as an "uncouth
gesture" by the other participant in the situation. In this designation the
gesture is alienated from the active process of producing it as well as from
the particular intention of its producer. It becomes an "uncouth gesture"
in and of itself. The gesture is thus fixed in an inert objectivity available to
all, with a significance conceived of as belonging to it intrinsically rather than
as expressive of something else. The gesture becomes reified, that is, it becomes
a thing-like facticity separated from its human source. Thus, \textit{ab initio}, reifica-
tion entails a de-humanization of its object.

But even in an alienated and reified world man continues to reflect and often
to formulate theoretically the results of his reflection. This happens, of course,
upon the basis of pre-theoretical alienation. There is consequently produced
a totalization that is itself alienated and alienating. Moreover, this alienated

\textsuperscript{13}Within the alienated and reified world there is a double structure of inertness, or better,
practico-inertness (Sartre): On the one hand, the world is produced as an inert objectivity
standing over and against man; on the other hand, man produces himself as an inert "piece"
of this world. Gabel, in the work cited, insists on the non-dialecticality of false consciousness.
Yet, false consciousness is a secondary phenomenon in that it is founded on an existentia-
Ilialienatedness which precedes all reflection. However reified, man must never be ontologically
equated with a thing. Reification rather involves living as a man the condition of a thing.
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consciousness, both of world and of self, may be designated as false consciousness – false in the sense that the actual process by which itself and its world have been produced is forgotten. If this false consciousness achieves a theoretical formulation, the latter functions as a mystification (or, if one prefers, as an ideology – though we would prefer to avoid this term in the present context). For instance, following up the previous example, if one reflects about a gesture as a defined inertness, one thereby calls into being a reifying apparatus by which any gesture is no longer a specific expression of the others’ or one’s own life, but rather becomes a quality that serves to characterize the other or oneself in a typical and anonymous manner. That is, the world is divided into “couth” and “uncouth” people, who are “couth” or “uncouth” in the same way as tables are brown or grey. In this way, there occurs a reversal of the actual process: no longer is the gesture an expression of the person, but the person is defined as the embodiment of an abstract quality of which the gesture is the symbol. Following this reification, a theory of manners may arise that legitimates the division of humanity into “couth” and “uncouth” people, and which ongoingly mystifies what actually occurs in concrete situations. On a further level of theoretical complexity, but still within the same movement of reifying mystification, there may develop a general psychology that defines persons as embodiments of abstract qualities or states.

With regard to the theoretical level, it would be a misunderstanding to conceive of this level as nothing but a passive reflection of “underlying” social processes. The theoretical formulations, rather, themselves become real moments of our pre-reflective existential situation. Founded upon the latter, they act back upon it. Theoretical reifications, expressive of pre-reflective and pre-theoretical reifying consciousness, can themselves become reified, hardening into dogmas and cutting off the possibilities of the world as an expressive fabric. In this way, the theoretical formulations may fixate even more firmly the reifying character of pre-theoretical consciousness.

For instance, one reifies action by saying that it is performed because (or, one may say – because of course) the actor is an X-type person. That is, X-type

14 This misunderstanding is exemplified by Lenin’s concept of “reflection” (otrozhenie), which attained the level of philosophical dogma in official “dialectical materialism” in the Soviet Union. The non-dialectical character of this concept is described excellently by Astrada in the following passage: “To consider the dialectical process of knowledge as a mere reflection, copy or photograph of real processes, of the developments that take place in the domain of nature, is to surreptitiously reify (cosificar) the fluidity of the processes themselves, and to forget the structural unity of subject and object that is supposed by the dialectic” (op. cit., 87 – our translation). The same non-dialectical character of dogmatic Marxism is expressed in the utopian vision of the future, which is reified as a “future-thing” (avenir-chose); cf. Simone de Beauvoir, Pour une morale d’ambiguïté (Paris, 1947), 165; Gabel, op. cit., 25. We cannot here enter further into the question of the dogmatization of Marxism and its concurrent metamorphosis into a reified ideology. Cf. Leszek Kolakowski, Der Mensch ohne Alternative (Munich, 1960), 7 ff., for one of the most incisive critiques of this process coming from within the Marxist camp itself.
persons perform such actions. Actions are perceived as standing separately from their performer. In other words, actions are conceived of as roles and the actor as an embodiment of roles. When one now reflects about these perceptions, the world is seen as inhabited by people who not only perform but are embodiments of roles. To put this a little facetiously, role-playing precedes existence – or, even better, replaces it. If one now goes on to theorize on the basis of this consciousness, one may develop a sociology that regards roles rather than people as the prime reality. Such a sociology effectively mystifies concrete social situations, but goes on to operate as a self-fulfilling prophecy by producing more social situations in which this whole process of reification can take place. It may then even happen that the world concocted by this kind of theorizing becomes the taken-for-granted world of everyday life and even finds its expression in everyday language. No one exists any longer, but roles interact in a sort of ectoplasmic exchange. The thief does not steal but is playing the role of thief, the judge does not judge but is playing the role of judge, and (last but not least) the criminologist does not understand either the thief’s stealing or the judge’s judging but is playing the role of social scientist. Such a world becomes the true world as it is internalized as such. We think it probable, incidentally, that a few generations of the teaching of this kind of sociology may well produce such a world in certain middle-class, college-educated strata in America (although at this point reifying psychology is more popular in these circles than reifying sociology).

