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THE SOCIAL PRODUCTION OF EXPERIENCE**

Formulation of the Problem

My intention in this paper is to outline a sociological interpretation of two popular pastimes: excessive drinking and participation in wandering plate sessions. In the general opinion the first pastime should be dealt with in terms of conventional sociology. A conventional formulation says that overuse of alcohol is a painful social problem which should be reduced by finding the proper answer to the question: why do people drink excessively and through a series of actions implied by this answer. It is often argued that the social problem may be reduced only through the elimination of its complex (psychological-cultural-social-political-economical) causes.

Similarly, the common opinion suggests the second pastime should be explained in terms of scientific psychology (with the use of such notions as: motivation, ideomotoric actions, imagination of the "medium" or susceptibility to suggestion on the part of other participants at the session). Parapsychology provides an alternative explanation. The growing public interest in wandering plates, healing, hypnosis, etc. calls for a complex explanation of the social problem (as in the case of alcohol overuse).

My opinion is that apart from conventional explanation of the pastimes in question, alcohol overuse and participation in wandering plate sessions require an analysis in terms of the sociology of knowledge or, more precisely, in terms of social production of

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** For the broader and revised version of this paper (in Polish) see: "Kultura i Społeczeństwo" 1985, vol. 29, no. 1.

experience. Therefore, the questions: "Why do people drink excessively from time to time?" and "Why do they become interested in wandering plates?" do not relate to my problem. Instead, I should ask about the structure of experience which makes the two phenomena possible or, more precisely, about the social construction of experience that make individual experience of excessive drinking and of wandering plate sessions possible. The general answer which is explored here is derived from the conception of reality assumptions and the tendency towards their fulfillment. I intend to follow the classical formula of W. I. Thomas: "if men define situations as real they are real in their consequences". In other words, commonly shared beliefs and presuppositions relating to drunken comportment or "strange" events are considered to be responsible for particular drunken comportment and particular "strange" events. I shall try to justify such analysis in terms of phenomenological sociology of knowledge. However, we should first turn back to some traditional orientations in the sociology of knowledge.

Some traditional explorations of Thomas's dictum:

Parsons and Merton

Parsons in his early essay "The Role of Ideas in Social Actions" (Parsons, 1964) distinguished two main classes of ideas, existential and normative, and a third class of imaginative ideas (the latter class he treated as a residual one). Within the class of existential ideas Parsons provided further distinction between empirical and nonempirical ideas. He examined the functions of the above classes of ideas. In his account, the empirical ideas are the basis for the choice of means to achieve given ends and form the stock of empirically valid knowledge. Nonempirical ideas (especially religious) justify the selection of ends to pursue.

Parsons referred to the notion of the "definition of the situation" but only in relation to religious ideas: "The function of religious ideas is, in relation to the interest in salvation, to »define the situation«, to use W. I. Thomas's term" (Parsons, 1964, p. 29). Thus Parsons does not take into consideration the

"defining" character of all ideas and relates the "defining" function to a particular class of ideas only.

Merton in his conception of self-fulfilling prophecy also restricted the meaning of the "definition of the situation" (Merton, 1982). The Mertonian limitation consists in a reduction of "definition of the situation" to its truth value. The self-fulfilling prophecy is simply a false definition of a situation evoking a new behavior which makes the originally false conception come true. (Merton mentions also on alternate possibility of the "suicidal prophecy" evoking a new behavior which falsifies the prophecy). Hence, a) the self-fulfilling prophecy refers only to observable changes in the external reality, and b) it contributes to the actualization of some particular fears, while the suicidal prophecy provides a warning against some particular evil (we shall return to the points a) and b) in section "A provisional conclusion").

Both Parsons and Merton limited the relevance of the "definition of the situation" to the function of religious ideas and to the self-fulfilling prophecies, respectively. In particular, the two pastimes in questions are situated outside the restricted boundaries of the "definition of the situation". Instead, functionalist approach could deal with overuse of alcohol in terms of its function (e.g., reduction of frustration) or disfunction (e.g., anomie of manners), and with the wandering plate sessions in terms of their latent function (e.g., the institution of safe and repeatable contacts with the supernatural).

An alternative sociology of knowledge

The main source for an alternative sociology of knowledge is the phenomenological point of view. Modern phenomenological sociology aims at explication of the essential features of consciousness (Schutz) or self-organizing orderliness of members' activity (ethnomethodology) which constitute the meaningful structure of the social world. (It should be added that important differences between Schutz and ethnomethodology relate to the status of cognition and action. However, it is impossible to discuss this com-

plex problem in the present paper). Thus, the phenomenological sociology looks at the social objects of traditional sociology from a radically different point of view. The traditional sociology asks about the causal, structural or functional rules governing the social life, having assumed the reality of the social world. On the other hand, phenomenological sociology asks about the basic conditions under which members of the social world experience their environment as a specific, understandable and orderly reality. The conditions which make the experience of this specific reality possible are identified as "cognitive styles" of specific "finite provinces of meaning" (Schutz), or as rules of practical reasoning which members "follow" in their on-going activity (ethnomethodology).

