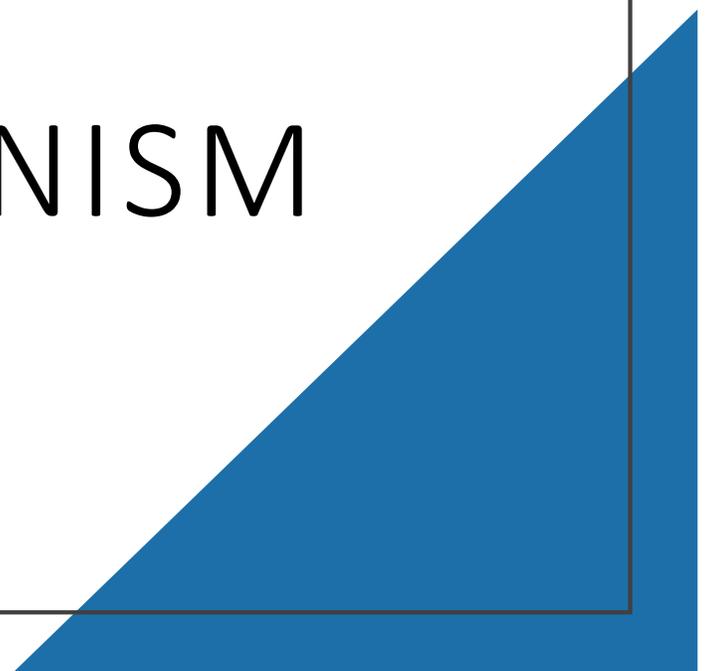


SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

SYMBOLIC INTERACTIONISM

WINTER TERM 2023



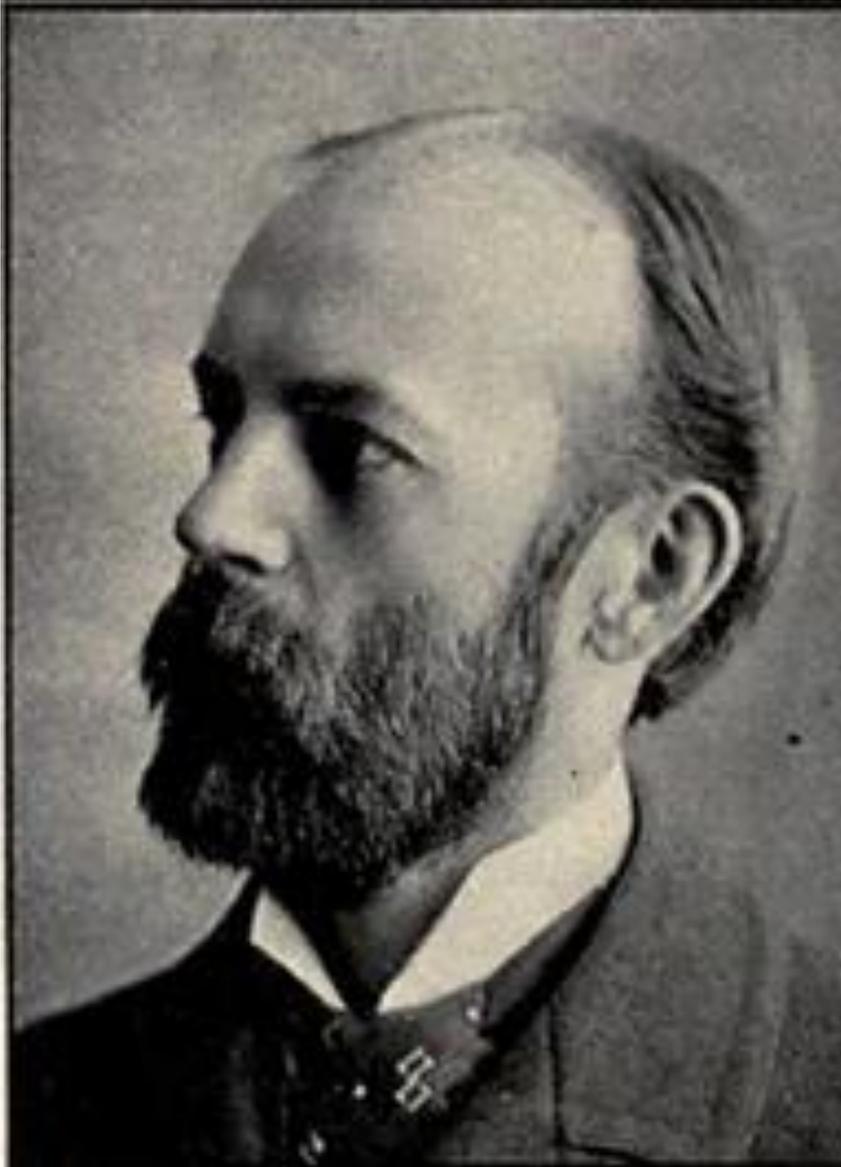
What is symbolic interactionism?  
What is pragmatism?  
What is Thomas and Thomas theorem?

