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The Other Side of Dialogue: On Making the Other Strange and the Experience of Otherness¹

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The central assumption of phenomenological and related approaches holds that the possibility of mutual understanding and communication in interpersonal relations is contingent on the supposition of the sameness of self and other. Under this assumption, the otherness of the other is conceived as an obstacle to achieving mutual understanding. Thus, the categories of stranger and strangeness are not considered constitutive of interpersonal communication and, consequently, are analyzed either in terms of social role or as a methodological device. The present paper examines this assumption by focusing on the process of "making the other strange," which involves the disengagement of the other's presence from his or her familiar, taken-for-granted identity. The other is thereby rendered "other," that is, opaque and irreducible in his individuality. This suspension of the taken-for-granted understanding opens up the possibility of a creative and critical search to understand the other and allows distinguishing among selves. Without this possibility, the picture of interpersonal communication remains incomplete. The discussion of the principles underlying this process and of its implications for an analytical account of interaction is followed by examples from everyday occurrences of making strange.

—"O day and night, but this is wondrous strange."

—"And therefore as a stranger give it welcome."

[SHAKESPEARE]

The aim of this study is to show how strangeness appears in the midst of the most ordinary relationships and how it diverts a relationship from its usual course. Moreover, strangeness engenders otherness. The other person emerges, at a distance, as a separate self. The appearance of otherness throws into relief the element indispensable to any dialogue. It

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is not the exchange of goods, approval, or power per se but rather a recognition of the "otherness" of "the other." If all were the same, we would, in fact, be not much different from a throng of egos engaged only in the pursuit of food, mates, safety, and power but devoid of selves. The revelation of the otherness of the other gives rise to the awareness of being separate and different from and strange to one another. Every attempt to communicate entails acknowledgment (however implicit) of the other. The appearance of strangeness is considered in the present study as an exposure to real distance, which may be experienced either as a terrifying abyss or as a "dialogic span" that motivates the desire to know the other, as well as the self, and fosters movement and change.

The importance of the phenomenon described above for sociological theory is in what the current approach in sociological phenomenology (mainly that of Alfred Schutz and his successors in ethnomethodology) calls the problematics of dialogue. The exploration of strangeness and otherness is offered here as a view of the other side of dialogue, which has been obscured by an overemphasis on the human production of common worlds of meaning as the only axis on which dialogue rotates. First, I will address writers such as Schutz and Garfinkel, as I think they have shown quite convincingly how people construct the limits of their worlds and their knowledge and how they bridge the distances between themselves and others by not questioning, by "taking for granted." Then, I will argue that human nature in general exhibits the opposite tendency, that is, toward curiosity, wonder, adventure, and relating to the other (and to the self) as unknown and strange. What I want to establish in this paper is an idea of dialogue as an interplay of familiarity and strangeness.

According to Schutz (1962), the "home world" in which we live offers us the comforting familiarity of the people around us with whom we transact our daily business. Myriad encounters, in their most minute detail, seem to be entirely contained within a framework of thought and language that Schutz called "the paramount reality of everyday life." According to him, this reality governs people's relations by limiting their thinking to what he called "thinking as usual," that is, thinking in terms of what one is acquainted with and can (with permissible variations) unconsciously repeat. The stress on familiarity, however, forces one's attention not only to what is already known and figured out but also to the act of deliberate "assuming away" of the unfamiliar as a part of everyday life. The unfamiliar is relegated to a familiar category of "the strange" or "the stranger," so that "strangeness" is reserved for someone or something that belongs (if at all) elsewhere. As such, a stranger, in fact, serves to demarcate, by his or her very strangeness, the boundaries of the familiar and (in that sense) of the real.

This view entails a broad division of social relations into those governed by familiarity and those governed by strangeness; the bulk of phenomenological studies of human interaction is predicated on such a division. Consequently, in that tradition, strangeness has been investigated mainly as the property of a certain type of social role, namely, the role of stranger. The seminal essays by Simmel (1950) and by Schutz (1944) delineated the essentials of this approach. Simmel focused on the structural peculiarities of the role of the stranger deriving from his being located simultaneously near to and far from the host society. Schutz chose to focus on the cognitive dimension of the stranger's role and singled out the stranger as a person whose unique position in the social structure gives him the advantage of objectivity in observing social relations—an advantage much sought after by social scientists. Both Simmel and Schutz, despite their different emphases, conceive of strangeness as pertaining to an observable and delimited realm of social relations obtaining between a host society and a person who is not a member.

The pertinence of strangeness to the wide range of commonplace social relations was affirmed in the ethnomethodological studies by Garfinkel (1972). In his experiments, he used estrangement techniques (introducing an “artificially produced” stranger into everyday situations) as a methodological device aimed at uncovering the commonsense assumptions of everyday dialogues. Each of the interacting individuals becomes a lay phenomenologist of sorts, situationally constrained to adopt an attitude that for Natanson constitutes a necessary step in transforming familiarity into strangeness, that is, “the direct presentation of what there is, bare of its encrustation of prior interpretation and already formed attitudes” (Natanson 1974, p. 9).

