

# FRAME ANALYSIS

An Essay on  
the Organization  
of Experience

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Erving Goffman

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*With a foreword by* BENNETT M. BERGER

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# I

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## Introduction

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There is a venerable tradition in philosophy that argues that what the reader assumes to be real is but a shadow, and that by attending to what the writer says about perception, thought, the brain, language, culture, a new methodology, or novel social forces, the veil can be lifted. That sort of line, of course, gives as much a role to the writer and his writings as is possible to imagine and for that reason is pathetic. (What can better push a book than the claim that it will change what the reader thinks is going on?) A current example of this tradition can be found in some of the doctrines of social psychology and the W. I. Thomas dictum: "If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences." This statement is true as it reads but false as it is taken. Defining situations as real certainly has consequences, but these may contribute very marginally to the events in progress; in some cases only a slight embarrassment fits across the scene in mild concern for those who tried to define the situation wrongly. All the world is not a stage—certainly the theater isn't entirely. (Whether you organize a theater or an aircraft factory, you need to find places for cars to park and coats to be checked, and these had better be real places, which, incidentally, had better carry real insurance against theft.) Presumably, a "definition of the situation" is almost always to be found, but those who are in the situation ordinarily do not create this definition, even though their society often can be said to do so; ordinarily, all they do is to

assess correctly what the situation ought to be for them and then act accordingly. True, we personally negotiate aspects of all the arrangements under which we live, but often once these are negotiated, we continue on mechanically as though the matter had always been settled. So, too, there are occasions when we must wait until things are almost over before discovering what has been occurring and occasions of our own activity when we can considerably put off deciding what to claim we have been doing. But surely these are not the only principles of organization. Social life is dubious enough and ludicrous enough without having to wish it further into unreality.

Within the terms, then, of the bad name that the analysis of social reality has, this book presents another analysis of social reality. I try to follow a tradition established by William James in his famous chapter "The Perception of Reality,"<sup>1</sup> first published as an article in *Mind* in 1869. 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?* The important thing about reality, he implied, is our sense of its realness in contrast to our feeling that some things lack this quality. One can then ask under what conditions such a feeling is generated, and this question speaks to a small, manageable problem having to do with the camera and not what it is the camera takes pictures of.

In his answer, James stressed the factors of selective attention, intimate involvement, and noncontradiction by what is otherwise known. More important, he made a stab at differentiating the several different "worlds" that our attention and interest can make real for us, the possible subuniverses, the "orders of existence" (to use Aron Gurwitsch's phrase), in each of which an object of a given kind can have its proper being: the world of the senses, the world of scientific objects, the world of abstract philosophical truths, the worlds of myth and supernatural beliefs, the madman's world, etc. Each of these subworlds, according to James, has "its own special and separate style of existence,"<sup>2</sup> and "each world, whilst it is attended to, is real after its own fashion;

1. William James, *Principles of Psychology*, vol. 2 (New York: Dover Publications, 1950), chap. 21, pp. 283-324. Here, as throughout, italics in quoted materials are as in the original.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 291.

only the reality lapses with the attention."<sup>3</sup> Then, after taking this radical stand, James copped out; he allowed that the world of the senses has a special status, being the one we judge to be the realest reality, the one that retains our liveliest belief, the one before which the other worlds must give way.<sup>4</sup> James in all this agreed with Husserl's teacher, Brentano, and implied, as phenomenology came to do, the need to distinguish between the content of a current perception and the reality status we give to what is thus enclosed or bracketed within perception.<sup>5</sup>

James' crucial device, of course, was a rather scandalous play on the word "world" (or "reality"). What he meant was not the world but a particular person's current world—and, in fact, as will be argued, not even that. There was no good reason to use such billowy words. James opened a door; it let in wind as well as light.

In 1945 Alfred Schutz took up James' theme again in a paper called "On Multiple Realities."<sup>6</sup> His argument followed James' surprisingly closely, but more attention was given to the possibility of uncovering the conditions that must be fulfilled if we are to generate one realm of "reality," one "finite province of meaning,"

3. *Ibid.*, p. 293.

4. James' interest in the varieties-of-worlds problem was not fleeting. In his *Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Longmans, Green & Co., 1902) he approached the same question but through a different route.

5. "But who does not see that in a disbelieved or doubted or interrogative or conditional proposition, the ideas are combined in the same identical way in which they are in a proposition which is solidly believed" (James, *Principles of Psychology*, 2:286). Aron Gurwitsch in his *The Field of Consciousness* (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press, 1964) makes a similar comment in a discussion of Husserl.

