

The Stranger as Seer or Voyeur: A Dilemma of the Peep-Show Theory of Knowledge

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ABSTRACT

The belief that 'the stranger' (outsider, disinterested third party) sees things more clearly, i.e. is more "objective," is seen to be a corner-stone of folk wisdom; underlying Western judicial thought and concepts of objectivity in the social sciences. The author raises the dilemma that both positivistic and humanistic sociologists accept this belief—suggesting 1) that it is a residue of positivism and a quest for certain knowledge, or 2) the possibility that 'the stranger' does gain deeper insight into group life than members. The paper examines the concept of the stranger, considering the aura of charisma that seems to have been attached to it in ordinary discourse as well as within the sociological dialogue. Two types of strangers are described: outsiders and enemies within. Finally, an attempt is made to examine the testimony of prominent strangers as they describe their marginal status and speculate on the ways that status has made them unusually perceptive observers of social phenomena.

In order to see it, one must be either a Martian, or, if an earthling, sufficiently detached, marooned, bemused, wounded, crazy, one-eyed, and lucky enough to become a Martian for a second and catch a glimpse of it.

—Walker Percy, *The Message In The Bottle*

The idea that the outsider, the disinterested third party, sees things more clearly, i.e. is a more objective arbiter of disputes than those directly involved in a controversy, has been a cornerstone of folk wisdom throughout history. The fundamentals of the Western judicial system are secured within it and concepts of objectivity in the social sciences are derived from it. Indeed, before history annexed the prefix to the word, *dis-interested*, this insight touched humankind's relation to its god.

According to Biblical texts, Solomon was lifted above the brutishness of ordinary mortals by his wisdom. But, Solomon was king of the realm, not a stranger to it. Aquinas offered philosophers an image of the traveler, the wayfarer, as a moderator of morals. But, it was Shakespeare who gave us the classic portrait of the objective stranger. In *The Merchant of Venice*, Portia is allowed to judge because she not only possesses the detachment of learning and the distance of a traveler from Padua; but she is also a woman—an alien in the world of commerce.¹

Montesquieu's *Persian Letters* posed the thesis that the best sociologist is a stranger. Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*, Gide's *Return From the U.S.S.R.*, Santayana's *On America*, Tagore's *Nationalism*, Fanon's *The Wretched Of The Earth*, Myrdal's *An American Dilemma*, and Liebow's *Tally's Corner*, can be seen as validations of this thesis. Similarly, some of the greatest sociologists have in fact been strangers, immigrants, refugees, and exiles: Marx, Veblen, Sorokin, Schutz, Mannheim, Znaniecki. And, of course, Montesquieu's simple theme provided the *raison d'être* of anthropology.

CREATIVITY AND ESTRANGEMENT

The artist-as-stranger, exile, expatriate or bohemian, has become a cliché of modernism. Romanticism established the idea that the stranger viewpoint—the skewed vision—is the wellspring of creativity. An aphorism often attributed to W. H.

Auden asserts that a work of genius always contains an essential error: a distortion of vision which informs that vision.² Michel Foucault (*Madness And Civilization*) and others have pointed out that in the modern world the anxiety of the artist who is stranded between sanity and insanity may be one source of that distortion. In his monumental work, *The Act Of Creation*, Arthur Koestler concluded that the source of creativity (and irony) can be traced to the tension which results from perceiving a situation or idea in two self-consistent but habitually incompatible frames of reference.³

Romanticism is a protest against the hegemony of the rationalistic-scientific ethos. It expresses the existential anguish of blocked-creativity: the *ennui* produced by the discovery that there is a veil of theory covering nature. Lukacs (1971) describes this veil as a "reification" of nature. From the time of Baudelaire and Delacroix, the creative tension of the artistic vision has been generated by attempts to break through this invisible barrier and touch existence. Thus, the stranger is the most compelling narrative mask in Twentieth Century literature from Appolinaire, Breton, and Rilke, to Camus, Beckett, and Solzhenitsyn.

THE SCIENTIST AS VOYEUR

The scientist is the stranger's metaphoric kin. However, whereas the Romantic dons the mask of the stranger in search of a point of contact with being; scientists disguise themselves in this garb in order to mark and even exaggerate their distance from being. In the Baconian ethos, scientists estranged themselves from nature in order to assert their power over it. Comte appropriated the Baconian ideal and applied it to the social world. Durkheim urged the scientist to treat social facts as "things." It was Max Weber, however, who recited the most ingenious parable in the litany of objectivism. Weber established the myth of the Minotaur in which the valuing human is miraculously transformed into a value-free scientist when he or she puts on professional

robes and begins to study other valuing men and women (Gouldner, 1973).

In *The Psychology Of Science* (1966:49), Abraham Maslow probed the implications of the scientist-as-stranger analogy. He asked:

What does the orthodox scientist mean by 'knowing?' Let us remember that at the beginning of science the word 'knowing' meant 'knowing of the external physical world,' and for the orthodox scientist it still does. It means looking at something independent of you the perceiver. It is something to which you are a stranger, a bystander, a member of the audience. You the observer are, then really alien to it, uncomprehending and without sympathy and identification, without any starting point of tacit knowledge that you might already have. You look through the microscope or the telescope as through a keyhole, peering, peeping, from a distance, from outside, not as one who has a right to be in the room being peeped into.

In a sense, much of Western philosophy can be seen as a conspiracy to insulate the philosopher and scientist against contact with his or her data. Since antiquity, philosophers have sought means of exorcising hidden interests.⁴ Plato charted the shadows on the wall of the cave. Bacon warned against "idols." And, Hume questioned the basis of causal imputation regardless of the interests of the observer.

The peep-show theory of knowledge was not seriously challenged until the Nineteenth Century. Karl Marx documented the class basis of ideological thought but retained a belief in the possibility of positive scientific knowledge. Wilhelm Dilthey (1969:154) outlined the cutting edge of the "knife of historical relativism" which "cut to pieces all metaphysics and religion" (including positivism). Max Scheler coined the phrase, "the sociology of knowledge" to express his belief that all forms of thinking, intuition and cognition, are socially determined but he denied the contention that the validity of knowledge is affected by its social origins. It was, however, the "great sham-smasher,"

Friedrich Nietzsche, who announced that the very idea of interest-free thought is but a fantasy of professors and philosophers.⁵

Karl Mannheim's sociology of knowledge is a critique and creative amalgam of these challenges to objectivist epistemology. The premises of Mannheim's sociology of knowledge would seem to leave our scientific voyeur—our disinterested-outsider—an embarrassed interested-insider. Mannheim (1936:2) argued, "there are modes of thought which cannot be adequately understood so long as their origins are obscured." Further, he maintained (Mannheim quoted by Taylor, 1956:74), "it is impossible to conceive of absolute truth existing independently of the values and position of the subject and unrelated to the social context."

