

Peter Berger's Sociology and his Images of Society (II)

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Introduction

Sweeping views of large cities, vast stretches of ocean or mountain ranges are pleasing to eye and mind. Peter Berger's *The Social Construction of Reality* leaves a similar intellectual impression on the reader of what man and society are like as total, social phenomena. The argument of the book is an extensive statement on the social construction of objective and subjective reality within society and man, the mechanism of which is the social dialectic of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Paraphrased very briefly, human activity represents externalization of human subjectivity, which is rendered into objective reality through institutionalization. Objective reality, in turn, is internalized by means of socialization; it is transformed again into subjective reality. The social world, seen in this way, is a product of man, while man himself is a product of the social world. In a word, man produces both society and himself.

Berger's synthesis concerning objective and subjective reality constitutes his answer to two fundamentally different questions raised by Emile Durkheim and Max Weber: 'How is it possible that subjective meanings take on objective facticities? Or...How is it possible that human activity (*Handeln*) should produce a world of things (*choses*)?' (Berger, 1966: 18). In the following, I shall discuss Berger's present theoretical analysis in connection with his earlier work. To what extent is it continuous with and a development of previous, less explicit attempts at theory? The same question will be raised with respect to Berger's use of metaphor and imaginative language in theory construction. Also, the problem of the social dialectic will be discussed. Let us begin by sketching a clearer picture of Berger's objective and subjective social reality.

I. The social construction of reality

1. Society as an objective reality

Berger's inquiry into objective reality begins with some basic considerations about human nature, mainly borrowed from Arnold Gehlen's philosophical anthropology. The process of becoming a human being takes place in interrelationship with a specific cultural environment. Human infants, left to themselves, are unable to develop human consciousness; in other words, human consciousness remains undeveloped when not mediated and stimulated by fellow human beings. In contrast to animals, the human organism lacks resources to grow up by itself; it lacks inherent behavioral orientation, and therefore is basically unstable. It is characterized by 'instinctual deprivation'. By the same token, human beings are initially open to any orientation of the mind they may happen to relate to. Stability is gained by acquiring behavioral orientations that are sedimented in social institutions and culture. 'Social institutions are at the core of this process of cultural stabilization. They are the culturally produced forms by which human activity is given coherence and continuity' (1965a: 112). From this it follows that the theory of institutionalization must be at the core of the social construction of reality and of its explanation.

Institutionalization can be said to begin with habitualization and typification of activity, the internal mechanism of which is typification. Certain actions are repeated and become patterns of action. To quote: 'Institutionalization occurs whenever there is reciprocal typification of habitualized actions by types of actors. Put differently, any such typification is an institution. What must be stressed is the reciprocity of institutional typifications and the typicality of not only the actions but also of the actors in institutions' (1966: 54). Berger goes on to show that institutionalization solidifies when patterns of behavior are passed on to others by means of socialization of newly born members to society. In order to transmit patterns of behavior, they must be represented as 'given,' as external reality, or more simply, as the way things are done in a given society. In this way, the institutionalized world constitutes objectivated human activity that confronts the individuals who constructed this reality or who were socialized within it. Stated generally, constructed reality acts back upon the constructors.

It is in this sense that man produces a social world and is, in turn, produced by it.

Role activity occupies a central place in the processes of institutionalization. Social roles are habitualized patterns of behavior. Berger conceptualizes roles as typifications of forms of action; these can be conceived of as entities independent from individual acting. Roles can be performed by any actor. Typification in roles, therefore, is already an objectivation of action. Roles represent the social order. In relation to an actor, it can be said that only 'a part of the self is objectified as the performer of [t]his action' (1966 : 73). Because of the multiplicity of actions and roles, it can be said that the self is only partly involved in any single role. A person who would wholly identify only with one role would be a robot, not a human being. Consequently, in retrospection, it is possible to establish a certain distance from the roles one plays and to see oneself as the performer of a certain action, and therefore, as a certain type of actor.

The scope of institutionalization varies with the division of labor, entailing great differences between simple and complex societies. Institutionalization appears to be most total and its facticity most dense in simple societies. However, institutionalization can never become total; it never involves all forms of conduct, and it never becomes a process independent from the actors. At any time, it is a social process in the sense that it supposes the ongoing activity of concrete human beings. Therefore, to ensure stability, the institutional order must be maintained by reinforcing action. This is realized by means of legitimation. In other words, positive legitimation of existing institutions is necessary in order to solidify these institutions and the established social order. Institutions by themselves may tend toward integration, but the fact that institutions are constructed implies that their logic is result rather than cause. In Berger's words : '[R]eflective consciousness superimposes the quality of logic on the institutional order' (1966 : 64). Further, Berger maintains that the integration of a society is effected in terms of knowledge, which he sees as very fundamental to the legitimation of social reality as well as to its sedimentation within individual consciousness.

Legitimation is an important part of ongoing institutionalization. It is seen as the necessary follow-up of institutionalization, a kind of 'second-order objectivation of meaning'. Continues Berger : 'Legitimation produces new meanings that serve to integrate the meanings already attached to disparate institutional processes. The function of legitimation is to make objectively available and subjectively

plausible the “first-order” objectivations that have been institutionalized’ (1966 : 92). However, legitimation is not a unified process, since there are different levels and different agencies of legitimation. As for the levels of legitimation, they range from incipient legitimation in linguistic objectifications of human experience and rudimentary theoretical propositions such as proverbs and moral maxims to explicit theories of legitimation formulated by experts. The most effective means of legitimation is found in symbolic universes, ‘bodies of theoretical tradition that integrate different provinces of meaning and encompass the institutional order in a symbolic totality...To reiterate, symbolic processes are processes of signification that refer to realities other than those of everyday experience’ (1966 : 95).