Generally speaking, reification operates in society by bestowing ontological status on social roles and institutions. Roles are reified by detaching them from human intentionality and expressivity, and transforming them into an inevitable destiny for their bearers. The latter may then act in the false consciousness that they “have no choice” – because they are bearers of this or that role. Concrete actions then become mere mimetic repetitions of the prototypical actions embodied in the roles. This reification of roles may take place irrespective of the degree of “civilization” of the society in question. The primitive who sleeps with his wife mimes the prototypical action of the gods in creating the universe – “ultimately” it is not he but the gods who create life. The executioner who kills his victim mimes the prototypical action of the gods, of abstract justice or of the state in upholding right and punishing wrong – “ultimately” it is not he but these abstractions that engage in killing. The businessman who operates apart from his personal convictions and sympathies in his business activities mimes the prototypical actions that may be thought to dwell in some Platonic heaven of economic abstractions – “ultimately” it

15 It must not be thought that this criticism extends to George H. Mead, the most important figure in the development of role theory. Mead effectively protects himself against this sort of reification with his (we would argue) dialectical understanding of the “I” and the “me”. Cf. George H. Mead, Mind, Self and Society (Chicago, 1934).
is not he who is doing business but the economic system is conceived of as acting through him. The reification of roles, on all possible levels of sophistication, thus produces a quasi-sacramental world, in which human actions do not express human meanings but rather represent, in priestly fashion, various super-human abstractions they are supposed to embody. Religious, ethical and "scientific" theories are then called upon to legitimate and further mystify the de-humanization that has occurred.\(^{16}\)

Institutions are reified by mystifying their true character as human objectives and by defining them, again, as supra-human facticities analogous to the facticities of nature. The family, for example, ceases to be a human enterprise and becomes a re-enactment of prototypical actions founded, say, in the will of the gods, natural law, or human nature. The deviant from these institutionally defined courses of action may thus be perceived, and thereby theoretically annihilated, as one who offends against the very "nature of things", against the "natural order" of the world or of his own being. Thus he who, in one society, denies the "natural" superiority of men over women, or, in another society, the "natural" superiority of women over men, is not only a moral monster but a demented being who denies what is self-evident to every "normal" person. The horror with which "sexual perversion" is still regarded today may serve as a good illustration of the power of reification. The substitution of psychiatric categories of "mental illness" for the "unspeakable crime" of English common law hardly mitigates the harshness of theoretical annihilation. It cannot be our purpose here to supply a catalogue of institutional reifications. Suffice it to point to such reifications as "the economy", "the state", the nation", or "the revolutionary movement" to indicate the very wide scope of the reification of institutions. Nor can we enter here into the question of the ultimate root of these processes, which we strongly suspect to lie in some fundamental terrors of human existence, notably the terror of chaos – which is then assuaged by the fabrication of the sort of firm order that only reifications can constitute. To follow these questions, however, would exceed the purpose of this argument.

The end result of the various reifications is that the dialectical process in its totality is lost, and is replaced by an experience and conception of mechanical causality. The relationship between human beings and society is understood as a collision between inert facticities. While in fact men produce society as, at the same time, society produces men, what is now conceived of and actually experienced is only a situation in which society produces men. For sociology, then, so-called sociologism represents reification on the level of theoretical formulation.\(^{17}\)

\(^{16}\) Cf. Peter Berger, *The Precarious Vision* (Garden City, N.Y., 1961), for a discussion of the ethical implications of this.