But, Mannheim like Marx, Dilthey, and Scheler, could not rest secure in relativism. Marx never abandoned the quest for objective knowledge. Dilthey offered the hope that we might discover a glimpse—a fragment—of "truth." Scheler never fully surrendered his Catholic commitment to universal truth. And, Mannheim sought to alleviate the embarrassment of our interested-insider through education. That is, he maintained that through an "integration" of human knowledge, Dilthey's "fragments" of truth could be "related" to one another and thereby transcend the narrow interest-bound "perspective" from which they originated. Thus, he reintroduced the idea of the outsider, the disinterested third party, in the *personae* of the free-floating intellectual who would serve as an arbiter of perspectivalism. In spite of his finely-tailored philosophical coat, Mannheim's disinterested-outsider did not escape embarrassment. This construction evoked critical responses in the most divergent ideological quarters.⁶ Even a sympathetic reader, C. Wright Mills, regarded it as little more than a variation on the theme of the philosopher-king.⁷ Hostile critics saw it as a dangerous resurrection of the idols of Comtism.

The polemics inspired by Mannheim's retreat from relativism have obscured its intent. Mannheim did not regard the

free-floating intellectual as a virginal repository of absolute truth. Rather, he considers him or her the least flawed hope we have in a less than virginal world. For Mannheim was convinced that science is not a hermetically sealed realm of pure cognitive activity. He regarded it as a human enterprise which is shaped by the powers and interests within the scientific community.

Many of the questions raised by Mannheim's sociology of knowledge are being reconsidered by metascientists today (although curiously Mannheim's writings are seldom consulted). Because the analytic theory of knowledge is presently undergoing a radical re-evaluation, philosophers of science are again seriously posing the question: *Who sees the truth?*

Among critics of orthodox social science, the mystique of the objective stranger is once again being entertained. Albert Salomen (1962:144) affirmed the thesis that the best sociologist is the stranger. Robert Merton (1976) suggested that there are some truths which are more easily grasped by outsiders, while insiders may have privileged access to others. Identifying himself as an existential phenomenologist, Edward Tiryakian (1975:3) contends listening to the stranger offers a very good starting point for "bracketing the natural attitude." And, of course, the entire ethnomethodological enterprise is founded upon an attempt to suspend taken for granted assumptions, i.e. to develop strategies for approaching everyday life situations from anthropologically strange perspectives. And, Maslow (1966:117), who never skirted confrontation with paradox, concluded his critique of spectator knowledge with the admission that:

The Jew or the Negro has far more spectator objectivity about our society than the insider. If you belong to the country club or the establishment, you are likely to take all of its values for granted and not even notice them. This includes all the rationalizations, its denials, the official hypocrisies, etc. Just these the outsider can see clearly and easily. There are therefore some truths that the spectator

can see more easily than the experiencer, who is part of the reality cognized.⁸

THE DILEMMA

Few contemporary theorists have carried the dialogue beyond the assertion that the stranger is *somehow* a repository of objectivity. Is this belief in the greater objectivity of the stranger merely a residue of positivism—a last errant hope for certain knowledge? Or, is it possible that the stranger does gain deeper insight into the texture of group life than members? It appears that both positivistic and humanistic sociologists accept Montesquieu's thesis. Why?

The present essay examines the concept of the stranger, considering the aura of charisma that seems to have been attached to it in ordinary discourse as well as within the sociological dialogue. Two general types of strangers are described: outsiders (The Eidolons) and enemies-within (The Emperor's Tailors). Finally, a rather limited attempt will be made to examine the testimony of some prominent strangers as they describe their marginal status and speculate on the ways that status has made them unusually perceptive observers of social phenomena.

THE CHARISMA OF THE STRANGER

Ordinary language references to the stranger carry ambiguous connotations. This ambiguity may reveal more than it conceals. The word itself derives from the French, *estrange* which means external, foreign or extra. Webster lists such synonyms as *singular, unique, peculiar, eccentric, erratic, queer, quaint, and outsider*.

Hegel posited the "Other" as the basic category of human thought.⁹ Unlike Husserl who would later try to articulate the epistemology of a presuppositionless science; Hegel regarded consciousness as essentially prepositional: as "con-

sciousness of."¹⁰ In Hegel's view, the "I" can only be posed in being opposed, that is, in setting itself up as the essential as opposed to the "Other" which is external, foreign or extraneous to it. If the Hegelian postulate is correct, no group can ever set itself up as the "One" without at once setting up an "Other" to which it is opposed. Thus, according to a Hegelian (de Beauvoir, 1961:xvii):

If three travelers chance to occupy the same compartment that is enough to make vaguely hostile 'others' out of all the rest of the passengers on the train. In small-town eyes all persons not belonging to the village are 'strangers' and suspect; to the native of a country all who inhabit other countries are 'foreigners;' Jews are 'different' for the anti-Semite, Negroes are 'inferior' for American racists, aborigines are 'natives' for colonists, proletarians are the 'lower class' for the privileged.

The stranger is suspect. We warn our children, "Don't talk to strangers" (for strangers may bring harm). But we populate their fantasies with magical strangers who slay all the dragons we conjure: Superman, Santa Claus, and Jesus Christ—strangers all. Fear and fascination are the polarities of the stranger's charisma.

Walter Sokel (1959:64-65) locates the genesis of the concept of the stranger as a projection of the ego-ideal of the poet, artist, and intellectual, in the Storm and Stress period of German romanticism. He maintains that this "type" prevails throughout German expressionist literature:

Herman Hesse in his semi-Expressionist novel has called his embodiment of this type *Steppenwolf*, the wolf of the steppes, an outcast from the sheltering warmth of society, roaming the barren wastes of his loneliness. Sensitive, gifted, creative, the Expressionist hero is superior to the self-satisfied majority. But his superiority is the bane of his life, the stigma which singles him out from among men; his superiority casts him into outer darkness. His nature is unique; his words find no echo . . . His lot is compared to

that of the Jew. 'The poet is one who is scattered among the nations . . . an exile. He is, in our time especially, a stranger dwelling in insecure domiciles.'

