THE STRANGER AND THE CITY

JULIE MEYER

ABSTRACT

In- and outsiders conceive of the modern city as a conglomerate of strangers, the individuals being anonymous and traditions and conventions lacking. Social relations are governed by the two divergent aims of avoiding identity and establishing cells of community. Unlike that of the rooted community, the orientation of the city is to time and not to place. Consequently, the traditional social order disintegrates, and new groups, which are not classes, emerge. This urban development will spread from the city to the country and change the ways of life and patterns of values.

This paper attempts to apply the sociological concept of the stranger to that of the city. The city under consideration is the modern metropolis as we know it in the Western world.

The concept of the stranger[1] will be used here in its broadest sense. In its original narrow meaning it is based on locality. The native is one who is rooted in a given place. The stranger is a migrant, and even if he settles down, he remains a migrant by background. The native's family can be identified, and so can his individual past experience.

Nothing is known about the stranger's ancestry and his individual past, and the unknown as such is strange. He may tell the story of his own people and life, but this self-identification is different from that gained by mutually shared experience. Deviation from the values established in a given place does not necessarily change the native into a stranger. The man with the bad background, the criminal, is known to the neighbors, his ways are familiar to them. In about 1848 two neighboring towns in Germany had an interesting correspondence. The one told the other that they had caught a thief and politely asked for permission to hang him on the gallows owned by the other town. Whereupon this town's fathers refused the request because, as they wrote, "we have built these gallows for our own beloved native sons only."

On the other hand, acceptance of established values does not change the stranger into a native. Even if he shares more and more experiences with the others, the unknown part of his life differentiates him from that of the people who are rooted. He may find himself an equal at one time and a partial stranger at another, but there still lurks the possibility of his being again the total stranger, either by the attitude of others toward him or by his own attitude toward them or by both together, as the situation arises.

In its broader meaning the concept of the stranger connotes a relation of remoteness to any field in which people can be rooted, such as the community of the family, a given culture, or a faith. It can mean total or relative remoteness; it can be permanent or changing in its degree. The stranger can be an immigrant or an emigrant, one who has come or one who has left, but not necessarily in the physical meaning of the word. A man can become a stranger in his own family, a stranger in his own country. The stranger can be a stranger because he is not accepted or because he does not accept. The total stranger of the latter type is the one who for his way of life takes his own guidance only and refuses either to be guided by others or to guide them. The American language has the word "maverick" for this kind of man, the strong animal that has left the herd. This indicates that the stranger is not always considered an inferior or one who is discriminated against.[2]

The concept of the stranger must not be confused with that of the outsider. The

[1] For a recent discussion of the problem see an article by Dr. Alfred Schuetz in the *American Journal of Sociology*, XLIX, 499–507.

[2] There is, however, a tendency to ascribe individual characteristics of strangers to the whole group from which they come and to do so by singling

stranger is an outsider, but not every outsider is a stranger. Outsiders and insiders differ from each other with regard to the specific traits that each has developed apart from those that all men have in common. Whether or not the outsider is a stranger depends on the respective emphasis put on difference and commonness in his relationship to the insiders. Mutual awareness of the difference and commonness is generally present in this relationship, but the determining circumstance is which of the two is considered basic and which accidental. For instance, in the case of the outsider who is called in to investigate a problem or to arbitrate a dispute, the emphasis is on his being basically the same person as the others. Their views and judgment are marred because they are too close to the scene and too involved in it. But for this accident, they would see and decide things as clearly as any third person. Therefore, a third person has to be selected whose remoteness from the situation guarantees his objectivity. He can function as the foremost among equals and understand their problem, and his interpretation of the problem can be understood and accepted by them.

In the case of the stranger, however, the emphasis is on his being a person unlike those he approaches. In this relationship differences in views and judgment, in appearance and mores, are considered to be basic, impairing mutual understanding. The area of likeness is considered negligible and accidental. It is true that the selection of an outsider to function as a third person does not rest solely on his being an outsider but also on his personal prestige as known to those who select him. But absence of prestige is not what characterizes an outsider as a stranger. The stranger also can enjoy prestige and be called upon for that—the classical case of the healer—and be all the more a stranger.