The treatment of strangeness either as a methodological device or as a social role leaves unexplored the manifestations of strangeness in the familiar web of relations that constitutes the paramount reality of everyday life. Such exploration would imply not simply an application of the idea of the stranger to any commonplace encounter but a reexamination of the principle of the essential accessibility of human experience to understanding (both on the part of interacting individuals *vis-à-vis* each other and on the part of the phenomenologically oriented student of social interaction). This principle, which we may call the principle of human fellowship, holds that it is imperative constantly to assume that our fellow human beings inhabit the same reality we do.² Under this principle, if a

² The assumption of similarity between people in different cultures is discussed in Winch (1970). Zimmerman and Pollner (1971) write on the assumption of identity between lay and professional conceptions of social fact.

dialogue is to take place, strangeness as a phenomenon of everyday interaction must be considered negatively, namely, as that part of an encounter that must be constantly "assumed away" by the participants.

The present paper is an attempt to restore the experience of strangeness to what I believe is its proper place in social interaction. It is not my intention to argue that the above principle is wrong but rather, as mentioned earlier, to illuminate its other side so as to attain a complete (dialectic) conception of the phenomenon of human dialogue. I will begin with an examination of the way the human fellowship principle leads to assumptions of typicality and sameness with regard to the other, and then I will show how the experience of strangeness upsets the taken-for-granted typicality and sameness and, thereby, exposes the otherness of the other. In addition, I will examine the nature of the threat that the revelation of otherness constitutes for the individual. I will conclude with an account of those everyday situations in which manifestations of strangeness and otherness may be most clearly observed.

THE FAMILIARITY AND TYPICALITY OF THE OTHER

Two distinct and separate individuals are assumed in every dialogue. What is "here" for one is "there" for the other: their standpoints differ, and each one defines the situation differently. "How does it happen," then, asks Schutz (1962, p. 117), "that mutual understanding and communication are possible at all?" The answer he proposed for this troublesome question is that one understands the other by explicating one's own lived experiences. The differences in individual perspectives are overcome by each interactant taking it for granted that (1) "If I change places with (the other) so that his here becomes mine, I would be at the same distance from things and see them in the same typicality as he actually does," and (2) "The differences in perspectives originating in my and his unique biographical situation are irrelevant for the purpose at hand" (Schutz 1970, p. 183).

Schutz points out that, in order to deal with and understand each other, individuals have to take it for granted that understanding actually occurs. For that purpose, they have to assume that self and other are the same, that "I can understand the acts and motives of Caesar as well as of the cave-man who left no other testimonies of his existence than the firestone hatchet . . ." (Schutz 1970, p. 180). In order to understand the other, I must reduce acts and motives to something or somebody who is typical, *the same as* what I can imagine or knew beforehand. In other words, "I am able to understand other people's acts only if I can imagine that I myself would perform analogous acts if I were in the same situa-

tion” (p. 181). Only situations, then, seem to differ, but individuals are assumed, in principle, to be the same—the same as myself, that is. Moreover, since standpoints are assumed to be interchangeable, the assumption itself suffices, and the actual interchange is unnecessary.

It appears, however, as Garfinkel (1967) and Cicourel (1970) have demonstrated, that individuals do not simply maintain these assumptions but are constantly engaged in a joint enterprise aimed at sustaining an ongoing sense of understanding: “Persons refuse to permit each other to understand what they are really talking about. . . . The anticipation that persons *will* understand, the occasionality of expressions, the specific vagueness of references . . . waiting for something later in order to see what was meant before are sanctioned properties of common discourse. . . . No matter how specific the terms of common understanding may be . . . they attain the status of an agreement for persons only in so far as the stipulated conditions carry along an unspoken but understood *et cetera* clause . . .” (Garfinkel 1972, pp. 6, 28). This means that participants in a conversation view each other as parties to an agreement to maintain common understanding. Thus, every utterance is expected to be meaningful in terms of some whole, even if the elucidation of that whole is suspended. Garfinkel calls this process “the documentary method of interpretation”: “The method consists of treating an actual appearance as the document of . . . a supposed underlying pattern. Not only is the underlying pattern derived from individual documentary evidences, but the individual documentary evidences are interpreted on the basis of ‘what is known’ about the underlying pattern” (Garfinkel 1967, p. 78).

The anticipation of a future, complete understanding enables persons to assume that the world is meaningful in terms of their schemes of interpretation. Moreover, in Garfinkel’s experiments, any attempt to breach these assumptions was met with astonishment, rejection, and rage. In a similar way, the understanding of the other is mediated by a grid of familiar typifications; the other as other remains unnoticed. The other is noticed merely as a document of some typification that is constantly upheld by the *et cetera* rule.