The agencies of legitimation (also called conceptual machineries) are found in mythologies, theologies, philosophies, and science, Specialization and organization of these systems of knowledge result from the division of labor in knowledge-production. Many situations are possible. The organization of knowledge ranges from monopolized agencies in simple societies to the most disparate ones in modern, complex societies, where several different symbolic universes operate at the same time. They all function essentially in the same nomic way, by ordering experience. In this way, discrepant meanings become more or less integrated and constitute a sheltering canopy, either for the given society as a whole, or for individuals separately. As for individuals, identities as a whole or different phases of biography are integrated, e. g., by means of rites of passage, while marginal experiences such as the experience of death are ‘contained’ within its boundaries.

2. Society as subjective reality

The social landscape of objective reality has a mirror image, as it were, in consciousness as subjective reality, or as a reconstruction or social reality within consciousness. Reconstructed by means of socialization, it is maintained by subsequent social interaction. People participate in the same social world; through ongoing mutual identification they participate in each other’s being. This is most explicitly the case during the first phase of socialization, called primary socialization. Here, internalization occurs through identification with significant others.

[B]y this identification with significant others the child becomes capable of identifying himself, of acquiring a subjectively coherent and plausible identity. In other words, the self is a reflected entity, reflecting the attitudes

first taken by significant others toward it; the individual becomes what he is addressed as by his significant others' (1966 : 132).

Subsequently, attitudes and roles develop with persons relating to specific others. These roles and attitudes gradually expand and develop into the awareness of what is called 'the generalized other'. With this development it becomes possible to identify with society. In this way, 'Society, identity *and* reality are subjectively crystalized in the same process of internalization' (1966 : 133).

Consequently, a symmetrical relationship is established between objective and subjective reality, and the socialized members of a society become able to recognize themselves as belonging to that society. As is the case in institutionalization, the symmetrical relationship between objective and subjective reality is never total or complete. The extent of symmetry varies with the varying success of socialization. It is usually maximal in simple societies, while more variations of success and failure can be expected to occur in less simple societies, where socialization is more complex, that is, where it is affected by different groups and agencies.

Secondary socialization can be said to begin when the idea of the generalized other has been formed within individual consciousness and role-specific knowledge begins to accumulate. Most forms of education can be considered to be instances of secondary socialization. Because of the institutionalized character of education, relations are formalized and identification with the socializers decreases. Pedagogic techniques may be necessary to assure maximal success. As can be seen in systems of socialization such as that of engineers, musicians, and military and religious personnel; the socializing process differs in terms of what is to be internalized and what techniques are used.

The subjective reality within consciousness is maintained mainly by the routine activities of everyday life and interaction with one's fellow men, one's significant others, and one's contemporaries. 'The most important vehicle of reality-maintenance is conversation' (1966 : 152). One's fellow men function like a chorus in a concert vis-a-vis the soloists; the chorus reinforces the individual voices. Evidently, this process is implicit in working. In sum, it may be said that the maintenance of subjective reality depends mainly on the success of the socialization process and the strength of the plausibility structure, that is, the social base which comes into being through the fact that a number of people internalize the same social

reality. This implies that the maintenance of subjective reality becomes difficult in a weak plausibility structure, where several alternative versions of social realities are available. This further means that re-socialization may occur, for example, through changing one's occupation and one's life style; this change is affected through communication with different associates. Berger calls this process 'alternation'. The most common way of effecting alternation is to nihilate conceptions of one's old reality, preferably reinterpreting it in terms of the new one.

The totality of subjective reality within one person can be called an identity. 'Identity is a phenomenon that emerges from the dialectic between individual and society' (1966: 174). Thus, according to Berger's description and analysis of this phenomenon, man almost visibly becomes a product of his society, while at the same time being its co-producer by participating in social life and interpreting it. When one internalizes the patterns of behavior of the society one belongs to, culturally located conceptions about behavior materialize into demeanor which is characteristic for the culture in question. When ways of thinking and behavior of a given type differentiate, different types of identity develop and become relatively stable elements of objective social reality. In this way one can observe and speak of an American, a Japanese, a New Yorker, etc.

A related aspect of being a product of one's culture (or sub-culture) is the fact that identity-types reflect the predominant elements of knowledge concerning identities. In other words, theories about identities may function in the same way as psychologies. They are legitimating; they are part of the construction of reality. For example, possession by demons occurs in cultures that have knowledge about such occurrences, while neuroses occur in cultures that are enlightened about such mental phenomena. In other words, individuals construct their subjective reality according to the objectively available knowledge in their societies; this further means that accepted theories of behavior not only explain behavior but are part of its production. Here one sees that knowledge in general and acknowledged theories about identity in particular function as social phenomena even when they are not scientifically valid (1965 b).

3. The social dialectic.

Apparently, Berger does not treat the social dialectic as something apart or different in function from other social processes. However, I wish to argue that

Berger's analysis wins in clarity when the social dialectic, as a matter of the unconscious functioning of social reality, is clearly distinguished and kept apart from empirical processes. In other words, the social dialectic can be neatly described as a different layer of reality, to be distinguished from specific institutionalizations, actual social roles, and instances of legitimation. It can be seen as the hidden mechanism of all social reality construction, or the general logic behind observable social processes.

To repeat by way of summary, the main processes of objective and subjective reality construction according to Berger are the following. First, there is the emergence of the social order as an objectivation of externalized human subjectivity. Its concrete emergence is observed in the institutionalization of the social through habitualization of action of which role behavior is the paradigmatic case. The emergent social order is subsequently legitimized. Second, we have the internalization of objective reality in consciousness, of which identity formation is the central process.

The social dialectic, as mentioned earlier, consists of three moments : externalization, objectivation, and internalization. This conceptual scheme is elaborated upon especially in connection with religion as the agency of legitimation *par excellence*¹.

The initiating phase of the social dialectic is externalization, which is said to be an anthropological necessity. Stated concretely, man cannot but actualize himself through various activities together with his fellow men. Having initially no fixed relationship to the world, man constructs a world for himself, by expressing himself in activity, which objectivates into structural elements that guide further development.