Among such characters we mentioned those concerning modes of presentation, as when a thing is one time perceived, another time remembered or merely imagined, or when a certain state of affairs (the identical matter of a proposition) is asserted or denied, doubted, questioned, or deemed probable. [p. 327]

6. First appearing in *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*, V (1945): 533-576; reprinted in his *Collected Papers*, 3 vols. (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1962), 1:207-259.) A later version is "The Stratification of the Life-World," in Alfred Schutz and Thomas Luckmann, *The Structures of the Life-World*, trans. Richard M. Zaner and H. Tristram Engelhardt, Jr. (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1973), pp. 21-98. An influential treatment of Schutz's ideas is Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday & Company, Anchor Books, 1966).

as opposed to another. Schutz added the notion, interesting but not entirely convincing, that we experience a special kind of "shock" when suddenly thrust from one "world," say, that of dreams, to another, such as that of the theater:

There are as many innumerable kinds of different shock experiences as there are different finite provinces of meaning upon which I may bestow the accent of reality. Some instances are: the shock of falling asleep as the leap into the world of dreams; the inner transformation we endure if the curtain in the theater rises as the transition into the world of the stageplay; the radical change in our attitude if, before a painting, we permit our visual field to be limited by what is within the frame as the passage into the pictorial world; our quandary, relaxing into laughter, if, in listening to a joke, we are for a short time ready to accept the fictitious world of the jest as a reality in relation to which the world of our daily life takes on the character of foolishness; the child's turning toward his toy as the transition into the play-world; and so on. But also the religious experiences in all their varieties—for instance, Kierkegaard's experience of the "instant" as the leap into the religious sphere—are examples of such a shock, as well as the decision of the scientist to replace all passionate participation in the affairs of "this world" by a disinterested contemplative attitude.<sup>7</sup>

And although, like James, he assumed that one realm—the "working world"—had a preferential status, he was apparently more reserved than James about its objective character:

We speak of provinces of *meaning* and not of subuniverses because it is the meaning of our experience and not the ontological structure of the objects which constitute reality,<sup>8</sup>

attributing its priority to ourselves, not the world:

For we will find that the world of everyday life, the common-sense world, has a paramount position among the various provinces of reality, since only within it does communication with our fellow-men become possible. But the common-sense world is from the outset a sociocultural world, and the many questions connected

7. Schutz, *Collected Papers*, 1:231.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 230. See also Alfred Schutz, *Reflections on the Problem of Relevance*, ed. Richard M. Zaner (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1970), p. 125. On matters Schutzian I am indebted to Richard Grathoff.

with the intersubjectivity of the symbolic relations originate within it, are determined by it, and find their solution within it.<sup>9</sup>

and to the fact that our bodies always participate in the everyday world whatever our interest at the time, this participation implying a capacity to affect and be affected by the everyday world.<sup>10</sup> So instead of saying of a subuniverse that it is generated in accordance with certain structural principles, one says it has a certain "cognitive style."

Schutz's paper (and Schutz in general) was brought to the attention of ethnographic sociologists by Harold Garfinkel, who further extended the argument about multiple realities by going on (at least in his early comments) to look for rules which, when followed, allow us to generate a "world" of a given kind. Presumably a machine designed according to the proper specifications could grind out the reality of our choice. The conceptual attraction here is obvious. A game such as chess generates a habitable universe for those who can follow it, a plane of being, a cast of characters with a seemingly unlimited number of different situations and acts through which to realize their natures and destinies. Yet much of this is reducible to a small set of interdependent rules and practices. If the meaningfulness of everyday activity is similarly dependent on a closed, finite set of rules, then explication of them would give one a powerful means of analyzing social life. For example, one could then see (following Garfinkel) that the significance of certain deviant acts is that they undermine the intelligibility of everything else we had thought was going on around us, including all next acts, thus generating diffuse disorder. To uncover the informing, constitutive rules of everyday behavior would be to perform the sociologist's alchemy—the transmutation of any patch of ordinary social activity into an illuminating publication. It might be added that although James and Schutz are convincing in arguing that something like the "world" of dreams is differently organized from the world of everyday experience, they are quite unconvincing in providing any kind of account as to how many different "worlds" there are and whether everyday, wide-awake life can actually be seen as but one rule-produced plane of being, if so seen at all. Nor has

9. From "Symbol, Reality, and Society," Schutz, *Collected Papers*, 1:294.

10. *Ibid.*, p. 342.

there been much success in describing constitutive rules of everyday activity.<sup>11</sup> One is faced with the embarrassing methodological fact that the announcement of constitutive rules seems an open-ended game that any number can play forever. Players usually come up with five or ten rules (as I will), but there are no grounds for thinking that a thousand additional assumptions might not be listed by others. Moreover, these students neglect to make clear that what they are often concerned with is not an individual's sense of what is real, but rather what it is he can get caught up in, engrossed in, carried away by; and this can be something he can claim is really going on and yet claim is not real. One is left, then, with the structural similarity between everyday life—neglecting for a moment the possibility that no satisfactory catalog might be possible of what to include therein—and the various “worlds” of make-believe but no way of knowing how this relationship should modify our view of everyday life.