The problem of the stranger was discovered by modern sociology[3] and has been discussed mainly in sociological terms. The problem of the modern city or, in our case, of the metropolis has found many interpretations; and historic, legal, biological, anthropological, and social-work concepts make it necessary to emphasize that sociologically the city can be explained only in terms of social action. (The term "social action" will be used here in the sense of Max Weber; i.e., social action, that is, any human behavior—acting, tolerating, not acting—is an action which, according to its meaning, is related to the actions of others or, according to the concept of the actor, is related to the action of others. In its course it is oriented toward the behavior of others.) The concept of the stranger seems essential for understanding the orientation and determination of such action and the interaction between city and country. This, of course, does not imply that the complex problem can be unraveled solely on the basis of this concept of the stranger. The concept is only an isolated agent among the many which constitute the phenomenon of the city.

The city is conceived by insiders and outsiders as a conglomerate of strangers, of people who do not know one another, who have no identity but must seek to acquire it in order to emerge from anonymity. Walls between and in houses not only separate the neighbors' homes but also the mental communications between the people, who are inhabitants and not neighbors.

There exist, however, in every city—be it London, Paris, Rome, New York, or San Francisco—districts or streets which are neighborhoods in the true meaning of the word, where people know one another, are identified by a definite local status, and present in themselves little societies with marked social stratification and a recognizable public opinion. The arrival of the washing machine in apartment houses sometimes has changed tenants from strangers into

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out the one with the highest personal qualities in the case of groups which are considered superior and the one with the lowest in the case of those considered inferior.

[3] Jurisprudence has dealt from time immemorial with some cases of the stranger, notably with the foreigner and the heretic, but not with the problem as such.

neighbors. Women gather around the washing machine as they once did around the village well, exchange gossip, develop leadership and followings; and not infrequently a hierarchy of power, influence, and prestige emerges from the laundering womenfolk, transforming an apartment house into an organized society of women. In all this, people are conscious of belonging together because they live in the same place and orient their social action toward this consciousness. Such districts, streets, and houses are scattered cells of community, whose existence, however, does not make the city. The city cannot be understood as the aggregate of such communities, as a big town of many towns or a big village of many villages. This assumption, however, still plays a vital role in political campaigns, under election systems established before the great cities came into existence. In New York City, for instance, a candidate's residence and duration of residence in his district, the question of whether he sends his children to a public school there or to a private school outside, are issues raised by friend or foe.

If people are conscious of the city in which they live and orient their social actions toward this consciousness—as they cannot fail to do—the concept of the conglomerate of strangers generates actions in two divergent directions: first, actions based on the desire to preserve anonymity, not to become identifiable, to remain a stranger among strangers; and, second, actions based on the desire to overcome strangeness, to be recognized by others and to recognize them, to be rooted.

The first kind of action is very obvious in the case of people who want to disappear. This is the attraction which the city exercises for the professional criminal. Organized crime can hide out only in the wilderness of a sparsely populated countryside or in the wilderness of a densely populated city. But only in the city can an underworld take shape that is larger in scope than organized crime, as it includes both the criminals and those engaged in illegal and antisocial practices. It is more than an organized group. It is a well-stratified society made invisible to the outsider by the anonymity in which the conglomerate of strangers veils the individual.

Less conspicuous but more significant is the same course of action taken by those who value being strangers among strangers for the sake of freedom. As, under feudalism, the city freed from the bonds of servitude the man who reached it, so the modern city offers freedom from the bondage of the neighbors' watchfulness, the conventions of class, and the demands of public opinion, which shackle the individual everywhere else.

The second kind of social action, based on the desire to overcome strangeness, is obvious in the significance which an association frequently has for its members in the city. It expresses itself in the related phenomenon that city associations more often than others may adopt characteristic features of community, at least for some periods of their existence. The word "association" is used here in its ordinary meaning, such as one finds in the *Classified Telephone Directory*. It is then a social relationship, oriented toward a specific interest, be it material or ideological. This association is motivated by rational considerations and is organized on the basis of rules that bind the members. In contrast to it, a community in its common meaning is a social relationship, which is oriented toward the feeling of its members of belonging together and is held together by this feeling. In spite of the emotional character of any community, rational devices may be used in order to evoke this feeling and to keep its flame burning. Community and stranger exclude each other by their very meaning. The stranger who is accepted by a community ceases to be a stranger. On the other hand, the stranger who is accepted by an association may still remain a stranger to those with whom he shares the same interest, be it in a world union or in stamp-collecting. On the meeting grounds of the association he may be an esteemed member whose individual contribution is valued, whose voice is heard, whose advice is sought. Outside its walls,

however, all doors that are open to the other members may be closed to him and his family.