what  
happened to  
sociology at  
the turn of the  
XXth century?

- Sociology „moved“ to USA...
- USA – a brand new society:
  - Migrants from all over the world – melting pot society
  - New, modern cities – Chicago, New York
  - Taylorism – rationally managed capitalism
- New way of thinking in philosophy and social sciences: PRAGMATISIM (very much rooted in the American social order, theory to be put in practice)

# pragmatism

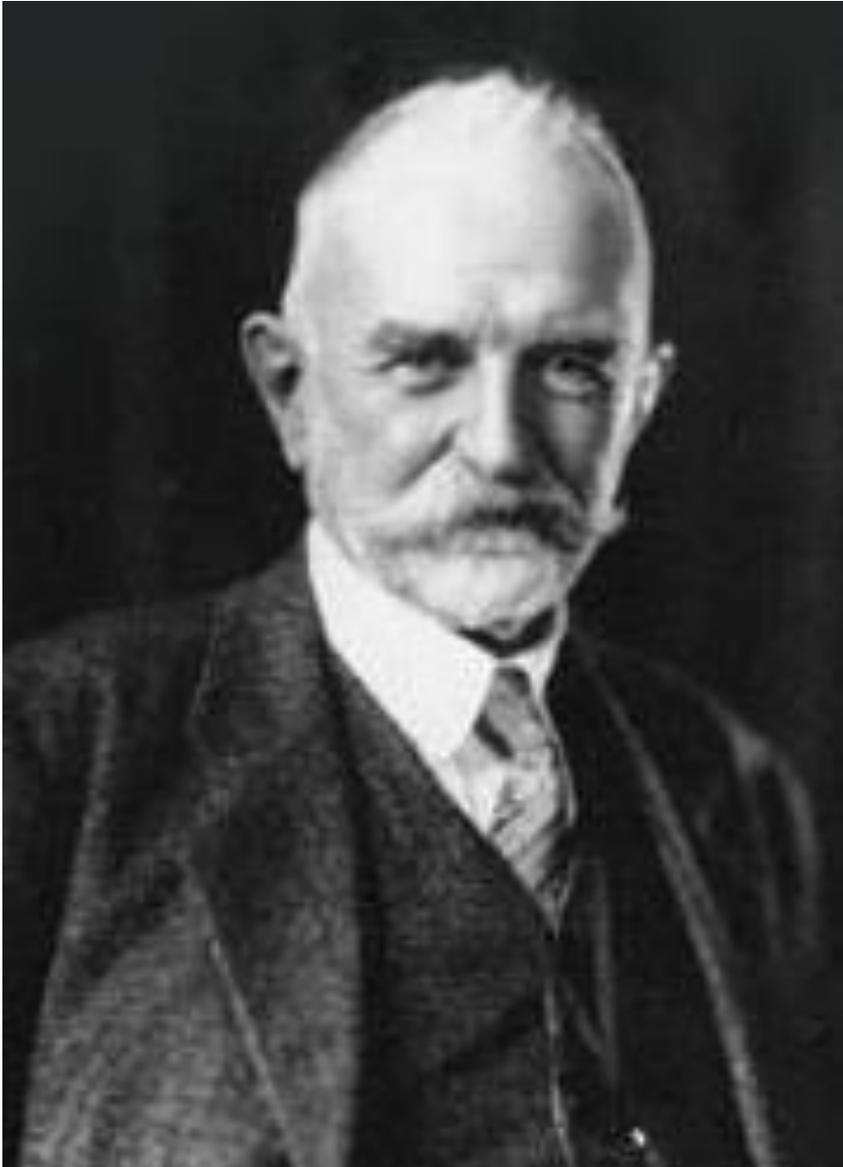
- William James, John Dewey
- social psychology as a separate discipline – interest in development of the child; identity and self
- a philosophy strictly connected to the mindset of the USA
- practicality of the theory as a main criterium; to be applied in the society and solve its problems