Interest in the James-Schutz line of thought has become active recently among persons whose initial stimulus came from sources not much connected historically with the phenomenological tradition: The work of those who created what has come to be called “the theater of the absurd,” most fully exhibited in the

11. Schutz's various pronouncements seem to have hypnotized some students into treating them as definitive rather than suggestive. His version of the “cognitive style” of everyday life he states as follows:

1. a specific tension of consciousness, namely, wide-awakeness, originating in full attention to life;
2. a specific epoché, namely suspension of doubt;
3. a prevalent form of spontaneity, namely working (a meaningful spontaneity based upon a project and characterized by the intention of bringing about the projected state of affairs by bodily movements gearing into the outer world);
4. a specific form of experiencing one's self (the working self as the total self);
5. a specific form of sociality (the common intersubjective world of communication and social action);
6. a specific time-perspective (the standard time originating in an interaction between *durée* and cosmic time as the universal temporal structure of the intersubjective world).

These are at least some of the features of the cognitive style belonging to this particular province of meaning. As long as our experiences of this world—the valid as well as the invalidated ones—partake of this style we may consider this province of meaning as real, we may bestow upon it the accent of reality. [*Ibid.*, pp. 230–231.]

analytical dramas of Luigi Pirandello. The very useful paper by Gregory Bateson, “A Theory of Play and Phantasy,”<sup>12</sup> in which he directly raised the question of unseriousness and seriousness, allowing us to see what a startling thing experience is, such that a bit of serious activity can be used as a model for putting together unserious versions of the same activity, and that, on occasion, we may not know whether it is play or the real thing that is occurring. (Bateson introduced his own version of the notion of “bracketing,” a usable one, and also the argument that individuals can intentionally produce framing confusion in those with whom they are dealing; it is in Bateson's paper that the term “frame” was proposed in roughly the sense in which I want to employ it.)<sup>13</sup> The work of John Austin, who, following Wittgenstein,<sup>14</sup> suggested again that what we mean by “really happening” is complicated, and that although an individual may dream unrealities, it is still proper to say of him on that occasion that he is really dreaming,<sup>15</sup> (I have also drawn on the work of a student of Austin, D. S. Schwayder, and his fine book, *The Stratification of Behavior*.)<sup>16</sup> The efforts of those who study (or at least publish on) fraud, deceit, misidentification, and other “optical” effects, and the work of those who study “strategic interaction,” including the way in which concealing and revealing bear upon definitions of the situation. The useful paper by Barney Glaser and Anselm Strauss, “Awareness Contexts and Social Interaction.”<sup>17</sup> Finally, the modern effort in linguistically oriented disciplines to employ the notion of a “code” as a device which informs

12. *Psychiatric Research Reports 2*, American Psychiatric Association (December 1955), pp. 39–51. Now reprinted in his *Steps to an Ecology of Mind* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1972), pp. 177–193. A useful exegesis is William F. Fry, Jr., *Sweet Madness: A Study of Humor* (Palo Alto, Calif.: Pacific Books, 1968).

13. Edward T. Cone, in the first chapter of his *Musical Form and Musical Performance* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1968), quite explicitly uses the term “frame” in much the same way that Bateson does and suggests some of the same lines of inquiry, but I think quite independently.

14. See, for example, Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. C. E. M. Anscombe (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1958), pt. 2, sec. 7.

15. See, for example, chap. 7 in his *Sense and Sensibilia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1962).

16. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1965.

17. *American Sociological Review*, XXIX (1964): 669–679.

work at golf, as do instructors, but both appreciate that their job is special, since it has to do with servicing persons engaged in play. In any case, again I will initially assume the right to pick my point of view, my motivational relevancies, only limiting this choice of perspective to one that participants would easily recognize to be valid.

Further, it is obvious that in most "situations" many different things are happening simultaneously—things that are likely to have begun at different moments and may terminate dissynchronously.<sup>19</sup> To ask the question "What is it that's going on here?" biases matters in the direction of unitary exposition and simplicity. This bias, too, I must be temporarily allowed.