\(^{17}\) Obviously, an intriguing task would be the comparative analysis of different sociological theories in terms of their proximity to or distance from this sort of sociologism. Equally obviously, the compilation of such a catalogue is not possible here.
Reification, on all levels of consciousness, converts the concrete into the abstract, then in turn concretizes the abstract. Also, reification converts quality into quantity. And, as we have seen, these conversions are functional for the effective operation of an institutional system. The functionality is perhaps seen most clearly in the highly bureaucratized institutional system in which we exist in contemporary society, especially in terms of the conversion of quality into quantity. But the fundamental reification of the concrete into the abstract is a cross-cultural and historically recurrent phenomenon. Despite all socio-historical differences, there is a structural continuity between the twentieth century person who reifies himself as “a representative of the corporation”, the twelfth century person who reifies himself as “a lord and gentleman”, and the primitive in just about any century who performs essentially the same reification by perceiving himself as, say, “a Baluba”, implying thereby a Baluba world-view, a Baluba self and a Baluba biography down to the minutiae of conduct. It is not difficult to see how such reifications make for a smoother-running corporative system, a more firmly established feudal system and a viable tribal society. Reification minimizes the range of reflection and choice, automatizes conduct in the socially prescribed channels and fixates the taken-for-granted perception of the world. Reification in this way comes close to being a functional imperative. In its end result, reification converts action into process, which is precisely the core of its social functionality. Inasmuch as this defines action without the actor, or praxis without its author, reified social processes are intrinsically alienating and de-humanizing.

It will be clear now that, while we must continue to insist that reification is not an anthropological necessity (in the sense that human being = reified being), it is still the case that reification constitutes the de facto reality of most socio-historical situations. Also, it would be a mistake to regard reification as a chronologically later perversion of some original state of non-reified existence (as in the pseudo-theological constructions of paradise, fall and redemption of vulgar Marxism) or even as a rare phenomenon in specific socio-historical situations (as Marx himself at least tended to do in his conception of reification in terms of the specifically capitalistic “fetishism of commodities”). As we have tried to show, just because of its social functionality, reification is a cross-cultural and historically recurrent phenomenon. Moreover, ethnology has provided sufficient evidence to lead to the belief that the earliest human societies are particularly massive in their reifications.18 Similarly, child psychology makes plausible the supposition that reification

18 Relevant to this point is the work of Lévy-Bruhl, which, however, is rather dated in its ethnological materials and is theoretically debatable in terms of its extreme formulations about “primitive mentality”. For a recent discussion of these problems cf. Claude Lévi-Strauss, La pensée sauvage (Paris, 1962).
is at least a stage in the biography of the individual, as it is in the history of the species.\(^\text{19}\)

**What are the instances of de-reification, even within the general reification empirically present in human history?** We could simply insist here on the theoretical possibility of such de-reification and leave the matter to an empirical sociology of knowledge for further research. We are prepared to go beyond this expedient to the extent of pointing to three socio-historical constellations that, it seems to us, are conducive to de-reification.

The first is the overall disintegration of social structures, necessarily entailing a disintegration of their taken-for-granted worlds. History affords a good many examples of how natural or man-caused catastrophes shook to its foundations a particular world, including its hitherto well-functioning reifying apparatus, bringing forth doubt and scepticism concerning every thing that had previously been taken for granted. In such situations, roles are suddenly revealed as human actions and institutions as humanly produced montages for these actions. Examples of such catastrophic disenchantment of the world need not be limited to modern western history, but can be found in the ancient societies of Egypt, India and China. Such "times of troubles" or "axial times" can be very conducive to a rediscovery of the world as an open human possibility.\(^\text{20}\)

Secondly, situations of culture contact and the ensuing "culture shock" can also produce a de-reifying impulse, even if they are not followed by an overall disintegration of the socially constituted world. Culture contact of any intensity tends to lead to a crisis in "knowledge", as one is confronted with alternative ways of perceiving the world and ordering one's life within it. Whether the contact takes the form of war or trade or migration, it brings about a clash of worlds, in ancient times expressed most readily as a clash of gods. Evidently there are different possibilities of development after such a clash, ranging from promiscuous syncretism to violent xenophobic retreat. In any case, however, culture contact will have weakened the reified fixedness of the old world. An important example of this is afforded by the historical part played by urban centers in the mixing of peoples – and thereby in the mixing, loosening and frequently humanizing of these peoples' worlds.\(^\text{21}\)

Thirdly, we would point to the de-reifying proclivity of individuals or groups existing in a state of social marginality. Such marginality may be chosen or inflicted, and it may take a large number of different social forms – ethnic

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\(^\text{19}\) Cf. the work of Piaget on the development of the world of the child.