On the other hand, membership in an association may be the channel which leads the stranger into the community and transforms him from one who lives in our midst to one who belongs to us. In the city, among the conglomerate of strangers, acceptance in an association very often means for the individual that he emerges from the anonymous conglomerate, that he is part of something, identified and identifiable by it. This social relationship by association can acquire this meaning for him because all the others with whom he joins are in the same situation. In such a case, association around a common interest tends to shift orientation from the objective interest to the subjective social relationship, to become the pivot for all actions of its members. The presence in the city of many competing interests, however, acts as a centrifugal force and, as a rule, prevents associations of this kind from developing into established communities. They are temporary substitutes for community.

In other situations, that of the small and middle town, for instance, the same shift of orientation can occur. Here, however, the orientation toward the social relationship as such is not motivated by the desire to be identified but by the fact that the individual is identified, that he has a given status in the community, and that convention and public opinion in this community tie status to membership in given associations.

The difference between city and noncity associations is less marked in this country, a nation of immigrants, than in other countries. Perhaps some of the unique features in the history of the American labor movement can be partially explained by the described relationship between the stranger and the association. Its character is pragmatic and is combined with a strong feeling of brotherhood. The American trade-union gave identification to the worker who came as a stranger to this country and, with it, a definite status in society. The trade-union became the community to which he belonged. In other countries the labor movement needed an ideology in order to unify its members and to be a representative of the workers as individuals and not only that of their economic interests. Furthermore, the fact that the American trade-union served as a means of identification for its members worked in the direction of preserving status by excluding all those whose lower status could decrease the prestige of the union. This may be one of the factors which preserved the identification of the American labor movement with the skilled workers and maintained the aristocracy of labor for a much longer period of time than was the case with trade-unions in other countries.

If people orient their actions toward the concept of the conglomerate of strangers in a positive and in a negative direction, does it mean that in the course of such actions they remain necessarily and actually strangers to one another? Or can an area of likeness develop, different from any other area in which people are alike? Can city people recognize one another as city people, as people who thereby "belong," and, in turn, be recognized as city people by outsiders? True, the social relationship which constitutes the city does not involve any consciousness or awareness of common roots, be it in a given place or in any area which can be clearly circumscribed.

In characterizing the stranger, Georg Simmel points out that, historically and essentially, the stranger is not "the owner of landed property" or in the figurative meaning of this term that the stranger's "substance of life" is not "fixed" either to an actual or to an ideal place in the society which surrounds him.[4] This absence of boundaries, however, evidently offers a unique opportunity of action; the conglomerate, by its very concept, presents to each and all unlimited possibilities of orientation. All the resulting diversified actions and relationships contain one common basic element: they are dominated by a particular orientation toward *time.* The rooted com-

[4] Georg Simmel, *Soziologie* (Leipzig, 1908), pp. 686–87.

munity directs action primarily toward *place*. Time plays a part only in so far as it is "inclosed" in place as the periods in which its established values and ways have been formed. Time is connected to place by the past, and this connection serves as yardstick for the present and the future.

The city, on the other hand, directs action primarily toward time. The one thing that people have in common is the experience of the present and the expectation of future experiences which, like the present ones, cannot be "inclosed" in the place from which the stranger came.[5] They are nevertheless his and thus constantly enlarge and transform his very substance of life. Thus place, as the spot where this constant transformation happens to him, becomes subordinated to time.

City people consequently conceive of themselves as those who are "ahead of things," the bearers of things to come, more advanced than the outsiders and knowing more than they. The underlying feeling is one of marching with time, and, in its intensity and power to determine the way of life, it equals the feeling of belonging to and being rooted in a place. That is, the city substitutes time for place as the basis for social relationship. He who marches with his time is no longer a migrant in a strange country but one who knows his road and his mates. Even those city dwellers who never go outside the narrow circle of home and working place and their immediate surroundings, who neither participate in nor are aware of movements and changes in the wider world, consider themselves superior to people in the country, more advanced and more versed in the ways of life. An expression of this attitude is the use of the same word for the country dweller and the backward or ignorant, or despicable, man, such as the English "boor," the German *Bauer*, the French *villain*, the Hebrew *am ha-arez* and the Chinese synonyms of—literally translated—"melon" and "sweet potato."

It is the absence of orientation toward place and, rather, the orientation toward time which makes the city the center of new movements. Orientation toward place means an established, change-resistant pattern of life. Orientation toward time means not only constant change but action in the direction of change. Nearly all national and international movements have originated in the city; and, even if the city was not their initiator, they gained momentum when they reached the city and spread from there all over the country or all over the world. Modern nationalism, probably the most significant movement in our time, is definitely an offspring of the city, and, when it invades a people, this people's cities become the center of the new nationalism. Even peasant movements need the streets and squares of the city to gather their followers and to prove and show their strength.