So, too, to speak of the "current" situation (just as to speak of something going on "here") is to allow reader and writer to continue along easily in their impression that they clearly know and agree on what they are thinking about. The amount of time covered by "current" (just as the amount of space covered by "here") obviously can vary greatly from one occasion to the next and from one participant to another; and the fact that participants seem to have no trouble in quickly coming to the same apparent understanding in this matter does not deny the intellectual importance of our trying to find out what this apparent consensus consists of and how it is established. To speak of something happening before the eyes of observers is to be on firmer ground than usual in the social sciences; but the ground is still shaky, and the crucial question of how a seeming agreement was reached concerning the identity of the "something" and the inclusiveness of "before the eyes" still remains.

Finally, it is plain that retrospective characterization of the "same" event or social occasion may differ very widely, that an individual's role in an undertaking can provide him with a distinctive evaluative assessment of what sort of an instance of the type the particular undertaking was. In that sense it has been argued, for example, that opposing rooters at a football game do not experience the "same" game,<sup>20</sup> and that what makes a party

19. Nicely described by Roger G. Barker and Herbert F. Wright, *Midwest and Its Children* (Evanston, Ill.: Row, Peterson & Company, 1964), chap. 7, "Dividing the Behavior Stream," pp. 225-273.

20. Presented perhaps overstrongly in a well-known early paper by Albert H. Hastorf and Hadley Cantril, "They Saw a Game: A Case Study," *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology*, XLIX (1954): 129-234.

and patterns all events that fall within the boundaries of its application.

I have borrowed extensively from all these sources, claiming really only the bringing of them together. My perspective is situational, meaning here a concern for what one individual can be alive to at a particular moment, this often involving a few other particular individuals and not necessarily restricted to the mutually monitored arena of a face-to-face gathering. I assume that when individuals attend to any current situation, they face the question: "What is it that's going on here?" Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tactily, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand. Starting, then, with that question, this volume attempts to limn out a framework that could be appealed to for the answer.

Let me say at once that the question "What is it that's going on here?" is considerably suspect. Any event can be described in terms of a focus that includes a wide swath or a narrow one and—as a related but not identical matter—in terms of a focus that is close-up or distant. And no one has a theory as to what particular span and level will come to be the ones employed. To begin with, I must be allowed to proceed by picking my span and level arbitrarily, without special justification.<sup>18</sup>

A similar issue is found in connection with perspective. When participant roles in an activity are differentiated—a common circumstance—the view that one person has of what is going on is likely to be quite different from that of another. There is a sense in which what is play for the golfer is work for the caddy. Different interests will—in Schutz's phrasing—generate different motivational relevancies. (Moreover, variability is complicated here by the fact that those who bring different perspectives to the "same" events are likely to employ different spans and levels of focus.) Of course, in many cases some of those who are committed to differing points of view and focus may still be willing to acknowledge that theirs is not the official or "real" one. Caddies

18. See the discussion by Emanuel A. Schegloff, "Notes on a Conversational Practice: Formulating Place," in David Sudnow, ed., *Studies in Social Interaction* (New York: The Free Press, 1972), pp. 75-119. There is a standard criticism of "role" as a concept which presents the same argument.

a good one for a participant who is made much of is just what makes it a bad one for a participant who thereby is made little of. All of which suggests that one should even be uneasy about the easy way in which it is assumed that participants in an activity can be terminologically identified and referred to without issue. For surely, a "couple" kissing can also be a "man" greeting his "wife" or "John" being careful with "Mary's" makeup.

I only want to claim that although these questions are very important, they are not the only ones, and that their treatment is not necessarily required before one can proceed. So here, too, I will let sleeping sentences lie.

My aim is to try to isolate some of the basic frameworks of understanding available in our society for making sense out of events, and to analyze the special vulnerabilities to which these frames of reference are subject. I start with the fact that from an individual's particular point of view, while one thing may momentarily appear to be what is really going on, in fact what is actually happening is plainly a joke, or a dream, or an accident, or a mistake, or a misunderstanding, or a deception, or a theatrical performance, and so forth. And attention will be directed to what it is about our sense of what is going on that makes it so vulnerable to the need for these various rereadings.

Elementary terms required by the subject matter to be dealt with are provided first. My treatment of these initial terms is abstract, and I am afraid the formulations provided are crude indeed by the standards of modern philosophy. The reader must initially bestow the benefit of mere doubt in order for us both to get to matters that (I feel) are less dubious.

The term "strip" will be used to refer to any arbitrary slice or cut from the stream of ongoing activity, including here sequences of happenings, real or fictive, as seen from the perspective of those subjectively involved in sustaining an interest in them. A strip is not meant to reflect a natural division made by the subjects of inquiry or an analytical division made by students who inquire; it will be used only to refer to any raw batch of occurrences (of whatever status in reality) that one wants to draw attention to as a starting point for analysis.