Symbolist poetry also celebrates the mythos of the stranger.¹¹

The texts of the French existentialists translated the stranger into a cosmic metaphor for the condition of man in the modern world. This view is perhaps nowhere better expressed than in Camus' (1955:5) memorable lines:

A world that can be explained even with bad reasons is a familiar world. But, on the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or hope of a promised land.

SIMMEL AND SCHUTZ: THESIS AND ANTITHESIS

The concept of the stranger was formally introduced into the vocabulary of sociologists by Georg Simmel. Simmel's notion is a direct borrowing of the expressionist-symbolist theme. Few American sociologists are aware of Simmel's deep involvement in these movements as literary critic, professor of aesthetics, connoisseur, patron, and friend—the great poet and self-defined stranger, Rainer Maria Rilke sometimes made Simmel's home one of his "insecure domiciles" and Simmel was intimately involved in elaborating the mythos of the neo-romantic movement led by his close friend, Stefan George. Nevertheless, Simmel's portrait of the stranger (unlike much of his other work) is wholly congruent with the strictures of the peep-show theory of knowledge. He sees the "Jew" and "trader" as representing in the purest form the stranger as a social type. Simmel (1955:404-405) describes the stranger as "near and far at the same time":

He is not radically committed to the unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group, and therefore approaches them with the specific attitude of 'objectivity' . . .

Objectivity may . . . be defined as freedom: the objective individual is bound by no commitments which could prejudice his perception, understanding, and evaluation of the given.

Simmel's essay, "The Stranger" is only a seven-page fragment. Yet, it has inspired a remarkable number of elaborations. Simmel's direct theoretical descendents include Robert Park and his students who applied the concept to studies of urbanism and migration. Park, who studied under Simmel at the University of Berlin, encouraged research on the stranger and the ethnic type he called "the marginal man." Many of the classics of the Chicago tradition—Louis Wirth's *The Ghetto*, W. I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's studies of *The Polish Peasant In Europe and America*, Everett Stonequist's *The Marginal Man*, Nels Anderson's *The Hobo*, and Harvey Zorbaugh's *The Gold Coast And The Slum*—are informed by the Simmelian legacy. Outside of the Chicago School, Margaret Mary Wood and Alfred Schutz are the most important bearers of this heritage. Wood's *The Stranger: A Study In Social Relationships* is a book-length exploration of the Simmelian theme. Her related work, *Paths Of Loneliness*, provides the theoretical framework and much of the substantive data for Clark Moustakas' study of creativity and solitude, *Loneliness*. Schutz, who was himself a stranger suspended between two cultures (nationally as well as occupationally), unquestionably contributed the most original ideas to this dialogue with his exploration of the social psychological dimensions of the stranger's anxiety.

Schutz shares Simmel's belief that the stranger is a repository of objectivity. However, he does not agree with Simmel's diagnosis of the source of this objectivity. Schutz (1960:108-109) maintains:

The stranger's objectivity cannot be sufficiently explained by his critical attitude. To be sure, he is not bound to worship the 'idols of the tribe' and has vivid feeling for the incoherence and inconsistency of the approached cultural

pattern . . . The deeper reason for his objectivity, however, lies in his own bitter experience of the limits of 'thinking-as-usual,' which has taught him that a man may lose his status, his rules of guidance, and even his history, and that the normal way of life is always far less guaranteed than it seems. Therefore, the stranger discerns, frequently with a grievous clear-sightedness, the rising of a crisis which may menace the whole foundation of the 'relatively natural conception of the world,' while all those symptoms pass unnoticed by members of the in-group, who rely on the continuance of their customary way of life.

Schutz is concerned with what happens to the stranger's sense of self when he or she seeks acceptance in a new group.¹² He maintains that every individual has a distinct repertoire of knowledge about their own life-world. He calls this repertoire "recipe knowledge" pointing out that it consists of just enough information to get people through the essential transactions of their respective social lives. The personal crisis of the stranger arises from the fact that the situation forces him or her "to place in question nearly everything that seems to be unquestionable to the members of the approached group." The cultural pattern of the approached group lacks the authority of a system of tested recipes because he or she does not share the historical tradition from which it was formed: "the cultural pattern of the approached group is to the stranger not a shelter but a field of adventure, not a matter of course but a questionable topic of investigation, not an instrument for disentangling problematic situations but a problematic situation itself and one hard to master" (1960:107-108). Schutz distinguishes the experience of the stranger seeking acceptance from the experiences of those whom we would call spectators or tourists:

. . . the ready-made picture of the foreign group subsisting within the stranger's home-group proves its inadequacy for the approaching stranger, for the mere reason that it has not been formed with the aim of provoking a response from, or a reaction of, the members of the foreign group.

The knowledge which it offers serves merely as a handy scheme for interpreting the foreign group and not as a guide for interaction between the two groups . . . this kind of knowledge is, so to speak, insulated; it can be neither verified nor falsified by responses of the members of the foreign group. The latter, therefore, consider this knowledge . . . as both irresponsible and irresponsible and complain of its prejudices, bias, and misunderstanding (1960: 104).

In a sense, Schutz offers a romantic interpretation of Montesquieu's thesis. He takes the position that the peep-show theory of knowledge cannot adequately explain the clear-sightedness of the stranger: that it is not the stranger's detachment but desire for attachment—not indifference but anxiety—which sensitizes him or her to the subtle nuances of the approached group's behavior. In effect, he takes the position that the stranger is *hurt into understanding*. And further, that if this were not the case, he or she would be able to provide no more than tourist knowledge, stereotypes, and ethnocentric self-congratulations. He or she would be no more than a *Babbit* in Europe or *The Ugly American* in Southeast Asia.