Objectivation is the second phase of the dialectical process. When objectivated, human activity acquires a measure of objectivity as a reality existing outside consciousness. The totality of objectivations constitute culture, which includes everything from tools and language to social symbols and society itself. Culture and society, being produced by man, act back on the producer. 'Society confronts man as external, subjectively opaque and coercive facticity' (1967 : 11). This facticity is experienced in social control, but its fundamental coerciveness is its power to constitute and impose itself as reality through objectivation. This means that 'the individual's own life appears as objectively real, to himself as well as

to others, only as it is located within a social world that itself has the character of objective reality' (1967: 13). To understand this effect on the individual we have to follow the explanation of the third phase, internalization.

Internalization, a term more or less synonymous with socialization, is responsible for the resulting symmetry between objective and subjective reality. Concretely it is seen as a learning process mediated through others. Its crucial dimension is identification with objective meanings. Internalization implies that the objective facticity of the social world becomes subjective facticity as well. Since internalization occurs through interaction with others, it includes at the same time externalization and objectivation. In a word, socialization occurs in a dialectical manner. It is through the dialectical process, constituted by the combined functioning of these three moments, that individual identities are shaped and that society, that is, the social order, comes into being. This implies that the essence of society is 'order'. In Berger's words: 'The socially constructed world is, above all, an ordering of experience' (1967: 19). Society represents a *nomos*, a meaningful order, and nomization is its most important function. Here, it becomes clear why religion is highlighted as the legitimating agency *par excellence*. Religion transforms the socially meaningful order into a sacred cosmos. In other words, social reality is believed to be grounded in the sacred. This is a far-reaching attribution of meaning, but as an objectivation it is merely an extension or a reinforcement of what was present from the beginning, the ordering function of social objectivations within institutions. The importance of language is emphasized again. 'On the fundament of language is built a cognitive and normative edifice that passes for knowledge in a society' (1967: 20). To participate in a society is to share its knowledge.

As for the social dialectic, its core is the mutual relationship between producer and product, which shape each other. The general mechanism of the social dialectic is clearly outlined in its three phases, but the areas where it operates are only suggested, e. g., in Berger's general conclusion:

Man is biologically destined to construct and inhabit a world with others. This world becomes for him the dominant and definitive reality. Its limits are set by nature, but once constructed, this world acts back on nature. In the dialectic between *nature* and *the socially constructed world the human organism* itself is transformed. In the *same* dialectic man produces reality and

thereby produces himself (1966 : 183; emphasis added).

Thus, strictly speaking, the dialectic manifests itself in three different relationships, between nature and the human world, between the human organism and identity, and between identity and society. The fact that Berger does not formulate a different functioning of the social dialectic in these three basically different relationships implies that there is only one instance of dialectic, and that it is the hidden mechanism of all constructed reality.

In concluding this section, it is in order to underline the importance of the distinction between the social dialectic and other processes inherent in social reality. As can be seen from our summary, the bulk of Berger's analysis is a phenomenological and sociological description of social life, beginning with social activity that is habitualized and institutionalized, and which in turn is internalized by new members of society. It can be argued that different levels of reality are involved, which should be kept analytically separate. One level of social reality is constituted by the social relationships and facts of social life which are recognizable to any person. It concerns the basic patterns of interaction which develop within institutions and organizations. A phenomenological description of these empirical data can be seen as the first level of analysis, or at least its preliminary stage²). Several sociological analyses of the same reality can be made in terms of role theory, socialization and formation of identities, formal organization etc., depending on one's interest.

A second level of reality with a corresponding one of analysis concerns the sociological functioning of the mechanisms inherent within the empirical phenomena. Berger touches upon two basic mechanisms: first, that of typification of acts and actors as a partial mechanism of objectivation, and second, identification as a partial mechanism of internalization. These mechanisms are not observable social phenomena, nor are they data of consciousness; nevertheless, the link with social life is still close.

The case of the social dialectic appears to be more remote from concrete social reality. As a different social mechanism one can see it as a third level of social reality, whose range of applicability is much greater than that of the former ones, since it pertains to social reality as a whole. Therefore, theorizing about this phenomenon is theorizing at a still higher level of generality. Moreover, because the dialectic is realistic in its results, one can trace its logic, but it is

difficult to see how it is amenable to empirical verification.

In conclusion, when one aims at a totalistic explanation of social reality, it is important to pay more attention to different levels of analysis and levels of generality than Berger does. Later I shall return the problem of the social dialectic. Let us now turn to a discussion of Berger's theory and look for lines of continuity and development with respect to his earlier work.

II. Berger's sociological landscape.

1. What is new in *The Social Construction of Reality*?

To start our discussion, let us begin with some recent appraisals and criticisms of Berger's theory. Both merits and demerits are said to result from his 'totalistic' approach (Hunter, 1984). While being highly successful in covering the essential elements of culture as a whole³, spanning micro and macro social worlds, some of Berger's elaborations, such as the relationship between identity and social structure, lack depth. It is said that Berger's theoretical work, though by no means unsophisticated, remains at an elementary level, stopping short of a formal theory. Therefore, there is not much new in his theory with respect to the individual and society, except his orientation in the direction of a phenomenological sociology.

In a curious way, Berger draws mutually contradictory criticism for paying too little and too much attention to matters of social structure. The first view is offered by Burke Thomason (1982). According to this view, Berger overly favors the constructionist view with respect to social reality, implying that this reality is always a human reality and that the processes of becoming givenness are put more in evidence than the givenness itself. Thomason admits the importance of the dialectical relationship between man and the social world, but he argues that assertions about the social dialectic, as pointed out by Berger, should not be taken as ontological characterizations of social reality. If the dialectic were treated differently, as a methodological device, it could indicate and affect the way one does sociology, not dogmatically foreclosing the opposite realistic approach of sociological conceptualization. It is the latter approach that focuses on the givenness of social reality. Further, Thomason elaborates on two serious shortcomings in Berger's account of man and social reality. First, Berger's concept of man is

said to be highly ambiguous. Sometimes it is used to indicate a collectivity, while it stands for an individual human being in different contexts. Secondly, social reality may either mean a reality independent of human consciousness, built up over time by a collectivity, or it may stand for a reality considered as a mode of consciousness, that is, a complex of subjective meanings held by individuals. Thomason concedes that such ambiguous concepts are useful and even creative in Berger's case, in that they convey a sense of a dynamic connectedness of all social reality. However, these concepts lack elaboration and their validity is questionable when their use entails a sociologically biased view. What is more, Thomason fears an intentional or 'tricky' use of these concepts, leading to the confusion of 'reality out there' and reality in the minds of people. He therefore insists on a more genuine phenomenological approach such as is proposed by Alfred Schutz. The latter does not run together social life as it is lived and forms of awareness of social reality, of which sociology is only one.