And of course much use will be made of Bateson's use of the term "frame." I assume that definitions of a situation are built up in accordance with principles of organization which govern events—at least social ones—and our subjective involvement in

them; frame is the word I use to refer to such of these basic elements as I am able to identify. That is my definition of frame. My phrase "frame analysis" is a slogan to refer to the examination in these terms of the organization of experience.

In dealing with conventional topics, it is usually practical to develop concepts and themes in some sort of logical sequence: nothing coming earlier depends on something coming later, and, hopefully, terms developed at any one point are actually used in what comes thereafter. Often the complaint of the writer is that linear presentation constrains what is actually a circular affair, ideally requiring simultaneous introduction of terms, and the complaint of the reader is that concepts elaborately defined are not much used beyond the point at which the fuss is made about their meaning. In the analysis of frames, linear presentation is no great embarrassment. Nor is the defining of terms not used thereafter. The problem, in fact, is that once a term is introduced (this occurring at the point at which it is first needed), it begins to have too much bearing, not merely applying to what comes later, but reapplying in each chapter to what it has already applied to. Thus each succeeding section of the study becomes more entangled, until a step can hardly be made because of what must be carried along with it. The process closely follows the horrors of repetition songs, as if—in the case of frame analysis—what Old MacDonald had on his farm were partridge and juniper trees.

Discussions about frame inevitably lead to questions concerning the status of the discussion itself, because here terms applying to what is analyzed ought to apply to the analysis also. I proceed on the commonsense assumption that ordinary language and ordinary writing practices are sufficiently flexible to allow anything that one wants to express to get expressed.<sup>21</sup> Here I follow Carnap's position:

The sentences, definitions, and rules of the syntax of a language are concerned with the forms of that language. But, now, how are these sentences, definitions, and rules themselves to be correctly expressed? Is a kind of super-language necessary for the purpose? And, again, a third language to explain the syntax of this super-language, and so on to infinity? Or is it possible to formulate the syntax of a language within that language itself? The obvious fear will arise that in the latter case, owing to certain reflexive defini-

21. *Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, ist nicht der satz, "Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen."*

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tions, contradictions of a nature seemingly similar to those which are familiar both in Cantor's theory of transfinite aggregates and in the pre-Russellian logic might make their appearance. But we shall see later that without any danger of contradictions or antinomies emerging it is possible to express the syntax of a language in that language itself, to an extent which is conditioned by the wealth of means of expression of the language in question.<sup>22</sup>

Thus, even if one took as one's task the examination of the use made in the humanities and the less robust sciences of "examples," "illustrations," and "cases in point," the object being to uncover the folk theories of evidence which underlie resort to these devices, it would still be the case that examples and illustrations would probably have to be used, and they probably could be without entirely vitiating the analysis.

In turning to the issue of reflexivity and in arguing that ordinary language is an adequate resource for discussing it, I do not mean that these particular linguistic matters should block all other concerns. Methodological self-consciousness that is full, immediate, and persistent sets aside all study and analysis except that of the reflexive problem itself, thereby displacing fields of inquiry instead of contributing to them. Thus, I will throughout use quotation marks to suggest a special sense of the word so marked and not concern myself systematically with the fact that this device is routinely used in a variety of quite different ways.<sup>23</sup>

22. Rudolf Carnap, *The Logical Syntax of Language*, trans. Amethe Smeaton (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trubner & Co., 1937), p. 3.

23. I. A. Richards, for example, has a version in his *How to Read a Page* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1942):

We all recognize—more or less unsystematically—that quotation marks serve varied purposes:

1. Sometimes they show merely that we are quoting and where our quotation begins and ends.
2. Sometimes they imply that the word or words within them are in some way open to question and are only to be taken in some special sense with reference to some special definition.
3. Sometimes they suggest further that what is quoted is nonsense or that there is really no such thing as the thing they profess to name.
4. Sometimes they suggest that the words are improperly used. The quotation marks are equivalent to *the so-called*.
5. Sometimes they only indicate that we are talking of the words as distinguished from their meanings. "Is" and "at" are shorter than "above." "Chien" means what "dog" means, and so forth.

There are many other uses. . . . [p. 66]

that these seem to bear closely on the question of frame, and that I must assume that the context of use will automatically lead my readers and me to have the same understanding, although neither I nor they might be able to explicate the matter further. So, too, with the warning and the lead that ordinary language philosophers have given us. I know that the crucial term "real" may have been permanently Wittgensteined into a blur of slightly different uses, but proceed on the assumption that carefulness can gradually bring us to an understanding of basic themes informing diversity, a diversity which carefulness itself initially establishes, and that what is taken for granted concerning the meaning of this word can safely so be done until it is convenient to attend to what one has been doing.