The existence of dialogue, therefore, is predicated almost solely on the supposition of sameness and typicality. This, however, voids dialogue of its interactive dimension, which becomes either redundant or ritualistic, overshadowed by the enclosed, self-contained world of common understanding.³ The separateness and distinctiveness of participants become illusory. Consequently, the question posed by Schutz, “How to bridge

³ For a critique of Schutz’s conception of the other, stressing the inactivity of the other in Schutz’s writing, see Perinbanayagam (1975).

between two subjective worlds?” is now reversed: “Is it possible to maintain a dialogue without dissolving it into taken-for-granted typifications?” The latter question thus points not to the difficulty of understanding the other but rather to the difficulty of beholding the other as other, that is, as someone who is a stranger and thus “not understood.” This problematic element of dialogue is the one I would like to explore further: the other as a person who is not understood but nonetheless real and present in the perceiver’s consciousness as an other; thus, dialogue turns into a dynamic venture. In contrast to the Schutzian view of interaction that asserts that there is no choice but to understand the other, the other side of dialogue emphasized here focuses on a sense of the other that is not entirely dependent on understanding; it may be called an “ability not to understand” the other. By one’s beholding the other as an other, he becomes not unexplained but inexplicable⁴ and is perceived simultaneously as being present *in corpore* in the immediate world of here and now and as belonging to a world of meaning to which the two idealizations of interchangeability and reciprocity of perspectives do not apply.

The otherness of the other person emerges through a process of defamiliarization, which I prefer to call “making the other strange.”⁵ This experience of the other as close and present yet also distant and strange is usually threatening and thus tends to be very short in duration—sometimes lasting only a fleeting moment. Then again, the need to understand, to interpret the other in terms of “my world,” resurfaces. At this stage, there can occur either regression to a denial of strangeness or a progression into a *new* quest for knowledge, while one deems previous conceptions of the other as irrelevant or unsatisfactory. Then, of course, the freshness of insight tends to be dulled by its own familiarity, and so on.

In view of the resistance of estrangement, as demonstrated in Garfinkel’s experiments, the question inevitably arises whether the experience of making the other strange is but a rare kind of experience that should not be considered constitutive of, let alone ubiquitous in, social interaction. Before attempting to provide a tentative answer to this question, it is necessary to clarify the characteristics of making the other strange, to provide an analytical description of the process, and to explain why it constitutes such a threat to persons engaged in interaction that it elicits the reported resistance from the individuals concerned.

⁴ “We tolerate the unexplained but not the inexplicable” (Goffman 1974, p. 30).

⁵ This phrasing is meant to avoid the negative connotation associated with estrangement in the sense of alienation. I borrow this phrasing from Erlich’s (1981) translation of Shklovsky’s Russian term *ostranenyie*.

ON MAKING THE OTHER STRANGE

The following example illuminates what I believe to be the prototype of making the other strange: the revelation of otherness in one's parent (or in one's child, at a much later stage). One could cite countless examples of such an experience. We can look at a very simple situation: a child for the first time sees his father in the father's workplace among other workers. This experience suddenly removes the certainty of that person's being exclusively "my father." The familiar world of home, in which father has total existence, is here juxtaposed with a foreign world that includes him, "naturally," as part of itself and thus renders him strange, other than what he was taken to be. The very "same" father is seen in an entirely new light as an other, thus putting a distance between him and the child. He is separated from his "fatherhood" and becomes a colleague of someone, a subordinate of someone else, or a manager of some people, whatever these terms may mean to the child beyond the very fact of his father's earnest involvement with men and women in his workplace.

A whole field of relations among people is revealed through this experience, though this revelation may be felt primarily as fear of abandonment, loss, and anger toward the father, who has breached the tacit child-father agreement. But the sudden strangeness that breeds fear and anger also breeds a recognition of the split between worlds, the awareness that he is (and therefore I am also) somebody else. For the child, this moment of recognition of his father's otherness is prototypical of similar moments with other people in the sense that the father (or the parent, in general) stands for the primary and most all-encompassing "home world," the world of home. The split between home and outside worlds or between father and other men (the father as another man) introduces the child to a new kind of distance, distance from the other. This distance may be turned into freedom and newfound perspective or into alienation, but both cases may be only different ways of coping with a similar experience—what has hitherto been taken for granted and explained has now been emancipated from the *et cetera* clause that gave it (the father) the reassuring presence of what is familiar and real within the confines of "our world" of understanding. The child's relation with his father now has to accommodate a new, inexplicable perception of the father as a strange man, an inhabitant of a strange world called work. (For many children, the father's or mother's work always remains a kind of other world on the margins of the home reality, and, for reasons that by now should be evident, they are not eager to revise that image.)

The above example only epitomizes the many occasions on which a parent is "caught" deviating from the familiar by the child. The deviation may be an utterance or gesture that is unexpected, a new hat, or the

behavior of a stranger toward the parent that exposes the parent as an other. In fact, such deviations correspond to what the Kabbalists call a progression from a child's "knowledge of the small" to his "knowledge of the big," that is, the father (a metaphor for God). In both, the father is apprehended as father, but in the knowledge of the big the knower achieves a distance from the all-engulfing conception of the father in the small child's mind. This distance reveals the world of the father and the complexity of relations with him. It is my contention that this knowledge emerges in moments of making strange in which otherness is apprehended.