BEYOND VOYEURISM: TALKING TO STRANGERS

Within the past decade there has been a growing awareness among sociologists who do participant observation studies that their work shares a closer kinship with the literary traditions of the stranger than with the impersonal methodology of orthodox science.¹³ Indeed, many acknowledge that an impersonal methodology is not only inappropriate but counter-productive to successful field work. As Rosalie Wax (1967:118) puts it, "participant observation (like living) involves unavoidable error, clumsiness, embarrassment, and suffering." Yet, these sentiments have no place in an impersonal scientific methodology. They are the shadows

or idols the peep-show theory of knowledge was supposed to purge.

Consequently, researchers doing participant observation studies have sustained a kind of humanistic underground which resists the cybernization of research. For members of this underground, de Tocqueville's *Democracy In America* remains an exemplary case. Severyn Bruyn (1966:200) affirms, "The brilliant insights of Alexis de Tocqueville . . . have been of inestimable worth to social scientists." But, Bruyn shares the longing of most participant observers for a model which can provide exact procedures for replication:

Such students of man in society reveal certain methodological traits in common . . . The unrecorded elements, the unwritten procedures which entered into the making of such significant interpretations of man, could be made explicit for others to follow in their own arenas of social research. In future years these principles of procedure which guided the masters of perception and articulation might gradually be made more clear to others; or as Max Weber would say, in future years the special 'charisma' of such intellectual leaders might come to be in part 'routinized.' Such may be the unintended outcome of the effects of these writers on succeeding generations of students, but any systematic study of their methods will likely remain undone . . .

Bruyn does not say why such a study will likely remain undone. But, I suspect he regards the "bureaucratization of individual genius" as too formidable of a challenge. Bruyn is an incisive critic of objectivism. Yet, when he refers to the "unrecorded elements" and "unwritten procedures" of the great strangers of the past, Bruyn unwittingly succumbs to the scientific assumptions he wishes to transcend.¹⁴

Most *literateurs* keep journals, diaries or notebooks. No sociologist ever published as complete a record of his experiences and procedures as Andre Gide whose *Journals* (in which he consciously attempted to record "for psychology" the complete record of a life) comprise (in edited and

highly condensed form) four enormous volumes. No sociologist ever published as full of a portrait of his personal epistemology as George Santayana. In addition, a number of the great strangers of the past have written full-length autobiographies. Collections of their letters have been published. And, all have been the subject of biographies. Therefore, we do in fact know a great deal more about the lives and work habits of these individuals than any sociologist.

The task Bruyn outlined is formidable. It requires an enormous amount of time, skill, and industry. The present essay can only suggest the richness and diversity of the material which awaits such an inquiry.

THE MASK OF THE STRANGER: A RHETORICAL STRATEGY

Tales of travel and adventure have enchanted the Western mind since 1000 B.C. when literature was born in the Homeric legends. Marco Polo's account of the wonders of the Orient composed in the Thirteenth Century profoundly influenced the course of world history. By the Seventeenth Century, the Oriental romance had developed into a sophisticated literary genre.

Montesquieu embellished this form by assuming the mask of a Persian philosopher and composing a satirical account of morals and manners in Regency France. Montesquieu framed this account in the form of letters which he published anonymously. Actually his knowledge of Persia was acquired in his reading robes from the books of Tavernier and Chardin. But, the fact that Montesquieu realized that his irony would not be as effective in his own name as it would be if it "purported to be the spontaneous impressions of some foreign traveler" (Davidson, 1901:x) indicates that the mystique of the stranger already had a powerful hold over the European imagination. When *The Persian Letters* were issued in a quarto edition in 1754, an introduction which has been ascribed to Montesquieu was included. It explores the psychological effect of the stranger mask:

The Persians . . . found themselves suddenly in Europe, transplanted to all intents and purposes, into another world. It was therefore necessary for some time to represent them as ignorant and full of prejudices: attention was bestowed exclusively on the formulation and development of their ideas. Their first thoughts must have been exceptional . . . The reader should also observe that the whole charm of the work lies in the continuous contrast between the existing state of things and the remarkable, artless, or odd manner in which they are regarded (1910:26-27).

For Montesquieu the mask of the stranger is merely a technical device—a contrivance which sharpens the bite of his satire in a style which resembles that of his English acquaintance, Jonathan Swift. Voltaire responded to *The Persian Letters* by saying anyone could have written them. To prove his point, he also composed a number of serio-comic Oriental romances of his own. Oliver Goldsmith also contributed to the genre. With Goldsmith's offering, a series of letters collected under the title *Citizen Of The World*; we can see the beginnings of the romantic identification of the stranger as an ego projection of the artist. Goldsmith shows the development of a Chinese philosopher in London as he moves from a learned but confused provincial emigre to a citizen of the world who announces in his final letter:

As for myself, the world being one city to me, I do not much care in which of the streets I happen to reside: I shall, therefore, spend the remainder of my days in examining the manners of different countries . . . 'They must often change', says Confucius, 'who would be constant in happiness or wisdom' (1901:427).

A half-century later, Herder (quoted by Schenk, 1966:265) spoke of "men who seem to have come from another world and to belong to another world . . . one calls these rarities of nature Romantic characters." Rainer Maria Rilke (quoted by Wydenbruck, 1949:43) saw himself in this light as a citizen of the world and a man of the ages: "The greatest man, so it seems to me, is he who swears allegiance to no flag and,

because he has detached himself from the part, now belongs to the whole world."

THE EIDOLONS

In *Leaves Of Grass* Walt Whitman spoke of the advent of a new social type, the Eidolon. The Eidolon closely resembles Goldsmith's citizen of the world. Being the master of more than one tradition, this social hybrid (like Mannheim's free-floating intellectual and Herder's "Romantic characters") promises to take us beyond surface knowledge to a more profound form of human understanding. George Santayana and Andre Gide might be described as eidolons.

Santayana was born in Spain of Spanish parents. Shortly after his birth, Santayana's parents separated. He lived in Spain with his father until the age of eight when he was sent to America to live with his mother and his American half-brother and two half-sisters. He later described his life in this family as like life in a boarding-house. Santayana pursued his education at Harvard and in Europe. In 1912 he gave up a Harvard professorship and took up residence abroad. He spent the last years of his life as a recluse in a convent hospital in Rome.