The traditional sociology of knowledge (Parsons, Merton) describes the set of social relationships in which particular portions of substantial knowledge are embedded (the consequences of "ideas" and "prophecies" for social action). The phenomenological sociology probes the structures of experience which make the particular experience possible, i.e., "provinces of meaning" upon which one may "bestow the accent of reality" (Schutz), or "members' methods" which enable them to "make setting accountable" (ethnomethodology).

The classical phenomenology of Husserl considered the apriori structures of "pure" consciousness as transcendental conditions, prior to experience. Phenomenological sociology surpasses the rules of orthodox phenomenological thinking. It points to the sedimented social history of the structures of consciousness (Schutz), or to the on-going, interactional construction of rules of practical reasoning (ethnomethodology). Hence, we may now call the perspective of alternative sociology of knowledge the social phenomenology, and its main problem the social production of experience.

Three studies in social phenomenology

- three approaches to the social production of experience

The conceptions by Schutz and ideas in ethnomethodology provide the foundation for the social phenomenology. I shall now try to consider three detailed analyses which are attempts at such pheno-

menology. The first and the third cases will require some further justification, since they are not phenomenological in the strict sense of the term.

H. Becker's study on the use of marihuana

Symbolic interactionism may be treated as the first sociological step toward social phenomenology. Howard S. Becker (1973) described the social production of experience of marihuana users through three stages of learning: learning the technique, learning to perceive effects, and learning to enjoy the effects. In other words, marihuana users acquire a capability for specific experience and that is why they become marihuana users in the proper sense. Becker considered the process of "becoming a marihuana user" in terms of entering a specific subculture (patterns of bodily behavior, patterns of vernacular expressions, a set of beliefs and typifications). Still, Becker's reasoning about the social production of experience is easily susceptible to reduction to the traditional notions of socialization (sociology) and suggestion (psychology).

MacAndrew and Edgerton's study on drunken comportment

C. MacAndrew and R. B. Edgerton applied ethnomethodology to the "social explanation" of the "loss of inhibitions" in drunken comportment (MacAndrew, Edgerton, 1969). Using vast anthropological literature they convincingly argued that it is not the alcohol (and its alleged "psychofarmacological potency"), but a "conventional wisdom" referring to the influence of alcohol that in fact evokes the "loss of inhibitions". The "conventional wisdom" is culturally bound, as the anthropological reports have documented.

The only proved influence of alcohol on human activity relates to "its deleterious effects upon our sensimotor capabilities - those doings that we talk about under such headings as locomotor ability, motor-coordination, visual acuity, reaction time and the like" (1969, p. 5). Thus, the conventional wisdom is based on the

following elliptical conviction: "Just as changes in the efficiency with which we exercise our sensimotor capabilities are consequent upon the action of alcohol on our innards, so too are changes in the manner in which we comport ourselves with our fellows" (1969, p. 11). The "social explanation" provided by the authors reads: "the way people comport themselves when they are drunk is determined not by alcohol's toxic assault upon the seat of moral judgement, conscience, or the like, but by what their society makes of and imparts to them concerning the state of drunkenness" (1969, p. 165). In Goffman's words: "it may be argued that drunken comportment is, first off, social behavior that adheres to one's sober understanding of how drunken people comport themselves, and that in so conducting oneself certain license and nonresponsibility can be obtained" (G o f f m a n, 1975, p. 198). (It should be added that Goffman locates "drunken comportment" within his notion of "fabricated framework", which is discussed below).

E. Goffman's notion "fabricated framework"
and its applicability to some "strange" events

Goffman acknowledged the relevance of "James-Schutz line" for his frame analysis: "I try to follow the tradition established by William James in his famous chapter »The Perception of Reality«. Instead of asking what reality is, he gave matters a subversive phenomenological twist, italicizing the following question: Under what circumstances do we think things are real?" (G o f f m a n, 1975, p. 2). In accordance with Schutz, Goffman paid special attention to the distinct character of realms of meaning (p. 3-4).

In fact, Goffman's frame analysis draws heavily on Schutzian premises, removing the question of what is "real" from the "finite provinces of meaning" to the fleeting boundaries of interactional "frames". Cultural repertoire of framings is responsible for countless answers to the common permanent question: "What is it that's going on here?". "Frame Analysis" by Goffman is a catalogue of framings which compose the stock of knowledge "at hand" in modern culture. Goffman systematically distinguished and described some

basic kinds of frameworks, i.e., primary frameworks, and the two-fold transformations - keyings and fabrications.