This criticism is partly reversed by Nicholas Abercrombie (1986). Berger is said to pay too much attention to social structure in the sense that he has too much concern for problems of social order. According to Abercrombie, the underlying assumptions of much of Berger's work are the ideas that human nature is fundamentally unstable and the social world highly precarious, becoming more and more so in modern society. Berger implicitly takes the necessity of stability and order as an axiom inherent in individual and social life, but this is difficult to demonstrate. Mankind actually can tolerate a great deal of dissention and conflict. What is more, Berger's legitimations do not only serve the social order; instances of legitimation may become sources of conflict as well. This concept of legitimation, too, is ambiguous; legitimation usually enhances order but it is said to contribute meaning in other contexts. Again, order is also assumed to be a result of internalization, but Berger does not explain how this is arrived at. Because of his underlying assumptions concerning order, Berger is indicted as a conservative theorist, even though at times he himself points out counter-conservative aspects of sociology. As for individual human existence, Berger's overriding concern with social order and related problems represents the limitations of autonomous human activity; they imply a measure of pessimism. Concludes Abercrombie :

There is therefore a tension in [Berger's work], both theoretical and

spiritual, between structure and human activity, and between pessimism and the possibilities of human autonomy—a tension that, perhaps, remains unresolved in sociology as a whole (Abercrombie, 1986 : 30).

This apparently contradictory criticism of bias with regard to both the producer of the social world and this world itself is obviously no joke, but is amusing anyway, certainly to Berger himself, whose candle seems to burn at both ends. However, on scrutinizing these allegations more carefully, one sees that they are less contrary than they seem to be at first sight. In the first account, Berger's theory is measured by the yardsticks offered by Schutz and in the second by those of more conventional sociology. According to the former, Berger falls short of Schutz's view of phenomenological analysis, which is supposed to refrain from causal and ontological assertions. But such assertions do occur in Berger's sociological theory, and the most appealing image in Berger's sociological landscape is indeed that of man the producer, as pointed out by Thomason. Berger, then, may plead guilty on this account, or counter with the contention that he is more concerned with substance than with methodological finesse. By the same token, however, Berger stays closer to conventional sociological theory, which intends a functional analysis of social reality in its actuality. Berger is said to be a functionalist (Abercrombie 1986 : 27). He is indeed much concerned with structural elements, as pointed out by this commentator, but it is with structural elements as unavoidable objectivations, which function as moral or normative necessities at the same time. Though functional, they are so for both the individual and for the social order. This shows that Berger is concerned with the micro and the macro level of social reality at the same time and that his goal is to make sense of the totality.

2. Berger's earlier sociology

The place of Berger's work within the discipline of sociology in general is, for obvious reasons, not unimportant. However, I feel that the question what is new in *The Social Construction* must be raised first and foremost with respect to Berger's earlier work, with which one would expect continuity while also expecting new developments or new insights. As in art, merely refurbishing or revamping the same old theme is never highly evaluated. I feel that Berger has been able to create something new in *The Social Construction* as compared with the *Invitation*

to *Sociology*. Even though both studies directly concern people in relation to the main areas and aspects of social reality, the focus in the former is on the picture as a whole, while in the latter there are several focuses. In other words, the latter offers differing pictures of man and society, which do not overlap. Here, it is necessary to summarize again the main points of the *Invitation* to compare it with *The Social Construction*.

The *Invitation*, too, begins with an account of objective reality, but here Berger centers attention on its manifestations of social control, social stratification, and social institutions. In sum, Berger touches upon many mechanisms of social control inherent in personal human relations and in social life with its moral, economic, and political dimensions, while he analyses social stratification in terms of meaning. Moreover, social control and social stratification are discussed briefly as instances of institutions that are channels of human behavior. All these elements of social structure represent external pressures on the individual in society, but there is an inner bondage, too. This internal dependency is evident in role behavior; it is also clear from the existence of social knowledge as well as the existence of groups that function as reference for matters of thinking and life style. Society exists within man. As we have seen, it is institutions and the process of institutionalization that become the central concern with respect to objective reality in *The Social Construction*.

The second part of the *Invitation* concerns man in society as an active agent. In the end, the deterministic forces of external and internal dependence are less rigid than suggested at first. One should not overlook the existence of subjective meanings and the intentionality of human action. There are many instances which show that individuals alone or in collectivities act against the grain of social structures. Expressed philosophically, human beings are free to act autonomously and authentically. With this we come to the ethical aspect of human action. The intentionality of human action is never ethically neutral. As in a morality play, actors may show committed attitudes, but possibly also non-committed ones such as we may find in a circus. Sociology as a science is supposed to be objective and ethically neutral, but this is certainly not the case in its applications or when intended as sociological Machiavellianism from the beginning.

As can be seen from the foregoing summaries, the content and structure of the two books are similar. The existence of man in society and general social

action are the centers of gravity in both, as can be expected from Berger's view that sociology ought to be humanistic. Further, aspects of social structure are analyzed in both books. These appear to receive primary emphasis for various reasons. They are invariably touched upon first. In the *Invitation*, the aspects of social structure appear to carry more weight, since more 'objectivistic' aspects such as instances of social control and social stratification are brought into play, while in *The Social Construction* more 'subjectivistic' elements such as knowledge and human consciousness itself are discussed. Also, the aspects of social structure in the *Invitation* are represented in a clear-cut picture as aspects of determination. This is not the case in the action perspective in the same book. Here, it concerns concrete social action which incorporates at least four different contexts of meaning. First, there is the practical context of meaning in everyday life as a matter of its general viability by means of routines, roles etc. Second, we have the ethical perspective, with several modes of moral meaning and ethical involvement resulting from the intentionality of human action. Third, metaphysical meaning is touched upon in its two extremes of ultimate meaning and ultimate meaninglessness. Fourth, there is the sociological meaning of human autonomy versus determinism. With respect to the latter, only those individuals appear to act autonomously who swim against the stream.