## Charles Cooley (1864-1929)

### GROUPS:

1. Primary – those we are obliged to belong to
2. Secondary – those we choose ourselves as adults



## George Herbert Mead (1863-1931)

He was not a sociologist

*Mind, Self and Society*, 1934

- Priority given to the social world in understanding the social experience.
- The social world precedes the individual mind both logically and temporally.

# *Mind, Self and Society*

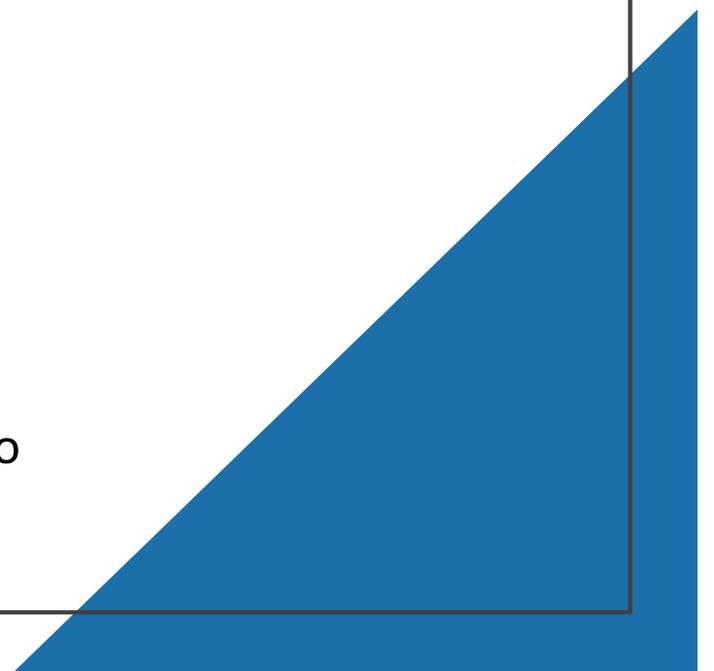
MIND – a process, not a thing; an inner conversation with one's self; a social phenomenon