\(^\text{20}\) For a critique of these concepts of Toynbee's and Jasper's respectively, cf. Eric Voegelin, *Order and History* (Baton Rouge, 1957), II, 19 ff. In this work Voegelin employs the very suggestive term "leap in being" to denote the radical transformation of the world to be found at such moments of history.

(e.g., "guest peoples"), religious (e.g., hermits and ascetics withdrawing from society), moral (e.g., the marginal worlds created by crime and vice) or political (e.g., political elites). It would not be difficult to develop the theme of dereification by analyzing the views of world and society – to stay with the above cases, of European Jews as expressed in their contributions to intellectual "debunking" movements, Indian religious asceticism in its radical devaluation of the world of everyday life as illusion, criminals and prostitutes of different socio-historical situations in their clear-eyed perception of the social drama in which they are often close to the sardonic Machiavellian perspective of those located at the levers of power in the society. These few examples may also make clear that such marginality may actually be sought by individuals with precisely the motive of penetrating the false consciousness of their society that may have become revealed to them as a result of one or another biographical accident.22

The sociology of knowledge is a discipline that has existed on the margins of both sociology and philosophy, as is well illustrated by the work of Scheler and Mannheim. On the one hand, the critique of consciousness has been the province of philosophy, while on the other hand, the empirical analysis of the social location of consciousness has been the province of sociology and other social sciences. However, the comprehensive perspective that we spoke of in our introductory remarks demands the cooperation between sociology and philosophy. This is not a matter of eclecticism, but follows with necessity from the problematics of the two disciplines themselves.

Philosophy has the propensity for solitude, systematic seclusion and dispassionate self-contemplation. This opposes it at the outset to the very warp and woof of the ongoing world in which human reality finds itself. In this way, philosophy becomes alienated activity, estranged both from man and his world. As such alienated activity, philosophy is "unpopular", pompously pouring forth unintelligible incantations. But philosophers are men and philosophy is itself a human product. As men, philosophers themselves are socially located. Philosophy by its own true essence does not stand outside the world, but does so only as alienated activity. Philosophy is estranged from itself in the very measure as man, whose expression philosophy is, is estranged from himself. Philosophy, then, is super-structure whose roots, sub- or infra-structure, are in actual, concrete, living, human intersubjectivity. Therefore, philosophy as prise de conscience of humanity (Husserl) must concern itself with the dialogue between man and world. Philosophy thus conceived necessarily involves critique of everyday life. Alfred Schutz and Henri Lefebvre have shown how this philosophical task can proceed in a phenomenological

22 Two well-known examples of sociological analyses of this sort of marginality are Simmel's work on the stranger and Veblen's work on the intellectual role of the Jews.
and a Marxian manner, respectively. An interesting task for the future is the synthesizing of these two manners of philosophizing.

Sociology has the tendency either to be a narrow empiricism oblivious of its own theoretical foundations or to build highly abstract theoretical systems emptied of empirical content. Both these directions take sociology away from that everyday life which is supposed to be the subject matter of the discipline. Sociology too is super-structure, in the sense just explicated with regard to philosophy. That is, sociology is grounded in the pulsating intersubjectivity of the real world of men. The de-humanization of sociology in either of the above-mentioned directions not only results in a pomposity as abstruse as anything the philosophers might conceivably produce, but marks the point at which sociology has lost its own subject. A sociology which retains its grasp of itself and its subject matter must be an continuing clarification of everyday life. The fulfilling of this task entails a critique of consciousness, which is the very stuff of everyday life.

Therefore, the sociology of knowledge is not an optional entertainment for either philosophy or sociology. Rather, the sociology of knowledge represents an essential meeting place for the sociologist and the philosopher as each is engaged in his own proper task, which is the illumination of the human world. A sojourn in this meeting place will protect both the philosopher and the sociologist against that alienation from the human world which congeals both their disciplines in an inhuman petrification. The analysis of reification made here may serve as an illustration of the possible sense of the meeting of the two disciplines in the sociology of knowledge.

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25 The present writers, in collaboration with three colleagues in sociology and philosophy, are currently engaged in the preparation of a systematic treatise in the sociology of knowledge, which will seek to move towards the theoretical integration indicated here. The writers would like to express their gratitude especially to Thomas Luckmann and Hansfried Kellner, colleagues in this project and partners in a continuing conversation about the problems touched upon in this article.