In his "Introduction" to *The Marginal Man* (1961:xvi), Robert Park characterized Santayana in these terms:

It is evident from his account of his life in Boston, that he lived there with his mother, as he did in fact in Spain with his father, more or less as an alien, always conscious of a different tradition and of intimate and indissoluble connections with another and a different world. In fact his life in both Spain and America seems to have been that of the typical 'stranger,' as described by Simmel in his *Sociology*; that is, one who lives in intimate association with the world about him but never so completely identifies with it that he is unable to look at it with a certain critical detachment. In Santayana's case this detachment has become . . . an intimate but 'compassionate understanding' of his world.

A relevant biographical note must be appended to Park's remarks. Although Park was apparently unaware of the fact, Santayana (like Park) studied under Simmel at Berlin.¹⁵ In light of our remarks about literary masks, this association is perhaps more than a coincidence.

Santayana was a master of English letters who moved freely and with dazzling style in both prose and poetry. Nevertheless, he always emphasized his Spanish origins which he felt others tended to overlook. Richard Lyon (1968:xi and xiv) maintains, "Santayana thought of himself always as the inveterate stranger . . . as standing apart in feeling—'detachable'—from the men and ideas among which he moved." Indeed, Lyon continues, "It is emphatically true of Santayana that he felt himself not only a stranger in America but a stranger in the world." Santayana (quoted by Park, 1961:xvi-xvii) himself acknowledged:

My philosophy may be regarded as a synthesis of the various traditions, or an attempt to view them from a level which their several deliverances may be justly understood. . . . I felt like a foreigner in Spain, more acutely so than in America, although for more trivial reasons . . . English had become my only possible instrument, and I deliberately put away everything that might confuse me in that medium . . . Thus in renouncing everything else for the sake of English letters I might be said to have been guilty, quite unintentionally, of a little stratagem, as if I had set out to say plausibly in English as many un-English things as possible.

In *The Idler And His Works* (1957:15), Santayana viewed his philosophical career in retrospect as "an advance from convention to radical sincerity." Lyon (1968:xv) suggests that the seeds of the philosophy of the mature Santayana were planted when the young Spaniard was transplanted to Boston:

The shock of that dislocation was perhaps the beginning of philosophy, for the sense of the contingency of existence never left Santayana—the sense of how arbitrary, how deeply unintelligible is the fatality which imposes on the

watching self this precise irrevocable world and no other. An apprehension of the world as an irrational given, intensely present yet present for no reason, lies near the center of his philosophy.

Santayana (1957:7-8) expressed this contingency in these words:

The surface of human experience must not be taken for its ground or for its own motive power. It is all an effect. . . . The liberal, empirical, psychological philosophy into which I was plunged was miserably artificial, like a modern town laid out in squares. There was nothing subterranean acknowledged in it Mankind lived lost in a fog of self-consciousness, persuaded that it was creating itself and the whole universe. They had forgotten their religion; and their philosophy, when they had one, was a glorification of their vanity and their furious impulse to make money, to make machines, and to make war. What would come of it, except perhaps to make them more alike? In my solitude I watched

The mission of Santayana's "radical sincerity" is to transcend convention. He regarded his detachment as a means of breaking through the veneer of social reality. Santayana listed two "pressing reforms" which require radical sincerity: "to criticize anthropomorphism in religion and fable in science" (1957:17).

He regarded America as the embodiment of modernism. His criticism of Americanism is a criticism of modernism—of the unrelenting faith in commerce and industry which is steadily driving toward "the manufacture of Homunculus, or the mechanical man" (Santayana quoted by Lyon, 1968: xxxii). He regarded America as a spiritual vacuum, the legitimate heir of the Baconian ethos which usurped power over nature by denying human nature.

Like Santayana, Andre Gide consistently reminded others that he was an outsider—in Gide's case, a "product of two races, two provinces, and two religions" (Fowlie, 1965:10) as well as two sexual identities. Gide believed that his lonely

and conflict-filled childhood endowed life with the intense sense of drama from which he shaped his art. Gide contended that nearly everything that can be said about human-kind has already been said, but almost nothing has been understood. He regarded his own life as raw material for the beginning of such an understanding. Like Santayana, Gide (1970:34) viewed his existence with an ironic detachment claiming that he often felt "like a stranger on this earth, playing the game of life without much believing in it." Gide also spent much of his life travelling. He used his travels as a means of self-analysis. Gide contrasted his "method" with Montesquieu's rationalism. He (quoted by Ames, 1947:247) cites Montesquieu's assertion: "I have laid down principles and seen particular cases bend into them as if by themselves . . . when I discovered these principles everything I was looking for came to me." Gide responds by saying:

That means that he sought only what he had previously found. Terrible limitation! and how I admire, in comparison, Claude Bernard's saying: 'The investigator must pursue what he seeks, but also see what he was not seeking,' that which he was not expecting to see though it should surprise him very much, annoy him. The Cartesian does not admit that he can ever be surprised. In sum he will not let himself be instructed by the unexpected.

In his travels Gide was instructed by the unexpected first in the Congo and then in Russia. In *Travels In The Congo* (1927), Gide presented a penetrating indictment of colonialism. He (1938:11-12) explains that he was able to see beyond the accepted interpretation of "the white man's benevolence" in Africa only when he ceased to be an official guest and donned the mask of the solitary wanderer:

. . . as long as I travelled in French Equatorial Africa accompanied by officials, everything seemed to me little short of marvellous. I only began to see things clearly when I left the Governor's car and decided to travel on foot and alone, so as to have six months in which to get into direct contact with the natives.

Gide's report from the Congo and his *Return From Lake Chad* (1927) outraged the political Right, but the Commissions of Inquiry subsequently confirmed all of Gide's charges.

Gide's account of his travels in the USSR reflect a more personal sense of disillusionment. In his *Journals* Gide had celebrated the Soviet system as the hope of humanity at a time when, as Sartre (1970:16) notes, "it was dangerous to do so." He went to Russia as a celebrity and delivered a memorial address at Maxim Gorki's funeral (1938:57-58):

I had soaked too deeply in Marxist writing for the last three years to feel myself very much of a stranger in the USSR. On the other hand, I had read too many books on travel, enthusiastic descriptions, apologies. My great mistake was to have put too much faith in all these encomiums. And then too, everything that might have served me as a warning was said in such an acrimonious tone . . . I am more inclined to believe love than hate. Yes, I was full of trust, confidence. And indeed what disturbed me most when I got there, was not so much to find imperfections, as to meet once again with the advantages I had wanted to escape from, the privileges I had hoped were abolished. Certainly I thought it natural that a guest should be received as well as possible and everywhere shown the best. But what astonished me was that there was such a gap between this best and the common lot; such excessive privilege beside so mediocre or bad ordinary. . . . It is perhaps a failing of my mind and its protestant formation that I distrust ideas that are profitable and opinions that are 'comfortable' . . .