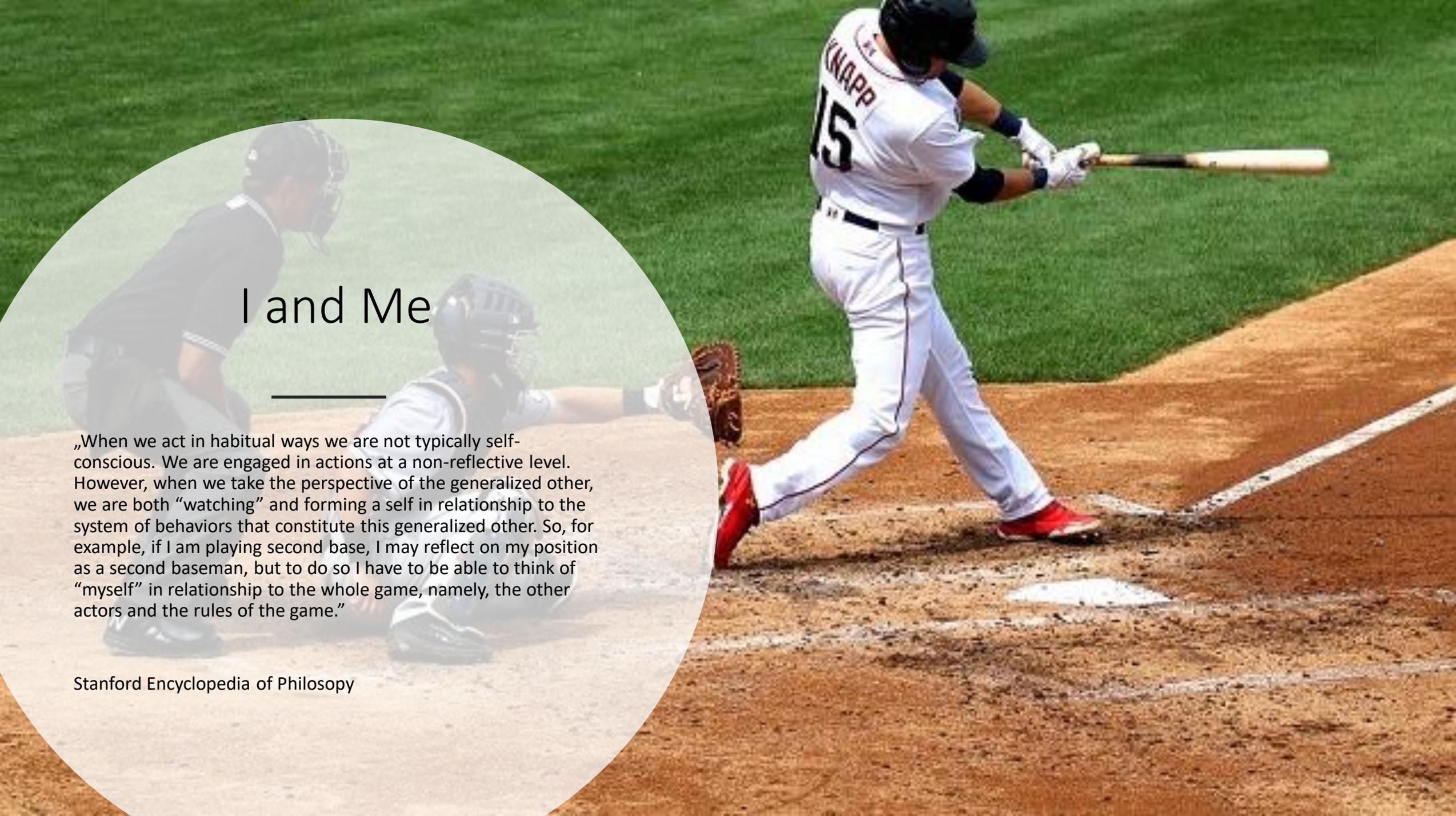
SELF – the ability to take oneself as an object; it presupposes a social process: communication among humans; the self is made through social activity and relationships; there is a development of self

## STAGES OF SELF DEVELOPMENT:

1. PLAY – children learn to take roles of discrete others
2. GAME – children learn to take; roles of everyone in the game; rules

GENERALISED OTHER – the attitude of the entire community; the ability to take the role of the generalised other





## I and Me

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„When we act in habitual ways we are not typically self-conscious. We are engaged in actions at a non-reflective level. However, when we take the perspective of the generalized other, we are both “watching” and forming a self in relationship to the system of behaviors that constitute this generalized other. So, for example, if I am playing second base, I may reflect on my position as a second baseman, but to do so I have to be able to think of “myself” in relationship to the whole game, namely, the other actors and the rules of the game.”