A further caveat. There are lots of good grounds for doubting the kind of analysis about to be presented. I would do so myself if it weren't my own. It is too bookish, too general, too removed from fieldwork to have a good chance of being anything more than another mentalistic adumbration. And, as will be noted throughout, there are certainly things that cannot be nicely dealt with in the arguments that follow. (I coin a series of terms—some "basic"; but writers have been doing that to not much avail for years.) Nonetheless, some of the things in this world seem to urge the analysis I am here attempting, and the compulsion is strong to try to outline the framework that will perform this job, even if this means some other tasks get handled badly.

Another disclaimer. This book is about the organization of experience—something that an individual actor can take into his mind—and not the organization of society. I make no claim whatsoever to be talking about the core matters of sociology—social organization and social structure. Those matters have been and can continue to be quite nicely studied without reference to frame at all. I am not addressing the structure of social life but the structure of experience individuals have at any moment of their social lives. I personally hold society to be first in every way and any individual's current involvements to be second; this report deals only with matters that are second. This book will have weaknesses enough in the areas it claims to deal with; there is no need to find limitations in regard to what it does not set about to cover. Of course, it can be argued that to focus on the nature of personal experiencing—with the implication this can

have for giving equally serious consideration to all matters that might momentarily concern the individual—is itself a standpoint with marked political implications, and that these are conservative ones. The analysis developed does not catch at the differences between the advantaged and disadvantaged classes and can be said to direct attention away from such matters. I think that is true. I can only suggest that he who would combat false consciousness and awaken people to their true interests has much to do, because the sleep is very deep. And I do not intend here to provide a lullaby but merely to sneak in and watch the way the people snore.

Finally, a note about the materials used. First, there is the fact that I deal again in this book with what I have dealt with in others—another go at analyzing fraud, deceit, con games, shows of various kinds, and the like. There are many footnotes to and much repetition of other things I've written.<sup>24</sup> I am trying to order my thoughts on these topics, trying to construct a general statement. That is the excuse.

Second, throughout the book very considerable use is made of anecdotes cited from the press and from popular books in the biographical genre.<sup>25</sup> There could hardly be data with less face value. Obviously, passing events that are typical or representative don't make news just for that reason; only extraordinary ones do, and even these are subject to the editorial violence routinely employed by gentle writers. Our understanding of the world precedes these stories, determining which ones reporters will select and how the ones that are selected will be told. Human interest stories are a caricature of evidence in the very degree of their interest, providing a unity, coherence, pointedness, self-completeness, and drama only crudely sustained, if at all, by everyday living. Each is a cross between an *experimentum crucium* and a sideshow. That is their point. The design of these reported events is fully responsive to our demands—which are not for facts but for typifications. Their telling demonstrates the power of our

24. So much so that I use source abbreviations, a list of which can be found on p. xi.

25. An analysis of incidentally published stories—"fillers"—is provided by Roland Barthes along with an exhibition of literary license in "Structure of *Fait-Divers*," in his *Critical Essays*, trans. Richard Howard (Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1972), pp. 185-196.

conventional understandings to cope with the bizarre potentials of social life, the furthest reaches of experience. What appears, then, to be a threat to our way of making sense of the world turns out to be an ingeniously selected defense of it. We press these stories to the wind; they keep the world from unsettling us. By and large, I do not present these anecdotes, therefore, as evidence or proof, but as clarifying depictions, as frame fantasies which manage, through the hundred liberties taken by their tellers, to celebrate our beliefs about the workings of the world. What was put into these tales is thus what I would like to get out of them.

These data have another weakness. I have culled them over the years on a hit-or-miss basis using principles of selection mysterious to me which, furthermore, changed from year to year and which I could not recover if I wanted to. Here, too, a caricature of systematic sampling is involved.

In addition to clippings as a source of materials, I draw on another, one as questionable as the first. Since this study attempts to deal with the organization of experience as such, whether "actual" or of the other kinds, I will have recourse to the following: cartoons, comics, novels, the cinema, and especially, it turns out, the legitimate stage. I am here involved in no horrors of bias different from the ones already exhibited in the selection of bits of human interest news. But I am led to draw on materials that writers in other traditions use, whether in literary and dramatic criticism of current "high" culture or in the sort of sociological journalism which attempts to read from surface changes in commercially available vicarious experience to the nature of our society at large. In consequence, many of the things I have to say about these materials will have already been said many times and better by fashionable writers. My excuse for brazenly dipping into this preempted domain is that I have a special interest, one that does not recognize a difference in value between a good novel and a bad one, a contemporary play or an ancient one, a comic strip or an opera. All are equally useful in explicating the character of strips of experienced activity. I end up quoting from well-known works recognized as setting standards, and from minor works current at the time of writing, but not because I think these examples of their genre have special cultural worth and warrant endorsement. Critics and reviewers

can certainly disconnect a hurried pedestrian from a minor inconvenience he might cause a passing stranger. Just as certainly, such efforts are optimistic when their purpose is to recast the way in which a long book is to be taken. (And more optimistic still in the case of a second edition's preface to an already prefaced edition, this being an attempt to recast a recasting.)