What actually occurs in such moments is a momentary disengagement of presence from identity. This is the point at which the child loses ground: the harmony between the father's corporeal presence and the totality of meanings this presence both documents and is exhaustively explained by (his identity) is broken. The reality of "that man" and his taken-for-granted identity no longer (in that moment) coincide. Consequently, both that man and the father become inexplicable, and this breaks the hitherto obvious coincidence of the two. Such discontinuity is not unlike noticing (the previously unnoticed) actor behind his character. The character and the actor become disconnected. The dialogue itself (between child and father) is thus shifted from its common course of "thinking as usual" onto a troublesome ground where former conceptions cannot retain their usualness anymore.

Thus, the process of making strange exposes the presence that was veiled by a web of taken-for-granted meanings. This exposure of presence may well bring forth new understandings and recognition, but it might also involve threat and anxiety. In some situations in which strangeness is undoubtedly evident, the threat it induces may cause an outright denial of that strangeness. An example of such a situation can be found in the first encounter one has with a newborn baby. Usually, on such occasions, the family and relatives immediately label the baby as like one of them. In fact, they project their own identities onto the baby, so that its presence may be immediately classified in terms of taken-for-granted meanings. The baby is not permitted to be a stranger, to exist in a realm of experiences inexplicable to the adult world. Furthermore, not only is it not allowed to be understood as having a separate identity; it also is not allowed *not* to take us as the obviously familiar father, mother, and the rest. Of course, things are explained to the baby, but tacitly it is very quickly assumed that the baby feels it is one of us. The fact is that, in the encounter with a newborn, there are two comparisons that could come naturally to one's mind, namely, that the baby is like me or, conversely, that I am (or was) like the baby. The second comparison is the one usually dismissed, probably because it brings to mind one's own otherness as a born creature.

Making that baby (or, later, that child) strange would mean the removal of what has been projected onto it and the exposure of the threat that had been dismissed by that projection.

It is worth noting at this point that in the encounter with the baby we can hardly speak of a mutual acknowledgment of strangeness even if there is such acknowledgment on the part of the adult. This may also be the case in the previous example of the child and the father. Indeed, making strange can occur without overtly acknowledging it in the conversation, even if the two parties involved both sense its occurrence. A moment when *mutual* recognition of otherness does take place, then, would consist in a break in what has been considered a common definition of the situation. In many situations, this occurs when the private sphere is invaded and exposed (Schneider 1977) and at least one of the interactants is out of place. Persons then confront each other as momentary strangers, displaced but on familiar ground. It may also be the effect of deliberately or suddenly breaking a friendship, a long-standing sharing of views, or even just breaching some background expectation in an everyday situation, as Garfinkel demonstrated. It may occur whenever reflexivity (Mehan and Wood 1975) is not achieved, as when a person talks to someone but receives no response that can confirm a common definition of the situation. When silence falls in the course of an interaction, each participant realizes the distance within the “we” unit.

Another, perhaps less threatening example of mutual recognition of otherness may be found in a situation where acquaintances meet each other after a long separation and must reestablish a familiarity that cannot be taken for granted anymore, not only because of the separation but also because each of them has (physically or otherwise) changed and become other than his former self. In general, it may be noted, people are constantly engaged in comparison (Suls and Miller 1977), privacy and boundary maintenance (Altman, Vinsel, and Brown 1981), and the construction of their uniqueness (Snyder and Fromkin 1981). But confronting otherness directly may induce threat and embarrassment, as I have shown earlier, so that making the other strange is usually not shared with other participants in the open but is rather covertly observed by many of the participants, as in the examples listed above.

SOME IMPLICATIONS OF MAKING THE OTHER STRANGE

In general, making strange implies a sudden awareness that an interaction has heretofore been a display of acts by different selves trying to adjust themselves to one another (in the sense of interaction rituals or fronts [Goffman 1967]). This awareness, which may be obvious in any first encounter with a stranger, is more threatening when the already

known and familiar person is made strange, because, with a stranger, trying to adjust to each other is the stuff out of which the dialogue is made, sometimes even explicitly so. In a routine conversation, however, a topic is defined within the framework of a taken-for-granted "we." When making strange occurs, this "we" is rendered irrelevant, and the topic of conversation can no longer serve as the focus of attention and thereby as the connecting tissue of the ongoing exchange. The interaction, then, is shifted back into the face-to-face frame in which the topic no longer bridges the gap; the distance between conversants becomes apparent, and self and other must reestablish their separate presences. The immediate anxiety in such a situation is felt as embarrassment stemming from unfamiliarity, when familiarity should have been expected (Gross and Stone 1964). It is the embarrassment of being in a face-to-face conversation with nothing to say.