Orientation toward place or toward time probably affects the emergence or nonemergence of public opinion. Why is it that we speak of the public opinion in a country (public opinion in England sounds quite reasonable), in a geographical area, or a county; public opinion in the South, in Nassau County, in a town; but never public opinion in the city, in New York, London, or Paris? Public opinion means an opinion expressed on an issue and so expressed that it is considered representative of the opinion of people in a given locality. Certainly, it is not representative because it is the opinion of a majority of the people in this locality but because it is that opinion to which the majority of the people will conform. If that is correct, then public opinion presupposes orientation toward place, the existence of a rooted community; and where these are absent, public opinion cannot form. To illustrate the case: When the United Nations considered establishing itself in Westchester County, public opinion in Westchester was against it. When the United Nations finally moved to New York, this move was neither favored nor disapproved by public

[5] This holds true for the old city families just as much as for the others. They belong to the conglomerate as small individual units with an individual past, which, as such, has not the power to establish generally recognized values and attitudes.

opinion in the city. Public opinion simply did not crystallize.

An issue which directly concerned every New Yorker is the increase of the 5-cent subway fare. Around this issue parties formed in favor or against it; one won, the other was defeated. In the afore-mentioned case of Westchester County an articulate opposition to public opinion existed. It could, however, not be conceived as an opposition or minority party; it was a group of dissidents. This points again to the strong possibility that public opinion is dependent on the existence of a community in a given locality. In Belgium the issue of the return of the king has occasioned a public opinion in every part of the country, every county, town, and village—but not so in Brussels. The metropolis of Belgium did not develop a public opinion, but only parties for and against the return. As far as political parties were the core of this bipartisan division, their members outside Brussels became, as such, supporters of, or dissidents from, public opinion.

Although the city has no public opinion, it frequently formulates the issues around which public opinion crystallizes in other places. This, of course, is related to the fact that the city is the center of movement. Organized opinions in the city—partisan opinions—frequently influence public opinion outside, mainly through the propaganda devices at the city's disposal. Summarizing, one may state: The city, in which, by its very nature, no public opinion can develop, functions nevertheless as the disk-thrower to public opinion.

It is exactly the orientation toward time, the absence of roots in place and its established pattern, which mainly causes the resentment of the countryside against the city. The man from the city who approaches a town, a village, or a farm community is likely to be considered not only a stranger but a dangerous stranger. Consciously or unconsciously, the natives and neighbors are aware that the pulse of the city beats in tempo with time, that the city as such welcomes change. Any city man, therefore, can be an agent of change and a menace to the established values and ways of life of the countryside. Moreover, if a man is not rooted, can one trust that what he holds true today he will hold true tomorrow? Consequently, the stranger from the city is suspected of belonging to the movement which is considered the worst threat to the established values and with the group which is most distrusted by the natives. During the last war, workers sent from the big cities to industrial war centers were quite frequently considered by the natives as foreigners and as saboteurs. Today the identification is with communism, which case needs no further illustration. The resentment has been strengthened by the memory of revolutionary periods when the masses from the city descended upon the countryside and of periods of misery when the same masses swamped the countryside as beggars.

On the other hand, the country and especially its towns imitate city manners and styles of appearance which demonstraet urbanity, the modern against the backward, the world against the backwoods. Consciously or unconsciously, the city's orientation toward time is the source of favorable response and acceptance as it is the source of resentment and rejection. Brought to its most general formulation, the stranger can be an object both of discrimination and of admiration to the same people and for the same reason, according to the aim of a specific social action. In our example, in the first case, the objective is the preservation of the established values and ways of life; in the second, the preservation of their prestige (not to "appear" backward or backwoodsy). As its masses symbolize the resented city, the members of its society, known to the country from stories and pictures, symbolize the favored city.

The mention of the masses and of society leads us to the last point. Does the concept of the stranger and the orientation resulting from it permit a social order and, if so, which one? The city under consideration exists in a society which has been established on a class order. The old city, still oriented toward being rooted in place, added to this order the bourgeois class; the

younger city, with lesser roots and in transition from orientation toward place to that toward time, added the proletarian class; and the modern city, oriented toward time, added the new middle classes, of which more has to be said. Classes exist in the city. Their individual members are conscious of their status in society because they belong to a given class, and, because of this, their status is recognized by others.