The action perspective and its complex of meaning in the *Invitation*, then, is very broad. It even extends to deception encased within structural elements such as roles, routines, and ritual, which may function as an 'immense apparatus of bad faith', or as 'deception and self-deception' (1963: 1665-7).

In contrast, the action perspective in *The Social Construction* appears to be more pronounced but its range of application and meaning is considerably narrower; its main problem is that of human autonomy versus determinism. This problem is solved on a higher level of generality as represented by the social dialectic with its three moments of externalization, objectivation, and internalization. Determinism becomes self-determinism. In *The Social Construction* Berger sticks to sociological problems. All the other problems that appear in the *Invitation* seem to recede into the shadowy background behind the curtains of the dialectical stage. Thus, the problemlessness of *The Social Construction* is as remarkable as the host of problems to which we were introduced in the *Invitation*. However, some phantoms reappear in *The Sacred Canopy* and in *The Homeless Mind*, where,

e. g., the problems of alienation, secularization, pluralization of social worlds, modernization and de-modernization are discussed. All these problems are problems of institutionalization and social change in modern society; however, in their discussion the social dialectic recedes into the background, exception made for alienation, which occurs when the dialectical functioning of the social world is forgotten⁴).

Summarizing our comparison of *The Social Construction* and Berger's earlier theorizing, we can say that indeed there is continuity and development. The content of the theorizing is largely the same, but *The Social Construction* concentrates on sociological problems, leaving behind the human problems of ethics and the various sources of meaning. We witness the development, if not of a new conceptual framework, at least of a new image of social reality, that of the social dialectic. There is some difference in approach, but the main difference is one of level of generality. Social determination and human action are integrated in the social dialectic. As for Berger's simultaneous approach as it were to the problems of social structure and action, of society and the individual, one might have expected that both levels cannot be linked except with great simplification, since the interconnectedness between individual and social phenomena is very complex⁵), as Berger himself often observes.

A similar argument concerning continuity and development in Berger's present work can be made in connection with his use of metaphor. The variety of images in the *Invitation* contrasts with their more limited but consistent use in *The Social Construction*, but there is also similarity as we will see later. Since metaphor is not a methodological issue, either in sociology or in Berger, it is of lesser importance, but it, too, is worth considering for reasons of style and content.

3. Implications of Berger's social imagery

The stylistic benefit of metaphor, like that of make-up in the world of women and some men, is important enough but does not need our attention. As I have argued elsewhere, the compatibility of metaphor and theory may be traced to the metaphorical nature of language itself in the sense that many non-physical things are conceptualized in terms of the physical or the visual. This, no doubt, is related to the fact that vision is the most developed form of human sense perception. Discussion of the role of images and imagination is not absent in the liter-

ature of the social sciences. For example, it has been argued that our knowledge basically is the image we have of the world, of how we are located in space and time, in the world of nature and in a field of personal relations that is colored by our emotions (Boulding, 1975). Another author, who discusses the common role of imagination in art and science, maintains that images are necessary to both. Art and science are evidently functionally different, but both are concerned with the clarification of reality and the exploration of the unknown. 'What else is imagination but the moving around in the mind, restlessly, compulsively, so often randomly, of images with which to express and to contain some aspects of perceived reality?' (Nisbet, 1977: 11). As may be expected, there are also arguments against the use of imagery especially in sociological research of the so-called qualitative sociology that developed in the phenomenological tradition, symbolic interactionism, and ethnomethodology (Fletcher, 1974). To this I shall return in a moment.

Berger's use of metaphor is instructive for its merits as well as its demerits. In general, his imagery fits his theoretical arguments. To repeat, the main images of social reality in the *Invitation* are a prison, self-imposed confinement, puppet theater, drama play, and conspiracy. These images, taken together, do not represent a coherent picture of society as a whole. This implies that society is definitely not a one-dimensional thing. Considered separately, Berger might have used them more carefully, in an ideal type fashion, not for clarifying the related phenomena in their totality, but to clarify some of their 'characteristics'. Images are misleading when they are used to suggest that society as a whole is such and such. For example, it is not society as a whole but only partial social realities or simply other people that are at the origin of external pressures. Another reason to be careful in using metaphor is that even a partial social reality like social control may function differently with respect to different people. Social control, or the social order in general, can be perceived either as a matter of collaboration or as one of constraint depending on the definition of self and the group⁶). Therefore, it is misleading and theoretically questionable to use images as realistic analogies for everything that goes on in social interaction. Goffman and Garfinkel especially draw criticism for their use of similes like drama and games (Fletcher, 1974: 117-24). Thus, different implications of one and the same image should be avoided. If one explicates different aspects of a single metaphor, the image itself tends

to grow larger than the phenomenon that is to be described. This easily entails a disfigurement, as is the case with Berger's drama metaphor. It has two meanings which are vaguely suggested, one for society as a whole, and another for individual behavior. In the first sense, drama is supposed to illustrate the precariousness of society and its fictional character; in the second sense, it illustrates the fact that external pressures on individuals are limited in impact. People act driven by their personal intentions, which show or hide either authenticity or bad faith, morally positive attitudes or cynism or even deception.

It appears to me that Berger is perplexed by the conflicting tendencies of human intentionality in the *Invitation*, to which he tried to find a solution by contemplating human freedom in a philosophical argument. But this only restates the problem. The uneasiness caused by a bewildering complex of tendencies may be a reason why Berger pursued a synthesis in *The Social Construction* in the form of a sociological solution to this problem.