In recording his impressions of his Russian journey, Gide (1937:62) was disturbed by the fact that "wholesale judgments" were expected from him when he felt successively "so hot and so cold." He was deeply impressed with the parks of culture, the model factories, the worker's clubs, and the children's gardens; but he was repulsed by the growth of the "new bourgeoisie" of the privileged party elite ("the new class"); by the total suppression of free thought and the absence of anything resembling "critical reason" in the Marxist sense. Deeply committed to French Communism and

to an artistic ethos of total candor, Gide (1938:71-72) resolved his internal conflict by viewing himself as "a posthumous author":

I cared very little about applause; I could only have got it from the bourgeois class from which I myself came, and to which, it is true, I still belonged, but which I heartily despised, precisely because I knew it so well, and against which all that was best in me rebelled . . . I had the painful but exhilarating impression of speaking in the desert. Speaking in the desert is very satisfactory; there is no risk of an echo distorting the sound of your voice; there is no need to be concerned about the impression your words may make; and there is nothing to influence them but a need for sincerity. And it is to be observed that when the public taste is warped, when convention has overcome truth, that very sincerity is styled affectation.

Gide's *Return From The USSR* outraged Leftist intellectuals and marked the decline of his popularity—so much so that when he died in 1951, one periodical announced that a corpse had died (Sartre, 1970). Yet Gide's resolve to speak without echo must be regarded in part as a romantic allusion because the response to the resonance of his words impelled him to write a second book on the USSR. The first report had been a day-to-day record of his personal impressions. But the second was a piece of scholarly research undertaken to "objectively" defend his personal knowledge.

Santayana and Gide are but two examples of the creative uses of alienation. There are others equally celebrated who might qualify for Walt Whitman's chorus of Eidolons—Camus, the French Algerian; Samuel Beckett, the Irishman who writes only in French; James Joyce, who had to invent a language in which he could find expression; Stefan George, the Franco-German who revolutionized the modern German idiom. Standing behind all these, the archetypal strangers of the Nineteenth Century, Nietzsche and Schopenhauer

whose extreme ironic detachment made them notorious martyrs of modernism.

THE EMPEROR'S TAILORS

Simmel described "the poor and like sundry" who are denied full participation in a group by virtue of their inferior status as "inner enemies." They too are strangers. Their relationship with the dominant group entails a unity of nearness and distance since from the point-of-view of the dominant group they possess only instrumental value. Beyond this, they are as Ralph Ellison (quoted by Silberman, 1964:110-111) put it, "invisible:"

I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me . . . it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me . . . That invisibility to which I refer occurs because of a peculiar disposition of the eyes of those with whom I come into contact. A matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality . . . It is sometimes advantageous to be unseen, although it is most often wearing on the nerves.

One of the advantages of invisibility is that the unseen see what is not meant to be seen. Those engaged in the most servile occupations; racial, ethnic, and religious minorities; those stigmatized by extreme physical and mental handicaps; as well as women and children; have historically been among the "unseen" within the power structures of industrial societies.

Richard Wright (quoted by Gross and Hardy, 1966: frontispiece) characterized the black man as "America's metaphor." A prominent literary critic (Geismar, 1968:xii) described black literature as "the best mirror in which to see

the white American self in mid-twentieth century." In "Stranger in the Village," James Baldwin (1955:140-142) explored this thesis by noting: "What is crucial here is that, since white men represent in the black man's world so heavy a weight, white men have for black men a reality which is far from being reciprocal . . . it is one of the ironies of black-white relations that, by means of what the white man imagines the black man to be, the black man is enabled to know who the white man is."

Similarly, some of the most perceptive analyses of European culture have been written by its victims—members of the Third World. At the dawn of this century, the Indian sage, Rabindranath Tagore (1917:16) warned against the depersonalizing and demoralizing effect of the alliance of science, commerce, and politics, which is the modern Nation-state: "In the West the national machinery of commerce and politics turns out neatly compressed bales of humanity which have their use and high market value; but they are bound in iron hoops, labelled and separated off with scientific care and precision." While western philosophers were extolling the virtues of their objectivist epistemology; Tagore saw western science as value-laden, an appendage of the lust for power and selfishness—a manipulative force which not only negates moral-man but also human nature itself. He warns (1917:34, 50-51):

Whenever Power removes all checks from its path to make its career easy, it triumphantly rides into its ultimate crash of death.

Take away man from his natural surroundings, from the fullness of his communal life, and all its living associations of beauty and love and social obligations, and you will be able to turn him into so many fragments of a machine for the production of wealth on a gigantic scale. Turn a tree into a log and it will burn for you, but it will never bear living flowers and fruit.

A half-century later Franz Fanon surveyed the wreckage that

Western plunder had brought to the Third World in the virtuous disguise of humanism. Fanon advised his brothers and sisters (1968:311-312): "Leave this Europe where they are never done talking of Man, yet murder men everywhere they find them, at the corner of every one of their own streets, in all corners of the globe." For Fanon as for Tagore, European man is a partial man—a deformation produced by excessive rationalism, and self-absorption: "A permanent dialogue with oneself and an increasing obscene narcissism never ceases to prepare the way for a half delirious state, where intellectual work became suffering and the reality was not at all that of a living man, working and creating himself, but rather words, different combinations of words, and the tensions springing from the meanings contained in words" (1968:313). Fanon contended that the future of humanity required the creation of a "new man." He believed the new man would be born in the Third World.

Simone de Beauvoir applies the Hegelian concept of "the Other" to relations between the sexes. She points out that history has been written by men and men have defined women as "the other" (1961:xvi):

She is defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential. He is the Subject, he is the Absolute—she is the Other.