This duality of familiarity and strangeness throws into relief the duality of being both inside (as part of "we") and outside (at a distance from the other) the interaction. As Simmel (1971, p. 17) put it, "The 'within' and the 'without' between individual and society define together the fully homogeneous position of man as a social animal." In terms taken from Arlow (1966), this can be seen as a split between two parts of the self: the "observing self," which is experienced as external to what is going on, and the "participating self," which is experienced as being *in* the situation or even *being* the situation. Thus placed, the observer becomes a stranger having "the bitter experience of the limits of the 'thinking as usual' " (Schutz 1944, p. 507), to whom any activity seems unfamiliar, strange, and questionable. Thus, not only the other but everything about the interaction is made strange. The observing self, split from the participating self, is, in the words of Wallace Stevens, "an ignorant man again," ignorant of his own here-and-now reality.

Metaphorically, the anxiety this making strange may induce is comparable to the experience of watching the night sky and suddenly realizing that the stars are not embroidered on the familiar surface of the dome sheltering our world but are set indeed in a real space—the space that so frightened Pascal. From here, it is but a short step to the realization that the observer himself is situated on an insignificant blot of a globe hovering arbitrarily in space. And, just as in an "interpersonal Copernican discovery," one's sense of the centrality of the world is lost and with it the taken-for-granted meaning of all that this centrality entailed.⁶ Thus,

⁶ See Eliade (1961) for a discussion of "our world" as always being situated at the center. The consequences of the loss of centrality of our world are discussed by Arendt (1958) and were movingly spelled out by Nietzsche in his parable of the madman (1971, p. 167). For a social psychological model of "contractual alterism," stressing

making strange becomes a source of deep fear because of the inability to understand and the loneliness resulting from the dissolution of the sense of we and our world.

Nevertheless, if no pathological split occurs (Arlow 1966), the observing self may endow the participating self with objectivity,⁷ which may result in better apprehension of the other's or the self's subjectivity by means of empathy (Kohut 1978). The other becomes a more distant and distinct person, and the ability not to understand him propels one into new inquiry. Thus, "taking the role of the other" (Mead 1934) would mean taking the role of an other—a whole other person. This entails what Natanson (1974) calls recognition—consciousness capable of freedom, a search for the person and not the typified role. It implies that making the other strange allows making a distinction between subjectivities or, rather, between selves: a recognition not only that I am the center, meaning he is different from me, but also that he is the center, making me the different other. Thus, through making strange and experiencing otherness, the two sides of dialogue can be realized. When the participants are not concerned with mutual adjustment to some image or future understanding of the dialogue, the here-and-now frame becomes predominant. This makes possible face-to-face relations between the two separate entities of "you" and "I" trying to achieve mutual discovery and attempting to establish a relation (Buber 1970). The activity of establishing a relation and mutual understanding becomes an active endeavor. The interacting person is no longer immersed in the dialogue (Shotter 1980) but consciously and actively creates the "I," the "you," and the "we." A single, paramount reality within which the dialogue occurs no longer exists, and instead the true dialogue as interaction among multiple realities appears. The sense of wonder recaptured indicates a crucial transition from a standpoint stressing the undifferentiated oneness of relations to that recognizing their duality.⁸ The birth of dialogue, then, is contingent on the emergence of otherness.

MAKING THE OTHER STRANGE IN EVERYDAY LIFE

To recapitulate, the idea of making the other strange implies the disenchantment of the here-and-now presence from the taken-for-granted iden-

the centrality of the other in human relations, see Rotenberg (1983). A philosophical analysis of the "plurality of worlds" can be found in Strasser (1969).

⁷ It is important to emphasize that objectification of the participating self is not a purely cognitive act but involves an experience of objectivity, of being objectified as well as performing an act of objectification.

⁸ In developmental terms, this transition relates to the emergence of the child from the symbiotic bond after the gradual onset of the process of separation/individuation (Mahler et al. 1975).

tity of a person (or of any object, for that matter).⁹ The person's presence (and, in turn, identity) emerges from the background in which it was embedded and that imbued it with meaning and is thus set apart, as other, from immediate and familiar schemes of interpretation.

The conditions conducive to making the other strange can be roughly divided into three types: (a) a deliberate cognitive maneuver by which one distances oneself from some taken-for-granted reality and focuses attention on the other person, on oneself, or on any phenomenon;¹⁰ (b) an inner psychological event (a dream, a fantasy, an insight, etc.) that changes abruptly the relation toward the other, the self, or the world; and (c) an external change, either volitional or imposed, that brings about a displacement of the perceived person from his surroundings and perhaps a juxtaposition of the same person with different surroundings.

Since the concern of the present section is with everyday occurrences of making strange, the focus of the following analysis will be on changes in situation that may result in strangeness and the revelation of otherness.

Displacement of the Familiar

Let us start with the most extensively studied phenomenon of encountering strangeness in everyday life, namely, leaving one's own home world and moving to a foreign place.¹¹ My interest here lies not in the properties of the stranger's role but in the effect of such a move on making strange what, at home, had been familiar for the stranger. As Mentel (1973, p. 47) puts it: "Most significant [cultural] 'shocks' potential in strangehood are those of self-discovery; this self-discovery challenges previous conceptions of self and, by implication, the social world which sponsored them." The familiar world of the self is here juxtaposed with a foreign world, which cannot be automatically related to in terms of my or our world. Under

⁹ In Gestalt terms, it could be contended that the more central the feature of the Gestalt made strange, the greater the resulting halo effect of strangeness (Hastrot et al. 1970).