Beyond the main argument of G o f f m a n ' s "summa" of social phenomenology one may find a very short section entitled "Fabricated Frameworks" (1975, p. 197-200). Goffman claims that in the case of fabrications "the assumption holds that although the particular activity in question is managed as a fabrication, still, activity of that kind could actually occur. There are claimed actions, however, such as the various forms of second sight, humanoid visitations from outer space, astrological influence, and the like, that might be impossible, and therefore what is being fabricated is not merely one occasion of the activity but also the possibility of the activity itself. And since these possibilities involve arcane powers, forces radically incompatible with our whole system of empirical knowledge about the workings of the physical world, one can say (as I would) that what is being fabricated are frameworks themselves" (G o f f m a n, 1975, p. 197). Other examples of "fabricated frameworks" provided by Goffman are: possession, hypnosis, insane behavior and drunken comportment.

There are some reservations concerning the applicability of the notion of "fabricated framework" in the case of drunken comportment. In my opinion, Goffman's notion applies to "events or deeds" which are brought to existence and which otherwise would not exist at all, as, e.g., the "strange" events listed by Goffman as well as the phenomenon of wandering plate sessions. Instead, in the case of drunken comportment the framework itself is not fabricated, because the "events and deeds" in question (i.e., the loss of inhibitions) could occur without the influence from alcohol.

A provisional conclusion

1. Contrary to both Parsons and Merton, social phenomenology indicates that all forms of experience can contribute to the processes of defining the situation.

2. Mertonian "prophecy" is a kind of statement relating to the observable state of affairs. Social phenomenology deals not only with the state of affairs (as in the case of drunken comportment),

but also with subjective experience (e.g., the experience of marijuana users, the experience of participants of wandering plate sessions).

Next, Merton considers the relation of ideas to future actions. Social phenomenology programmatically deals with the overall construction of the sense of reality, with the countless methods of constructing the "accountability" of the social world. Common sense knowledge of the future is one out of many topics within the phenomenological approach.

Finally, Merton considers truth vs. falsehood of "prophecies". On the other hand, phenomenological analysis stresses that the practical interest in accuracy vs. inaccuracy of anticipations is an essential feature of common sense reasoning as such.

3. A sociological explanation of the production of experience can benefit from Mertonian considerations on the sequence: prophecy - action - fulfillment of the prophecy. However it is social phenomenology which provides an elaborated and systematic frame of reference for the original ideas by W. I. Thomas and W. James.

Drunken comportment and wandering plate sessions.

Some problems and suggestions for research

We shall now focus on the conditions under which alcohol proves to facilitate the "loss of inhibitions" and on the conditions under which wandering plate sessions become "talk with the ghosts".

The social origin of reality assumptions

1. The first source of reality assumptions is the stock of "own" beliefs, a stock of "inside" knowledge maintained and used by people who are in favour of the pastimes in question. Although it is only in the case of wandering plate sessions that term "belief" sounds proper, it applies also to the overuse of alcohol. (Simply, we are more ready to treat supernatural phenomena in

terms of convictions; another important reason is that participants of wandering plate sessions often make use of Eastern religions, especially the idea of reincarnation).

Suggestions for research relate to the study of everyday typifications, theses and reasoning procedures as they are displayed in vernacular expressions referring to, or directly accompanying, marihuana use, drinking of alcohol wandering plate sessions.

2. The second source of reality assumptions is the set of convictions by opponents of the pastimes in question. It may be argued that marihuana users, persons exhibiting the "loss of inhibitions" as well as "bona-fide" participants of wandering plate sessions are to a considerable extent victims of their antagonists. In case of alcohol overuse there are numerous versions of moral condemnation and contempt (e.g., common sense labeling and social moralizing, anti-alcohol trends in the media, knowledge "at hand" of the staff of specialized anti-alcohol institutions and associations, and even legal regulations). All these moral objections derive from an ascetic version of "conventional wisdom". Religious recommendations are also relevant here. In some religions there is a strong conviction that drinking is utterly condemnable in any form. Other religions (e.g., catholicism) view the effects of alcohol overuse as blameworthy, though drinking itself is not considered condemnable.

Suggestions for reasearch relate to the inspection of common sense, journalistic, institutional, legal and religious prescriptions and of their social effects (the latter are often contrary to the declared intentions).

The boundaries of normalcy

The three pastimes produce experiences which transgress the boundaries of common sense criteria of normalcy. That is why these experiences require "explanations" or "justifications". "Bona-fide" reasoning (about marihuana effects, the influence of alcohol, and the talk with ghosts by means of the wandering plate) helps to "understand" the specific experiences which otherwise would not be understandable. In the athnomethodological sense, people who in-

dulge in any of these three pastimes make their setting "accountable", i.e., they try to find some "rule" which renders their experience "rational", "consistent", etc.