Virginia Woolf's *A Writer's Diary* (1953:96) reveals the author's sense of being an "outsider" in the British literary world:

These screens shut me out. Have no screens, for screens are made out of our own integument; and get at the thing itself, which has nothing whatever in common with a screen. The screen-making habit, though, is so universal that probably it preserves our sanity. If we had not this device for shutting people off from our sympathies we might perhaps dissolve utterly; separateness would be impossible. But the screens are in excess; not the sympathy.

Barred from the library at Oxford because she is a woman, Woolf posed her famous question, What if Shakespeare had been born a female? In *A Room Of Her Own* and *Three Guineas*, she presented a penetrating analysis of the male-dominated world of English letters. The immediate response to these books even within her circle of Bloomsbury intimates merely compounded Woolf's sense of isolation.

INNER ENEMIES: ENLIGHTENMENT AND ESTRANGEMENT

Dostoevsky (quoted by Foucault, 1965:ix) wrote, "It is not by confining one's neighbor that one is convinced of one's own sanity." Michel Foucault indicates that since the "great reforms" which the Positivists, Tuke and Pinel, brought about in the treatment of the insane, Dostoevsky's assertion may no longer be accurate. Foucault (1965:276) argues, "What we call psychiatric practice is a certain moral tactic contemporary with the end of the Eighteenth Century, preserved in the rites of asylum life, and overlaid by the myths of positivism." Foucault contends that until the Enlightenment, unreason and folly were regarded as integral parts of the human constitution: the roots of poetry and the tragic. In *King Lear* and *Don Quixote*, there is a romantic identification with madness. The madman is a mirror of what any man might become. Foucault maintains that the triumph of positivism required a purge of the dialectic (and thus the dialogue) which had acknowledged unreason as the root of reason. In confining the madman to the asylum, the Age of Reason transformed him into "a latecomer in the world of reason" (Foucault, 1965:249-250):

. . . it is the organization around the madman of a world where everything would be like and near him, but in which he himself would remain a stranger, the Stranger par excellence who is judged not only by appearances but by all that they may betray and reveal in spite of themselves . . . the madman is obliged to objectify himself in the eyes of reason as the perfect stranger, that is, as the man whose

strangeness does not reveal itself. The city of reason welcomes him only with the qualification and at the price of this surrender to anonymity.

The keepers of the asylum did not possess a science capable of understanding madness. The physician represented science as a moral authority. His powers took root in the madman's minority status: "If the medical personage could isolate madness, it was not because he knew it, but because he mastered it; and what for positivism would be an image of objectivity was only the other side of this domination" (Foucault, 1965:272).

Foucault reports that since the Enlightenment the incidence of insanity among highly creative minds has increased dramatically. Those who would go beyond the conventional, the superficial positivistic construction of reality, could no longer engage "in the praise of folly" as Erasmus did. Rather, they had to risk their sanity.

OTHER SCREENS

The asylum is not the only institution that insulates society against contact with strangers. Howard Zinn (1975:22) contends that in America:

. . . the huge proportion of poor people in jail for crimes against property suggests that prisons are inevitable counterparts of banks. And that so long as we have a system that breeds fierce and unequal competition for scarce resources . . . some steel bars will be needed to protect money and others to confine human beings.

So too, nursing homes shield youth against the strangeness of age. Other screens or "chain-link fences" (Liebow, 1967: 250) protect us against interaction with the retarded, the dying, the grossly deformed, and any "others" who might deprive us of our optimism.

The "Other" is obviously a fluid category. A "stranger" in one group may be an intimate of another. Regimes change. Racial and ethnic groups improve their status or lose it.

Yesterday's "one" may be tomorrow's "other." And, all of us in the modern world know the pains and privileges of being strangers.

CONCLUSION

Listening to the words of strangers is a frustrating experience for minds formed within positivistic conventions of scholarship. One wants to grasp and dissect each entry: to weigh and assess its truth value; to chart, log, or dismiss it. But this may be part of the "obscene narcissism" of the Western mind. We are caught in the same bind if we assert that the stranger possesses more "objective" knowledge than the insider. Perhaps, we might say that "inner enemies" possess more "relevant" knowledge since their existential condition has underscored the radical contingency of being. But, relevant for whom? The forces of social control?

If Hegel is correct, that the subject can only be posed in being opposed; then, the "truth" which the stranger can offer is only a negation. This is Sartre's view (1968:17): "We only become what we are by the radical deep-seated refusal of that which others have made us." This, too, seems to be the ideal which the romantic identification with the stranger embodies—the ideal of the autonomous self who is not bound by any dogmas, collective definitions or group loyalties which would compromise its integrity. Santayana's notion of radical sincerity and Gide's protestant distrust of comfortable opinions express this ideal.

The role Karl Mannheim assigned to the "free-floating intellectual" within the presidiums of power and planning is offensive to the democratic ethos. But, I would suggest that the type *or ideal* is itself valuable—particularly when contrasted with another intellectual type mentioned by Mannheim, "the muskateer of free-enterprise" (Mannheim quoted by Wolff, 1971:xc). Today the latter type seems to prevail not only in the parlors of princes and presidents but in academia as well.

Scholars who would risk moving beyond organizational definitions of academic sociology in order to pursue basic inquiry can be instructed by the ideal elaborated by Simmel, Schutz, Mannheim, Gide, and Santayana. But, it remains a cerebral ideal—perhaps even a lifeless ideal—unless it entails sympathy and compassion: a putting aside of the idols of the profession in order to enrich the idols of the species. It requires a rediscovery of the "I" in the "Thou" for as Nietzsche (1974:36) reminds us:

We are not thinking frogs, nor objectifying and registering mechanisms with their innards removed: constantly, we have to give birth to our thoughts out of our pain and, like mothers endow them with all we have of blood, heart, fire, pleasure, passion, agony, conscience, fate, and catastrophe. Life—that means for us constantly transforming all that we are into light and flame—also everything that wounds us; we simply can do no other.

NOTES

¹This example is frequently cited in the sociological literature and can almost be regarded as the basis for an ideal type. Simmel (1950) cites the custom of Italian cities of bringing judges in from another district. Wood (1934) specifically mentions Portia in this connection.

²If public recognition of the artistic vision is elitist, the phenomenon itself is not, as Liebow (1967:25-26) makes eminently clear in his description of the incisive qualities of Sea Cat's skewed vision.