¹⁰ The motivation underlying making strange as an act of volition can be referred to two sources—the will to know, inherent in the human species since the first bite of the apple from the tree of knowledge (where it is clearly associated with the revelation of otherness), and the will to set oneself at a distance in order to achieve independence, individuation, and consequently a sense of self (see, e.g., Thorner [1981] on the desire for knowledge and Winnicott [1965] and Mahler and McDevitt [1982] on maturational processes).

¹¹ There is a voluminous body of studies on strangers (tourists, anthropologists, explorers, expatriates, refugees, and the like) who move from one society to another. See, e.g., Nash (1963), Cohen (1979), and Rotberg (1970).

such circumstances, the sameness of people in the world is inevitably put into question. Language, etiquette, expressions of intentions, even navigating one's way in public spaces, which were habitually transparent, become immediately opaque and problematic. Hence, their otherness becomes more salient, that is, the rendering of both the hosts and guest as other.¹²

But even a less complete change of locale can generate similar responses, as, for instance, when moving into a new apartment; the physical environment is abruptly modified, home becomes just a place, and living in a place emerges out of its hitherto unnoticed everydayness. The displacement brought about by such change affects also the relations among the people who moved together to the new place, since their mutual spatial relations and arrangements need to be redefined, and thus are put into question. When familiarity is removed from the things surrounding a person, it is thereby removed from the person as well.

This applies also to the familiarity of social situations. For example, running into an acquaintance from the army, dressed in a suit in a city office, has a similar effect. The changing social situation renders that person a stranger, other than the familiar army acquaintance of past days.

Another form of displacing the familiar is described by Lyman and Scott (1975), who, following Simmel (1965), highlight adventures as a peculiarly modern way of departing from the mundane, uneventful world into the strange, thereby making one's whole life strange. This, they suggest, is a way for modern people to cope with alienation. The adventure in a love affair, for example, can be seen as an instance of making (oneself) strange. Through a liaison with an other, the lover steps out of his habitual self and regains a sense of presence and vitality that has been lost.

¹² In modern cultures, the occasions on which one can confront otherness are numerous. The television viewer or the passerby in any modern city is bombarded unceasingly by others—people of different origins, ages, styles, etc.—rushing in front of his eyes, going along their own ways. One cannot simply dismiss others, as did the Greeks and the Romans, as barbarians, people without culture, period. The relativism of modern culture has given others a place in the world and contracted the individual into the limited space of his own individuality, granting him at most some personal space (measured feverishly by social psychologists). Nevertheless, the response to this development has been not only the acceptance of others but also remoteness from them, the constant “filtering out” of others from consciousness as a shield against flooding the self. The magic circle of the private sphere has established itself as the front line of existence and faith (Berger and Luckman 1969). On the other hand, people are culturally encouraged to step out of their own limited worlds and tour other worlds. In this way, making strange does become a modern phenomenon.

Inplacement of the Strange

The effect of displacement can also be stimulated while staying in one's place and being either visited or intruded upon by a stranger. There are two aspects of this occurrence. First, the intruder may induce a shift in the routine activities of the group and thus unmoor group members from their "group-as-usual" condition. If the intruder becomes a member of the group (e.g., a new baby in a family), then, again, a dissonance is created between the intruder's belonging to the group and the intruder's otherness. The group needs both to define the intruder and to redefine itself in order to contain the intrusion, so that it is pushed to a point where its usual definition can no longer be taken for granted. Second, by taking the role of a foreign guest who is shown around and by looking at the familiar life world from his vantage point, one can recapture the original sense of wonder of the very familiar, and the presences in the common-sense world are reidentified in foreign terms. This identifying with a person unfamiliar with local conditions, and thereby adopting an external perspective on the familiar, is actually quite common. It can occur even between acquaintances, when a taken-for-granted perception of a person is contrasted with an alternative perception regarding the very same behavior or appearance.

Reidentification

The disassociation of identity and presence and the concomitant juxtaposition with a new background are likely to occur whenever naming and identity labeling are involved. A change in title, a missing title, or a new title attached to a person can generate the effects described above. Witnessing a degradation ceremony¹³ involving a familiar person, discovery of some hitherto concealed stigma, sudden elevation in rank, unexpected nakedness, or, conversely, wearing a mask or a costume—all these may result in a switch in the perception of the familiar person. Also, a juxtaposition by means of language can make the other strange. This is attained by the use of allegory, metaphor, analogy, and the like. For instance, the metaphor "a star" attached to movie idols is dead because of its automatic use. To refresh the vitality of the metaphor (really to "see a star"), one can make it strange by narrating a story about a tribe, some of whose members are worshiped as "suns" and "sunlets." Here, a relativization is produced by tearing a presence (the star phenomenon) from its

¹³ "The denounced person must be ritually separated from a place in the legitimate order, i.e., he must be defined as standing at a place opposed to it. He must be placed 'outside,' he must be made 'strange' " (Garfinkel 1956, p. 424).

habitual context and placing it in a different context, where it undergoes reidentification.