\* \* \* \* \*

But what about comments on prefaces? Where does such a topic taken up at such a point leave the writer and the reader (or a speaker and an audience)? Does that sort of talk strike at the inclination of the reader to discount or criticize prefacing as an activity? And if it turns out that the preface was written in bad faith, tailored from the beginning to exemplify this use that will have come to be made of it? Will the preface then be retrospectively reframed by the reader into something that really isn't a preface at all but an inappropriately inserted illustration of one? Or if an admission of bad faith is made unconvincingly, leaving open the possibility that the disclosure was an afterthought? What then?

\* \* \* \* \*

And does the last comment excuse me in any degree from having been puerile and obvious in commenting on prefaces, as when, in a book analyzing jokes, the writer is excused the badness of the cited jokes but not the badness of the analysis of them? (A novelist who nowadays injects direct address in the body of his work—"Dear Reader, if you've gone this far, you'll know I hate that character . . ."—easily fails to change the foot-

is to bring the not quite consciously appreciated to awareness, and to do this first, and that once again a restatement or republication will sound stale. All of this I think has some truth and correctly describes the contingencies of that kind of subject matter, there being inevitably an unstated element of the reader's interest that derives from the current interest of the item. This element will decline rather quickly, leaving the writer having written something that can no longer be read with interest. In fact, every analyst of jokes has faced this problem, since the current version of a basic joke which he writes about today will sound very dated tomorrow. But given what Brackman is stuck with reprinting, his introduction does the framing work that introductions can do to segregate the producer from his product, in this case arguing that the piece was an expression of his sensibility *then*, not now.

cite the classics of a genre in dealing with current works in order to explicate what if anything is significant and artful in them. I draw clumsily on the same materials—as well as critiques of them—simply because that is what is easy to hand. Indeed, these materials are easy to everyone's hand, providing something of a common fund of familiar experience, something that writers can assume readers know about.

\* \* \* \* \*

That is the introduction. Writing one allows a writer to try to set the terms of what he will write about. Accounts, excuses, apologies designed to reframe what follows after them, designed to draw a line between deficiencies in what the author writes and deficiencies in himself, leaving him, he hopes, a little better defended than he might otherwise be.<sup>26</sup> This sort of ritual work

<sup>26</sup> There is a useful article by Jacob Brackman called "The Put-On" (*The New Yorker*, June 24, 1967, pp. 34-73). In his twelve-page introduction to the paperback edition he writes:

Updating. If "updating" this essay were to mean exchanging more current jokes and performers for ones since disappeared, and appending how there came to be "put-on" head boutiques, and TV game shows, and a Sears Put-On clothing shop, and publishers crowing "This is the novel that makes you ask: *Is the author putting me on?*" and thousands of winkful commercials that seemed to say, "I know that you know that I'm trying to sell you. Let's you and me both goof on the product together."—if I were to "update" along these lines, and if I were to add little exegeses of Tiny Tim's wedding, Paul Morrissey's movies, Paul McCartney's death, then the piece would begin to stink of inauthenticity.

I think you must let a piece like this stand—not in its syntax, necessarily, but within the limits of its original awareness—as a fragment of cultural history. It may have been valid to the precise present for a matter of months, or days; who will quibble now that time is so short? Once the vision's devoured, mulched and incorporated, unless it has been frozen somewhere, its moment—when only so much had happened, when only so much had been revealed—is lost forever. All we have left are "updated" reports, grotesquely stretched, debased and freshened up as what played itself out between haircuts is made to seem the rage of a decade. If I were to do this piece today (which would itself be impossible) hardly anything in it would stay the same. Of things in the real world about which one can try to write, sensibility may be the slipperiest. If I won't write the new piece now, how can I go back and meddle with the old one? [*The Put-On* (New York: Bantam Books, 1972), pp. 10-11.]

Brackman also argues that current items of cultural interest date very rapidly and fully, and, by implication, that writings concerned with these items will date quickly, too. He also suggests that the point of such writings

ing we allow him; but what if he writes that he would like to succeed in such a device but knows we will not let him?)