³Koestler (1967:35-36) writes, "I have coined the term 'bisociation' in order to make a distinction between the routine skills of thinking on a single 'plane,' as it were, and the creative act, which . . . always operates on more than one plane. The former may be called single-minded, the latter a double-minded, transitory state of unstable equilibrium where the balance of both emotion and thought is disturbed."

⁴There are many exceptions of course: for instance, Augustine, Pascal, and Nietzsche; but significantly, they were all labelled 'subjective'—a label which excused others from the responsibility of seriously coming to terms with their ideas.

⁵H. L. Mencken used this epitaph to describe Nietzsche (Remmling, 1967:45). John O'Neill (1974:24) offers an interesting variation on Nietzsche's theme. He describes "universal truth" as "the trick of university, newspaper, and tourist culture."

⁶Merton (1949) challenged it from a functionalist perspective. Adorno

(quoted by Jay, 1973:291-292) sarcastically dismissed Mannheim's "reverence for the intelligentsia" as free-floating by asserting the answer "is to be found not in the reactionary postulate of its 'rootedness in Being' but rather in the reminder that the very intelligentsia that pretends to float freely is fundamentally rooted in the very being that must be changed and which it merely pretends to criticize."

⁷Mills (1959:180) sardonically remarks, "Were the 'philosopher' king, I should be tempted to leave the kingdom;" but Mills also ponders the question, "When kings are without any philosophy, are they not incapable of responsible rule?" Perhaps Alvin Gouldner comes closest to a sympathetic re-reading of Mannheim's conception of the social role of the intelligentsia in *The Future Of Intellectuals And The Rise Of The New Class* (1979).

⁸There is a striking example of this affect in *Tally's Corner* (1967:61-63). The researcher, Elliot Liebow, affirms the value of Tally's skill as a cement finisher. Tally diminishes it on the grounds that it requires only a limited amount of (theoretical) knowledge. He asks, "When was the last time you saw anyone standing around talking about concrete?" Tally incisively outlines the role "talk" (the elaborated codes of professionalism) plays in reinforcing the "chain-link fence" (the unity of nearness and distance) which separates lower-class Blacks like Tally, Richard, Lonnie and Sea Cat from middle class Whites like Liebow and Lonnie's lawyer.

⁹Hegel presents this thesis in *The Phenomenology of Mind*. Simone de Beauvoir applies it to the relationship between the sexes in *The Second Sex* (1961). The Hegelian construct exercised a profound influence over G. H. Mead's definition of the polarities of the "self."

¹⁰Whether Husserl actually achieved a presuppositionless philosophy is cast in serious doubt by Farber (1943:521). The inadequacies of Schutz's re-reading of Husserl are ably documented by Gorman (1977).

¹¹Sokel (1959:64-65) maintains that the deification of the lonely artist-genius is present in Goethe's *Faust*, in the historicist view of 'progress,' in Left-Hegelianism, and reaches its extreme in Nietzsche's *Zarathustra*. Edschmid (quoted by Sokel, 1959:55) lists Holderlin, Grabbe, Lenz, Kliet, Bucher, and Nietzsche in the genealogy of the stranger. Gay (1968:113) also underscores the importance of the stranger motif in pre-World War I German literature. Simmel's friends, the poets, George and Rilke both assume the mask of the stranger in a number of their poems. In 1900 George wrote a poem entitled, "The Stranger." A typical autobiographical line by Rilke celebrating the stranger theme runs, "Can you think how year to year I roam Thus—a stranger in a world of strangers" (Rilke quoted by Wydenbruck, 1949:245).

¹²Schutz maintains, "The outstanding example for the social situation under scrutiny is that of the immigrant . . . But by no means is their validity restricted to this special case. The applicant for membership in a closed club, the prospective bridegroom who wants to be admitted to the girl's family, the farmer's son who enters college, the city-dweller who settles in a rural environment, the 'selectee' who joins the army, the family of the

war worker who moves into a boom town—all are strangers according to the definition just given, although in these cases the typical 'crisis' that the immigrant undergoes may assume milder forms . . ." Nevertheless Schutz does not apply his perspective to the sociologist, anthropologist, or other professional field workers. He retains a certain dualism on this point: "The sociologist (as sociologist, not as a man among fellow-men which he remains in his private life) is the disinterested scientific onlooker of the social world." Schutz does acknowledge, "Strangeness and familiarity are not limited to the social field but are general categories of our interpretation of the world." But for Schutz the sociologist remains a Minotaur. I do not share this view. I believe that if the sociologist is to penetrate beyond superficial knowledge of the social process, he or she, like the stranger, must do so as a thinking-feeling, hurting and caring being. Elsewhere (Jansen, 1978:249-266), I argue that the "post-critical" philosophy of science outlined by Michael Polanyi (1958) provides an epistemological warrant for this belief.

¹³For an excellent summary of recent assessments of the constituents of successful participant observation, see Clinton R. Sanders, "Review essay: Participant observation and the politics of sociological method," *Qualitative Sociology* 1, 3 (1979):121-131.

¹⁴Contra Bruyn, Phillip Hammond (1964:2) points out: "The chronicling, month to month, of the investigations by these two 'sociologists before their day' [de Tocqueville and Beaumont] conveys as do few other documents the role of the circumstantial, the irrational, and nonrational, as well as the logical and systematic, nature of social research. Not only are the 'research methods' made obvious (e.g., de Tocqueville typically asked many different persons the same questions, he sought out documents from government bodies and officials, he regularly corresponded with his father in France to determine the comparability of American and French institutions), but also the role of 'controlling ideas,' of evanescent theory, of the fortuitous comment, emerges in a way that is seldom indicated in traditional research-reporting . . . very few social scientific reports, it appears, with all their discussion of methods, contain accounts of the 'method' by which they came about. There are almost no chronicles of social research. And yet this missing component is an important one, as seen in the frequency with which existing chronicles are cited as well as by the number of times eminent and experienced researchers have called for more such accounts."

¹⁵Santayana wrote William James in 1887, "I have discovered a *Privatdocent*, Dr. Simmel, whose lectures interest me very much" (Santayana quoted by Perry, 1935, Vol. I:402). James shared and encouraged Santayana's enthusiasm for Simmel's work.

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