In everyday life, this may occur through substitution—I meet someone who resembles my friend (in looks, in behavior), and, while observing this person, my friend is vicariously recognized as an other. This can be referred to as making the other strange by way of reflection. In reflection, a person is imaginatively projected onto a “screen,” created by someone else’s bearing resemblance to that person. The very same person (my friend) appears able to be altogether different, so that his identity is no longer taken for granted. Many devices, both ancient and modern, such as mirrors, cameras, audio- and videotapes, as well as many artistic creations function as such objectifiers of reality, plucking the familiar out of its background and setting it at a distance, thus allowing a look at it from the outside. Such objectification is like looking at a mirror and seeing somebody else’s features or looking at somebody else and seeing one’s own reflection. It goes without saying that in the course of time some reflections lose their vividness and become themselves routine and taken for granted.

One category of reflection is particularly noteworthy; one might call it multireflection. It can be exemplified by a young person’s entering a home for the elderly and becoming aware of the reality of the label “an old person” because of the multiplication of particular instances of this label. The presence and reality of this label/category can be, in fact, so overwhelming that the familiar person (a grandmother of the young person) suddenly appears as other, a typified instance of a general category.

This brings us to a whole new set of examples relating to making the other strange via the dimensions of time and age. Indeed, memories, postfactum accounts, documents, photos, and so on all make it possible to relate to a person or to oneself from a temporal distance. In all those instances, past is displaced into the present, temporalized by abolishing the time gap between it and the narrow confines of the present moment. By the same token, the present is pushed back into the past. This occurs in dialogues one conducts with one’s earlier selves and in dialogues with contemporaries, historical figures, or prehistoric beings. The most stunning effect of temporal making strange, though, is evident in moments in which a person becomes aware of the passage of time, when having grown old is suddenly recognized and keenly felt. This experience is expressed by the phrase “age came upon him suddenly” or, similarly, when one mutters “I was so young once” while looking at an old photo or noticing that one’s own child “has grown so much.” The time frame, rendering the same person as other, is essential in separating oneself from one age identity and passing to another. In other words, the experience of otherness is crucial for realizing the passage of time.

Dialogues with Other by Definition

The final example in this section will be of human dialogue that specializes, so to speak, in making strange and otherness. Mostly, the addressees of efforts to establish such dialogues are strangers but the kind of strangers that makes strange the very basic beliefs and knowledge of the people who engage in such dialogues. Explorers and, later, anthropologists have engaged in this kind of activity.¹⁴ In our times, these dialogues have gone much further: on the one hand, there are serious attempts to speak with members of other species that inhabit the earth—dolphins, apes, and even potted plants; on the other hand, the notion that we are not alone has stimulated excursions into space and sophisticated attempts to communicate with beings from space. To any of “them,” we have to make ourselves strange and present ourselves in our species identity. A fine, if somewhat odd, example is the satellite sent into space that contained a collection of samples documenting what the senders considered the most representative features of life on this planet. Pythagoras’s theorem, Beethoven’s Fifth, a recording of whale song, a drawing of a female and a male (with parted hair!), and the like.

In all these examples, the otherness and the remoteness of the “aliens” and, consequently, of ourselves are self-evident. Here, though, the other side of dialogue is constituted by the inevitable assumption that some unity lies behind the disparate voices making up the “earth’s chorus”—that the dolphins, the plants, the human species all partake in the universal sign system that makes dialogue with the aliens possible. Both sides must be present if the dialogue is to take place.

Contemplative Making Strange

As mentioned earlier, making strange can be the consequence of a deliberate cognitive effort. The following is but one example of such instances. In the Middle Eastern archaeology section of a museum, a visitor stops in front of a glass case enclosing a five-inch-tall figurine of a female. The figurine is made of round, roughly modeled pieces of ochre-colored baked clay of different sizes joined together in a crude fashion. It is one of several hundred artifacts—tools, weapons, bones, and so on—sembled

¹⁴ In contemporary interpretive anthropology, the process of defamiliarization is recommended as the basic strategy for a self-conscious cultural critique. In order to revise the normal, settled ways of thinking and conceptualization, the anthropologist juxtaposes the alien culture with his own. This juxtaposition, according to Marcus and Fischer (1986, p. 137), yields defamiliarization through the “disruption of common sense, doing the unexpected, placing familiar subjects in unfamiliar, or even shocking, contexts.”

in a large room illuminated by fluorescent light and filled with sounds of the shuffling feet and subdued voices of visitors. Every display is accompanied by a description detailing the location of the finding, excavation site, dating, use, and other miscellaneous, mostly anthropological data. In other words, the room and everything in it are, as a matter of course, a part of that “finite province of meaning” making up the world of a museum.