\* \* \* \* \*

And what about discussions about being puerile and obvious? A word incorrectly spelled can, I think, be successfully used by the misspeller as an illustration of incorrect spelling and analyzed as such. But can a writer posture in his writing and then effectively claim that all along he was only providing an illustration of bad taste and lack of sophistication? Would it be necessary for him to show, and if so, how would he, that his claims were not merely a device hit upon after the fact to make the best out of what he was not able to prevent from being a bad thing?

\* \* \* \* \*

And if in the first pages after acknowledging colleagues who had helped, I had said: "Richard C. Jeffrey, on the other hand, did not help." And if I had gone on here (in these later pages) to suggest that the aim had been to make a little joke and incidentally bring awareness to a tacit constraint on acknowledgment writing? Then the explication of this aim could be seen as bad faith—either a post-hoc effort to hedge on having tried to be witty or an admission of having entrapped the reader into accepting a plant, that is, a statement whose reason for inclusion would later be shown to have not been apparent. But if, as is in fact the case, the whole matter is enclosed as a question within a section of the introduction dealing with a consideration of introductions and is therefore not to be seen as having an initial character as a simple, straightforward introduction, what then?

And after all of this, can I get the point across that Richard C. Jeffrey in fact didn't help? Does this last sentence do it? And if so, had a conditional been used, as in: "And after all of this, could I get the point across . . . etc." What then? And would this last comment transform an assertion into an illustration and so once again cast the matter of Richard C. Jeffrey in doubt?

\* \* \* \* \*

And if the preface and the comments on the preface and the comments on the comments on the preface are put in question, what about the asterisks which divide up and divide off the various sections in which this is managed? And if the orthography had still been intact, would this last question itself have

undermined these framing devices, including the ones which bracket this sentence with the prior one?

\* \* \* \* \*

And if above I had said: "What about the \* \* \* \* \* which divide up and divide off . . ."; would this be a proper use of print, and can an easy rule be formulated? Given the motivational relevancies of orthographers, a book on orthography can properly use a batch of print to illustrate print, to the neglect of saying something with its meaning. Similarly, a geography book can properly switch from words to maps. But when a mystery writer has his hero find a coded message on a torn bit of paper and then shows the clue to the reader by inseting it in the center of the page as though it were a map in a geography book, so that the reader sees the tear as well as the message, what sort of shift to a nonfictional frame has the writer asked the reader to make, and was he quite within his rights to ask it? Is it overly cute for an anthropologist reporting on the role of metaphor (with special reference to animal sources) to write, "One always feels a bit sheepish, of course, about bringing the metaphor concept into the social sciences and perhaps that is because one always feels there is something soft and wooly about it"?<sup>27</sup> Similarly, if I try to get dodgy with prefaces, is this not different from writing about tricks done with prefaces (which characteristically need not be undertaken at the beginning of a study)? Is this not the difference between doing and writing about the doing? And in considering all of these matters, can I properly draw on my own text ("And if above I had said: 'What about the \* \* \* \* \* that divide up and divide off . . .'; would this be . . .") as an illustration? And in this last sentence has not all need to be hesitant about the right to use actual asterisks disappeared, for after all, a doubtful usage cited as an example of doubtful usage ceases to be something that is doubtful to print?

\* \* \* \* \*

And if I wanted to comment on the next to last sentence, the one containing a parenthesized quoted sentence and questionably real asterisks, could I quote *that* sentence effectively, that is,

<sup>27</sup> James W. Fernandez, "Persuasions and Performances: Of the Beast in Every Body . . . And the Metaphors of Everyman," *Daedalus*, Winter 1972, p. 41.

employ the apparently required punctuation marks and yet allow the reader an easy comprehension of what was being said about what? Would the limits of doing things in print have been reached?

\* \* \* \* \*

That is what frame analysis is about.

# 2

## Primary Frameworks

### I

When the individual in our Western society recognizes a particular event, he tends, whatever else he does, to imply in this response (and in effect employ) one or more frameworks or schemata of interpretation of a kind that can be called primary. I say primary because application of such a framework or perspective is seen by those who apply it as not depending on or harking back to some prior or "original" interpretation; indeed a primary framework is one that is seen as rendering what would otherwise be a meaningless aspect of the scene into something that is meaningful.

Primary frameworks vary in degree of organization. Some are neatly presentable as a system of entities, postulates, and rules; others—indeed, most others—appear to have no apparent articulated shape, providing only a lore of understanding, an approach, a perspective. Whatever the degree of organization, however, each primary framework allows its user to locate, perceive, identify, and label a seemingly infinite number of concrete occurrences defined in its terms. He is likely to be unaware of such organized features as the framework has and unable to describe the framework with any completeness if asked, yet these hand-caps are no bar to his easily and fully applying it.

In daily life in our society a tolerably clear distinction is