Berger's synthesis is clearly expressed in his metaphor of construction and that which is constructed. There is only the producer and the product. The edifice of knowledge is an important part of the latter. This double image of being producer and product does not merely suggest an accidental characteristic of man and society; it touches on their essence. However, the meaning this image conveys is not given to consciousness. Individually, people do not experience themselves either as producers of the social world or as its products. It is only in reflection that one may grasp the purport of the social dialectic in connection with self and the social order, which are quite different as 'products'. An individual is primarily a 'product' of a micro social world. Within consciousness individual identity develops before cultural identity; only the latter is primarily a product of the macro world. In contrast, society is a historical product that cannot to be reduced to *Handeln* of the living population of a society.

Further, man becomes a profoundly social being in *The Social Construction*. Man as a concept is idealized in this sense; it contrasts with the undersocialized view of man in the *Invitation*. There, the individual is seen as subject to inner bondage and external pressures, but somehow free and motivated by personal intentions. The bewildering problems of autonomy versus determinism and of different intentions and meanings are solved in *The Social Construction* by arguing that man is a social being through and through. If the problem is not solved

definitely, its acuteness is attenuated by arguing that the plurality of intentions and meanings of social life are integrated at a higher level of generality in the social nature of man.

It is not preposterous to reason that Berger became aware of the social nature of man through doing sociology. In the *Invitation* sociology itself was conceived of as a very social activity having many implications for social praxis. No such implications are suggested in *The Social Construction*, but implicit in it one can find a moral or community-oriented attitude, which is not present in other brands of more individualistic sociology. It is not difficult to draw the conclusion that, if *Man* is such a profoundly social being, *we* should be more aware of it. Competition and strife are part of social life, but how can society function without law and order? Why should we not admit that harmony is the collective goal of all societies and of the world as a whole?

Communitary and individualistic attitudes in science have been described in a philosophical context as 'romantic' and 'Enlightenment' types of thought respectively, influenced both in style and content by the underlying social imagery. This was cogently argued by David Bloor with respect to Karl Popper's and Thomas Kuhn's theories of science⁷⁾. The story runs as follows. Popper fashioned his theory of science from a universal point of view as a continuous effort to discover truths about the world, his basic metaphor being that of Darwinian evolution and the struggle for survival of the fittest in terms of rational theory. According to this view, theories must be severely scrutinized and tested with respect to their content of truth. One of Popper's goals was to safeguard against dogmatism and totalitarian views with respect to truth. In contrast, Kuhn focused on the existence of paradigms or working models in science established by a community of scientists. A revolution in science occurs when new conceptualizations make possible a new paradigm. Community is Kuhn's leading image. The underlying theme of his vision is a Durkheimian one; the nature of man is essentially social and society is not reducible to a mere aggregate of individuals. A society has its own history, its own traditions as well as its own spirit. Wholeness and interconnectedness are stressed and said to reveal a 'romantic' way of thinking. In contrast, Popper's thinking is said to be steeped in the ideology of the Enlightenment and its rationalism as the universal attribute of thinking which is to proceed by individual theoretical conjecture.

Placing Berger within this story would make him a 'romantic' sociologist, a new fancy in the trade! While avoiding this sobriquet but remaining attentive to the significance of social imagery in backstage theory construction, it may be better to stick to the sociological jargon of 'methodological collectivism' which Berger developed in *The Social Construction* and which was already present in the *Invitation* in Berger's concern to make sense of the whole. In other words, the former appears to be a synthesis, in theory as well as in imagery, of the earlier discussed jumble of problems relating to the facticity of social structures and to the conflicting layers of meaning in action. The continuity of imagery, however implicit, should not be missed. The earlier images such as a prison, puppet theater, drama play, and conspiracy, all suggest in one way or another collectivities of people engaged in the construction of reality.

4. The social dialectic revised

Several theoretically interesting problems can be found in the workshops of Berger's *Social Construction*. In the following I shall discuss briefly its core problem, that of the social dialectic. A full discussion would require clarification of the mechanisms of identification and typification, of the status of objective and subjective reality, and of the problem of intersubjectivity, issues that can all be traced in phenomenological sociology⁸). To the latter issues I shall refer only in passing.

It is commonly known that the term 'dialectic' hails from ancient Greek philosophy, where it was used in several meanings, such as the art of conversation, reasoning, and logic. In Hegel and Marx the term took on prominence denoting a historical process conceptualized as thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, but this famous triad was first used in German philosophy by Johann G. Fichte⁹). Berger, maintaining the tripartite scheme, understands it as the general principle behind social development, or as the form of causality in the sphere of the social, which is timeless. Two additional quotes:

The relationship between the two [self and society]... is a *dialectical rather than a mechanistic one*, because the self, once formed, is ready in its turn to react upon the society that shaped it (1965 b : 33 ; emphasis added). As far as the societal phenomenon is concerned, these moments [externalization, objectivation, and internalization] are *not* to be thought of as occurring in a temporal sequence. Rather society and each part of it are simultaneously

characterized by these three moments, so that any analysis in terms of only one or two of them falls short (1966 : 129).

Since every analysis of the social world must include the three aspects of dialectic, everything social is asserted to be dialectical in nature. From this and from our earlier summary one can understand dialectic as the hidden mechanism of all social construction. However, other commentators contend that Berger's dialectic is 'methodological' (Wuthnow, 1984 : 243), that he merely invokes it to demonstrate the basic sociality of human nature. 'The real goal is that of strongly urging a certain humanization of sociological attitudes' (Thomason, 1982 : 158). What is worse, the concept is criticized for being ambiguous: '[E]lements of [Berger's] dialectic are ambiguous because it is unclear and equivocal just what aspects of the real social processes are being referred to' (Thomason, 1982 : 145). Again, other authors accept Berger's view¹⁰. I myself wish to argue, as already begun above, that it makes sense to consider dialectic as a kind of inner chemistry of the social. However, before proceeding we have to see what is problematic in Berger's conception.