In this context it could be argued that some essential features of everyday normalcy remain intact in the new realms of reality, providing them with the basic net of social organization. According to Schutz, common sense knowledge consists of "recipes", i.e., practical instructions and recommendations prescribing typical means which are to be employed in order to achieve typical goals. Similarly, participants of wandering plate sessions have some set of "recipes" at their disposal (e.g., recommendations relating to drawing the letters and numbers on the table and the arrow on the back side of the plate, and to the position of hands). Secondly, human partners of "talk with ghosts" follow the rules of conversations explored by conversation analysis. Some examples from wandering plate sessions:

a. The session begins when the "medium" says "Ghost, ghost, come here, we want to talk with you" (the "medium" takes a seat in the circle, and he is the only person who is able to come in contact with ghosts). The opening sequence takes place when the swinging moves of the plate occur. The "answer" of the ghost to the "summon" of the "medium" means the availability of the former for the talk (cf.: Schegloff, 1972).

b. Next the "medium" begins to put questions to the ghost. The ghost gives answers by means of letters and numbers drawn on the table and indicated by the arrow drawn on the plate. When the answers fulfill the common expectations concerning their normal character the sequence is continued.

c. When the letters begin to mix with each other producing nonsense answers (which may happen just after the opening sequence as well as after very long talk) the "medium" puts some controlling questions: "Are you joking?", "Do you want to talk with us?". Such questions may provide the first element of pre-closing sequence, if the ghost's answer is "Yes" to the first question or "No" to the second one.

d. The closing sequence consists of an order by the "medium": "Ghost, go away from here", the answer being the meaningful "absence", namely stopping the plate (the terminal signal of the lack

of further availability for talk) (for points (b), (c), and (d), cf.: S a c k s, 1972; S c h e g l o f f, S a c k s, 1973; S a c k s, S c h e g l o f f, J e f f e r s o n, 1974).

My suggestions for research relate here to: 1) the specific components of the new realms of reality, which are contradictory to the common ones, 2) the components of the new realms which are consistent with the common ones, and 3) the relation between 1 and 2.

When the fun is over

The "conventional wisdom", strengthened by its restrictive versions and by the official moral condemnations often makes it difficult to take pastimes easy and, in fact, may promote undesirable involvement. A dangerous possibility is connected with the overuse of alcohol. It is "conventionally" assumed that excessive drinking leads to openly aggressive behavior. Therefore alcohol is used strategically in order to evoke and "justify" the aggressive behavior in other persons (anthropological evidence is found in M a c A n d r e w, E d g e r t o n, 1969).

In a more general sense, the three pastimes in question are not innocent. To the contrary they happen to be treacherous. Marijuana use may change into addiction. Excessive drinking may turn into alcoholism. Wandering plate sessions may sometimes come closer to the insane experience of externally induced motions. In fact the beliefs which have been shown to be responsible for the social production of experience in the three pastimes seem to be also greatly underestimated as a source of their dangerous related forms.

Conclusions

1. The alternative standpoint in the sociology of knowledge which has been advocated here is based on social phenomenology, i. e., it aims at explicating the structures of experience which make individual experience possible.

2. Social phenomenology deals neither with demystification of subconscious psychological forces nor with the demystification of extra-conscious, social processes which determine common-sense experience. Instead, social phenomenology is occupied with the common-sense domain of the "seen but unnoticed" (Garfinkel, 1967).

3. The phenomenologically oriented explication of rules of common-sense reasoning is often in conflict with common-sense opinions and prejudices regarding the common sense itself. The presented account of some social pastimes would sound unreasonable and unacceptable from the members' point of view. People are really convinced about the influence of alcohol resulting in the "loss of inhibitions" and the present account would be regarded by the members as yet another splitting hairs by sociologists. Similarly, "bona-fide" participants of wandering plate sessions would feel offended by putting their good faith in question.

4. Phenomenological sociology recommends respect for common-sense knowledge. Nevertheless, it shows also that common-sense knowledge is not capable of analyzing itself. The analytical point of view is provided by social phenomenology. Detailed analyses in phenomenological sociology contain a disclosure of the elliptical status of "conventional wisdom" as well as an exposure of the ways in which "realms" are constructed by "conventional wisdom".

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SPOŁECZNE WYTWARZANIE DOŚWIADCZENIA

Artykuł przedstawia hipotezę dotyczącą wpływu reguł doświadczenia potocznego na wytwarzanie doświadczeń przekraczających - w potocznym mniemaniu - granice doświadczenia zdroworozsądkowego. Rozważane są konkretne przykłady tego rodzaju zjawisk oraz możliwości dalszych badań. Podstawy teoretyczne prezentowanego podejścia znaleźć można u A. Schütza oraz w etnometodologii.