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy

# *Mind, Self and Society*



SOCIETY – the ongoing social process that precedes both the mind and the self.



education as the essential process in the society – common habits of the community are internalised in the actor

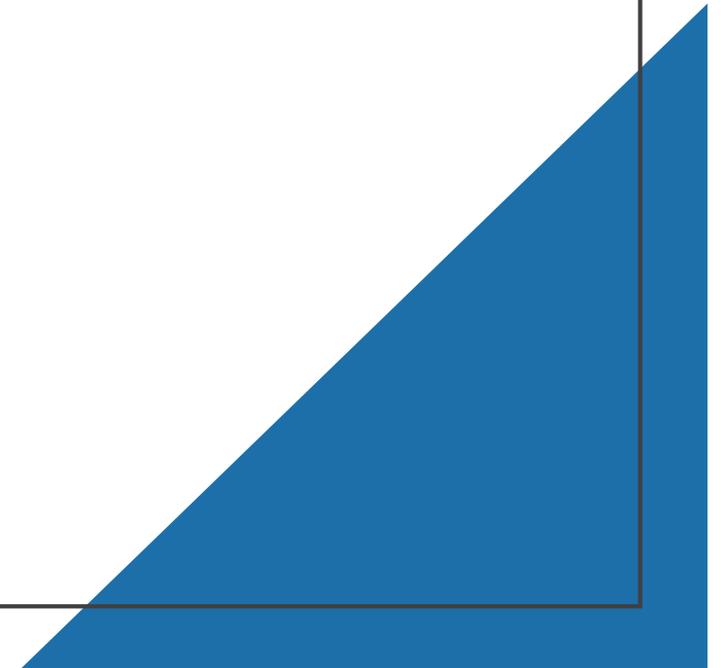
# Thomas & Thomas theorem

„If men define situations as real, they are real in their consequences.”

William Issac Thomas and Dorothy Swaine Thomas



DEFINITION OF THE SITUATION



# symbolic interactionism

- the term coined by Herbert Blumer in 1937

## MAIN ASSUMPTIONS OF THE PARADIGM:

1. Humans have the capacity to think
2. The capacity to thought is shaped by social interaction
3. In interactions people learn the meanings and symbols that they use in action and interaction
4. The intertwined patterns of action and interactions make up groups and societies.



## Erving Goffman (1922-1982)

- Canadian born
- from the migrant Jewish family from the Eastern Europe

*The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*

self

- all-too-human selves vs. socialized selves (after Mead)

What people expect from us and what we can / want do spontaneously?

- the product of the dramatic interaction between an actor and an audience

# social interactions

DISTANCE

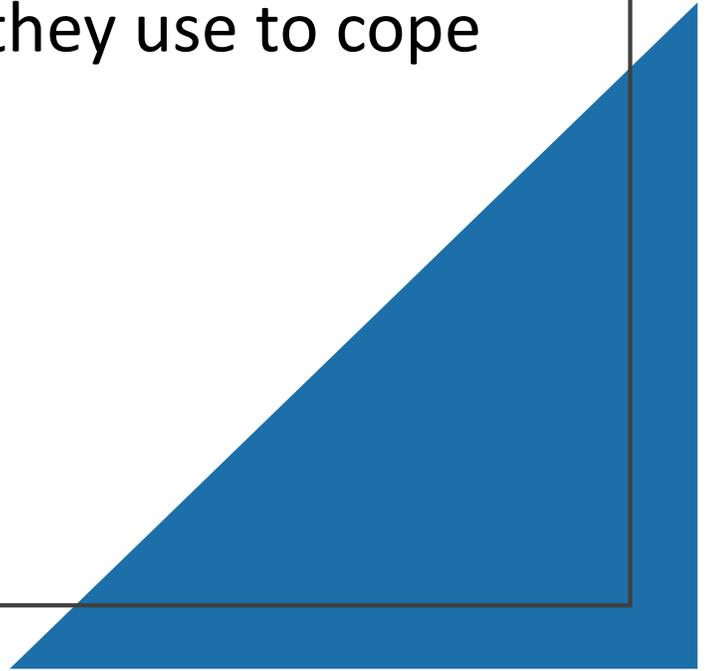


more and more  
anonymous



impression management

TECHNIQUES actors use to maintain certain impressions in the face of problems they are likely to encounter, and methods they use to cope with these problems.





after Goffman

- ethnomethodology
- sociolinguistics
- studies in microsociology – Randall Collins