The dialectical nature of all social reality implies that both the social order and human identity are 'products' that are constructed dialectically. Since there is only one dialectic, are we to conclude that these two products are fundamentally the same? And since Berger claims that objective reality and subjective reality are symmetrical and that both are characterized by facticity¹¹, are we to conclude that the facticity of both series of phenomena is the same? The answer to both questions is in the negative, but reading Berger reveals no clues to the answer. Therefore, a close look at his dialectic is in order.

To begin with, externalization and objectivation are abstract terms denoting two different moments of overt action, which are not empirically distinct. These terms need each other, because they include each other *ab ovo*, so to speak. Externalization without objectivation is non-existent. Stated more concretely, an observable act is externalization and objectivation at the same time, but it is not necessarily socially objectivated. Not all acts are social in nature, and not all acts objectivate in roles, much less in institutions. This implies that there are different forms of objectivation. Berger acknowledges this in another context, where he clarifies the concepts of objectivation, objectification, reification, and alienation, all of which are related (1965 c). In a nut shell, objectivation is the embodiment

of human subjectivity in products, while objectification is an objectivation as an object of reflection. Reification is an objectification in an alienated mode. It is alienation that is responsible for breaking the unity of the act of producing and its product so that the facticity of social realities is reinforced to the extent that they are perceived as things. From Berger's definition of the foregoing terms one can conclude that the various manifestation of the phenomenon of objectivation are different forms of consciousness. From this it follows that the processes of formation are located within consciousness and that the resulting facticity is a product of consciousness. Berger's conceptualization of objectification and alienation confirms this conclusion. Here, we have returned to the problem of facticity: if institutionalization and the formation of human identity are both a matter of consciousness, how do consciousness of self and of the social order differ? To answer this question, we have to turn our attention to the term 'internalization' and the corresponding phenomenon.

As for the third term of the social dialectic, we notice that it differs from the other two. Internalization is roughly equivalent to socialization, which is evidently not 'a moment' of action but rather an ongoing process. No doubt, here lies the reason why Berger asserts that internalization contains the other two moments as well. Obviously, socialization occurs in a dialectical way. This represents an incongruity with respect to externalization and objectivation, which separately cannot contain the other moments at the same time. Another inconsistency concerns the time perspective of the three moments. Externalization and objectivation occur at the same time, but objectivation and internalization cannot occur simultaneously, because producer and product would become identical, and therefore, contradictory. For these reasons we must conclude that something is wrong with Berger's dialectical triad. An adjustment suggests itself if the processes involved in both the formation of the social order and that of identity are clarified.

First, action itself, which is analytically constituted by two moments, can be considered as a process of construction, externalization representing the aspect of the producing and objectivation representing the aspect of being produced. Further, institutionalization, as argued by Berger, can be conceived of as habitualization of action in a collectivity. By way of analogy, imagine that a gifted sportsman invents a new sport, a ball game, to be played by teams. To realize his project,

he has to envision a scheme of action involving at least two different tasks or roles in order to make possible competition. A set of rules completes the play. In Berger's terminology, we have a new externalization and objectivation of human subjectivity. In our analogy, subjectivity is the idea or a series of ideas of the new ball game, that are to be acted out in a certain sequence and under certain conditions¹²⁾. The idea evidently is of crucial importance, but, as far as institutionalization is concerned, it is its objectivation in a scheme of action that is of central significance. It is this that constitutes the objective order that doubles as a complex of objective meanings.

Secondly, the process of identity formation, according to Berger, begins with internalization of objective reality. Revising this process, we assume that at its core we find a *junction* of objective and subjective reality. In the analogy, the fundamental condition required of an aspiring player of the new game is that he must be able to grasp the idea behind it and be able to play a role as in all sports. In internalization, then, it is this grasping of meaning which comes first analytically. I wish to call the initial grasping of meaning 'ideation'. In the analogy, again, ideation is the same for the original inventor as for his followers; only the way of getting the idea is different. To get a realistic grasp of the idea all players concerned have to externalize and practice it through habitualization of a suitable pattern of action. The same habitualization leads to institutionalization of the game and is functional in internalization as well, but what actually matters for the two processes is different. For the formation of identity or self-consciousness it is the *meaning* that the game has for the players that matters most. For example, it may be the absorbing form of activity admired by fans or any of the other pleasures which derive from performing a sport together with one's buddies. Meaning need not be the same for all players. Actually, individual meanings cannot be the same for different persons, who have different identities. In contrast, the aspects that are crucial for the institutionalization of this activity are quite different. It is the general meaning of the game, its social functions, its smooth set of rules, in a word, it is the objective aspects and conditions that matter in this respect.

We can reconstruct Berger's dialectic by assuming the existence of two processes of production, which are partly similar and partly different, one resulting in the social order and the other effecting personal identity. Their common analytical moments are ideation and externalization, which stand for the producing side,

while the third element, which indicates the aspect of being produced, is different. But if different, we need a different term. In the case of the social order, the aspect of being produced is expressed neatly by the term objectivation; in the case of consciousness 'subjectivation' suggests itself¹³). This term, then, becomes a twin concept with objectivation. It is not unimportant to explain the similarity of the two terms as well as the extent to which objectivated and subjectivated reality are similar, but for present purposes it is more important to point out their main difference. Objectivated and subjectivated reality are different in function. Objective reality functions as the frame within which action takes place. A frame, of necessity, presupposes order. Subjective reality as individual consciousness is very different. It functions as the recipient of action, that is, as a complex of meaning within which new acts must be somehow integrated. This complex of meaning is not necessarily ordered, because personality is not necessarily integrated¹⁴).

It is the difference in interrelatedness of the elements of a totality which may show a difference in facticity. Since the ordering of elements is essential to the functioning of a social system but less so to the personality system, we assume that the facticity of the social order is greater than that of consciousness. If this conclusion is obvious, its fundamental premise is not. Theoretically, it is more difficult to construct an integrated self than an integrated collectivity, because a collectivity is naturally an object of attention, while the self is not. Fortunately and unfortunately, one has to step back to be able to look at oneself. We must regret the lack of a built-in mechanism for self-reflection, for such a mechanism would probably save us from the foolishness of not acting according to social norms, but we are lucky without it, since continual self-reflection would reveal still greater non-autonomous conformity to the run of the mill. In contrast, social structures are always out there in the sense that, even in the natural attitude, they are an object of continuous attention, since social structures are part of the conditions that affect one's action for better or for worse.