The figurine is a part of that world. Not only its physical location, its habitat, but also the accompanying factual information (“about eight-thousand-year-old figurine of a goddess worshipped by an ancient Canaanite tribe, which dwelled at . . .”) combine to produce a sense of the figurine as possessing a firm identity that reflects a harmony between its corporeal presence and the totality of meanings this presence both documents and is exhaustively explained by. No special effort is required in that brief moment (between beholding a display of stone arrowheads and the next display of remnants of charred animal bones) to understand it. Our visitor is simply unable not to understand it; he just takes it for granted.

But something makes our visitor tarry. The more intense and focused his gazing and his mental effort become, the more they seem to bounce off the unyielding muteness of the object. The visitor realizes that the bits and pieces of anthropological lore within which it has been embedded are utterly irrelevant to the task of “explaining” the figurine. It becomes obvious to him that the figurine is really and truly a remnant of another world so remote in time as to be utterly foreign and incomprehensible. The physical presence of the figurine, its immediate palpability, becomes disengaged from its hitherto meaningful habitat—its reality and its taken-for-granted identity no longer coincide. The ancient figurine is made truly strange, its otherness looming large, very near yet very far away. It has become inexplicable. This does not reduce the sense of beauty or the awe (let alone the curiosity) the figurine evokes. On the contrary, the revelation of the figurine’s otherness infuses it with new life.

Other modes of contemplative making strange exist in religion, in art, and in intellectual observation. It is interesting that in each realm a different aspect of strangeness and of its threats is emphasized and brought into greater relief. Briefly, in religious experience, the aspects emphasized are mystery and awe. In Berger’s (1967) words, “The projected meanings of human activity congeal into a gigantic and mysterious ‘other world,’ hovering over the world of men as an alien reality” (p. 96). Or, to quote Otto (1923), “That which is mysterious is . . . the ‘wholly other,’ that which is beyond the sphere of the usual, the intelligible and the familiar” (p. 26). In art, it was Shklovsky (1965), the influential Russian formalist critic, who claimed that “the technique of art is to make

objects unfamiliar . . . make the familiar seem strange” (p. 12). What he called the “defamiliarization” and “deautomatization” that art produces are aimed at roughening and impeding perception to remove its everyday routinization. Art, therefore, by its own specific modality of making strange, attempts to contain the reality of the world in order to overcome the fact that, to quote T. S. Eliot, “Human kind cannot bear very much reality.”

Unlike art and religion, phenomenology’s ways of dealing with strangeness and otherness are primarily those of knowing and understanding, which make up the endeavor of intellectual study and research. When the phenomenological inquiry is pushed to extremes, it proceeds in the direction of seeing persons from the outside, in their plain gestures, either of body or speech, that is, as mere creatures, about whom as little knowledge as possible is presupposed. It means that the phenomenologist is trying to step outside everything that is specifically human in order to understand what being human is. The threat, as shown in the foregoing analysis, lies precisely at this point, in the split between the subject and object, between the observer and the observed. The phenomenologist watching human creatures from the outside is nonetheless one of them and cannot escape the realization that the strange creature observed is none other than the observer. In this way, the act of observation must itself be realized as yet another facet of being a human creature. Thus, the phenomenologist (and phenomenology itself) is made strange.

CONCLUSION

Making strange as a disengagement of presence from identity compels us to acknowledge the strangeness and otherness of the familiar and taken for granted. As I have shown in various examples in the previous section, we deliberately seek the experience of otherness or are circumstantially confronted by others denuded of familiar attributes. The disparity between presence and identity makes the other appear as a separate being that cannot be automatically understood. This activates the sense of distance between self and other and reflects back to the self the partial and fictitious nature of the attributes through which the identity of the other has been construed. The necessity of redefining both the identity of the other and the relation toward him is the outcome of this process. The appearance of strangeness in what we have considered to be familiar to us not only urges us to reconstruct the meanings we give to others and to ourselves but also reminds us that strangeness (with all its implications) is a constant, if tacit, element in every conversation. The acknowledgment of that element during conversation may cause a “ripple” or a “tear” in the surface of the conversation itself. As a perspective on human conver-

sation in general, strangeness highlights the other side of dialogue as crucial to any consideration of dialogue as a phenomenon to be explored.

In the concept of dialogue suggested here, the other is at once familiar and remote. Self and other inhabit the same world, but, all the same, the other is out there living a life that is different, with its own center. Being self-contained and, at the same time, a part of a common universe, is the very essence of dialogue. In Geertz's (1973, p. 13) words, referring to the task of the anthropologist approaching a foreign culture: "We are not, or at least I am not, seeking either to become natives . . . or to mimic them. . . . We are seeking, in the widened sense of the term in which it encompasses very much more than talk, to converse with them, a matter a great deal more difficult, and not only with strangers, than is commonly recognized."

Conversing with the other, as I have tried to show, necessitates both the construction of sameness and familiarity and the recognition of otherness and strangeness. The true understanding of dialogue may be reached only when disparate selves are acknowledged within the larger common framework of meaning.

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