If the facticity of consciousness is less dense than that of objective reality, this does not mean that it is absent altogether in the former. Continuing the above argument, the facticity of consciousness can be thought to be proportional with the degree of integration, as it is effected by socialization as described by Berger, but also as it is effected through personal formation of the self.

This brings us to our last point, the *differential* effect of dialectic as re-

versed causality of the product on the producer, not touched upon by Berger. It is arguable that its effect in general is proportional to the degree of facticity of consciousness. The more firmly social structures are internalized, the more firm their force of producing man in their image and the weaker the chances are that those selves will act back on that society. When objective reality is less firmly internalized, as tends to occur in culturally and spiritually pluralistic societies, social reflection is facilitated but without much effect as long as most individuals take the social structures for granted. As for the internal dialectic, theoretically it is supposed to meet with more difficulties the more weakly objective reality is internalized, while personal reflection becomes harder than ever.

Summary and conclusion

The Social Construction of Reality shows continuity with and is a development of the *Invitation to Sociology*. Both books deal with aspects of social structure and human action, but at different levels of generality. The *Invitation* provides concrete descriptions of several instances of social structures, while also outlining a broad vista of human action and a plurality of meanings, thus showing several focuses, which are illustrated by various metaphors. In contrast, *The Social Construction* represents only a single focus, that of construction in a dialectical manner, but with two results. The social order is constructed through the process of institutionalization, providing a basis for stability which is biologically lacking in human beings; individual identity is constructed through the process of internalization and the acquisition of social knowledge.

Berger draws severe criticism with respect to *The Social Construction* for ambiguities in its conceptions of man, society, and the social dialectic, as well as for its exclusive concern with the positive aspects of order in society. I have argued that Berger's sociology with its community-oriented attitude can be better understood as *methodological collectivism* and that his theoretical stance becomes more acceptable when different levels of generality are kept apart. The social dialectic represents the highest level of generality. It can be conceived of as the unobservable chemistry of all social reality, which is, however, not undifferentiated. The functioning of the dialectic is different in the formation of the social order and in the formation of the human identity. The two processes

should be seen as initiating in 'ideation' or the intellectual grasping of meaning, which objectivates as an aspect of order in objective reality but which remains fundamentally an aspect of meaning within consciousness.

NOTES

- 1) *The Sacred Canopy* starts with an explanation of the social dialectic, which is more systematic than the one in *The Social Construction*. In the former, religion is subsequently discussed as legitimation of the social order, but also as causing problems such as alienation and masochistic attitudes in individuals. Further, secularization of religion is discussed as a problem affecting society, the individual, and religion as a cultural system.
- 2) According to the Schutzian view, a description of relationships and social structures as experienced by actors in concrete situations does not constitute sociological analysis; it is only a preparatory stage. Analysis proper reduces concrete social reality to its essential elements and their relationships.
- 3) Wuthnow and Hunter (1984) view Berger's sociology as an analysis of culture. Indeed, culture can be conceived of as the totality of cultural products including society itself. However, this view tends to focus on culture as a product only. Berger's sociology is more dynamic. Basically, it concerns the existence of man in society.
- 4) Alienation, according to Berger, occurs when one is not conscious of the social dialectic. This is problematic, since it may mean that a great part of the population, including conventional sociologists, are alienated.
- 5) This is argued by S. Lindenberg (1983) in connection with model construction in sociology. According to Lindenberg, models are different from ideal types. Basically, an ideal type is an abstraction, while a model of a social phenomenon is a scientific description of the phenomenon in question that is as simple as possible and as complex as necessary.
- 6) See Ralf H. Turner (1989). To quote: 'The paradox of social order is that constraint and collaboration are inextricably intertwined, and the effort to separate them necessarily does violence to the dynamics of collective life' (p.83).
- 7) Cf. Karl Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Hutchinson, 1959, and Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.
- 8) Intersubjectivity, which is mostly taken for granted in conventional sociology, is especially thematic in phenomenological sociology. It concerns the understanding of the Other. Explained briefly, the 'we-relationship' is seen as a basic relationship underlying all other relations. It supposes an interlocking of perspectives, motives, and behavior. The Other's consciousness is structured like mine. Schutz calls the argumentation concerned 'The general thesis of the alter ego's existence'. Cf. Richard M. Zaner (1961) and Maurice Natanson (1986).
- 9) See 'Dialectic' and 'Dialectic Materialism' in *The Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. The Macmillan Company and The Free Press, New York, 1967, pp.385-396.
- 10) Cf., Weigert 1981, 1986, who cites other sources, not available to me, where the term is used. Weigert discusses the dialectic of objective and subjective identities as a problem of fundamentally different experiences in the private and public sphere (1986 : 54-6).

- 11) As Berger states: 'Internalization, then, implies that the objective facticity of the social world becomes a subjective facticity as well. The individual encounters the institutions as *data* of the objective world outside himself, but they are now *data* of his own consciousness as well.'
- 12) The grasping of an idea, of course, does not occur in unsocialized subjectivity; it does not emerge in a vacuum. Ideation is necessarily preceded by previous internalizations of objective reality. This is also argued by Thomason (1982), who concludes that a substantial social psychology of the dialectic is needed, one which goes beyond abstract theoretical formulations.
- 13) The term 'subjectivation' is also used in Weigert (1986).
- 14) Berger's argumentation concerning the dialectical production of the social order and human identity implies that, like society, identity is an ordering of experience, too. However, this appears to be contested in recent theories, where the human personality is seen as a complex of identities. I myself have argued elsewhere that the integration of consciousness is always a task to be realized again and again (Bachika, 1991).

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