Do, however, consciousness and recognition still have the same meaning for determining their social actions? Does status have the same significance in the city as it has outside? Take English society, which identifies the upper class with the aristocracy. The presence of the country squire in a village is of great significance for all its social relationships and has a great impact on the village as such. The presence of an aristocracy in London is of little significance and has no impact on the city whatsoever.

An examination of social classes as they exist in the city reveals that they determine social relationships only so far as their members individually insist that they do so and, further, that class has lost the power to make its members conform to its pattern. Moreover, new strata of society are emerging in the city.

Somewhere on the top is what is called "society." Although it originated probably as a "set" of the upper class, it is neither identical with the upper class nor affiliated with it. Nor is it, by any definition, a class by itself. The high status of its members is not derived from their belonging to "society" but rather the status of "society" is derived from the high economic, family, or professional standing of each of its members. All "society" as a closely knit group does is to publicize the status of its members. This already indicates an orientation toward the conglomerate of strangers. The individual is not born into "society" and can leave it at will. Individual status or assumed status is a prerequisite for being accepted, but joining is a matter of voluntary decision. No traditional conventions determine the directions of social action. "Society" adjusts its direction to the tendencies of the time and crystallizes them. Thus it was highly conservative in the Victorian period and inclined toward the extravagant after the first World War. Perhaps one can say that in this respect "society" tries to function as a substitute for public opinion. This is quite obvious in the role it assumes—or pretends to have assumed—of being the arbiter of urbanity, which one may loosely define as the cultural expression of the city. In this context "society" has taken over from the upper classes the function of sponsoring art and science, once sponsored by the aristocracy and later by the bourgeoisie. The diversity of the background of its members and their individual status make "society" the main channel for carrying information and requests to other groups and individuals of the city, to its own members, and to outsiders. This creates a clientele around "society." Thus "society" holds positions both on the top and in the center of the city.

The new middle classes have already been mentioned. The nonmanual employees, clerical workers of all kinds, semiprofessionals, and professionals, except those in high managerial positions, have become discernible as a group in the social stratification of the city. Even the term "middle classes" indicates that they are not a class. Nor can they be determined as a class by any yardstick of class definition, be it economic, social, or the consciousness of belonging together. No cohesion whatever exists among the groups themselves—salesgirls, engineers, and nurses do not compare their status with one another but with that of classes above and below.

Orientation toward class concepts brought the middle classes into existence. Its members have in common that they were employees who considered themselves different from labor and yet were rejected by the old middle class of small businessmen and artisans because they were employees. Inevitably, they became a unit because, in the framework of class concepts, classes claimed and rejected them. This course of action is significant because it proves that, in the city at least, the old class order no longer has the

power to cast the stranger out into the unknown or the ability to assimilate him in the form of a new class. Like the existence of "society," it reveals a tendency toward a new social stratification whose strata will not be classes. What we shall call them I do not know.

The matter becomes even more complicated by the phenomenon of the masses. Once this concept meant the lowest in the class structure, the proletarian class. This class is extinguished in the city, where it originated. Its remnants—common laborers, who shift from industry to industry—experience long intervals of unemployment and live in slums and are not a class because class-consciousness is absent among them.

What, then, are the masses? They are conceived to be at the bottom of society as its large component, the people as such. But "people as such," unidentified and at the same time a discernible group, do not exist. The existing concept, however, makes the appeal to the nonexisting masses possible and can call them to life, although not to a permanent existence. The masses which surge up in response to an appeal are always the same in appearance and action and different in their individual composition. We do not know what the masses really are, and, although we do know the incentive of the appeal, we do not know what makes individuals a mass. Thinking is the ability of the individual, and of the individual only. The masses do not think, and the individual does not exist in the masses.

If a man starts to think, he separates himself from the masses. This is beautifully illustrated by the German writer, Muehsam's, story of the street-lamp cleaner. During a revolution the masses parade through the city, singing, shouting, and throwing bricks. The street-lamp cleaner is among them. Suddenly he catches sight of the broken glass of a street lamp. Out he steps and starts to think. He ponders on how a man can do both at once; make a revolution and clean lamps ("wie man revolutzt und dabei doch Lampen putzt").

It is the latent force of the nonexisting masses in the city which expresses strangeness in its most radical meaning. When the masses come to life, they change the individual who joins them into a nonindividual, a stranger to himself. To the outsider, the individual disappears in the masses.

In conclusion one may ask if in the city the significance of the class structure has decreased and if new status groups emerge like "society" and the middle classes, does that mean the disintegration of our society? One cannot predict in which directions the new groups will develop, which others will emerge, and what will be their common denominator. It seems, however, that the old and new status groups can exist side by side in the same society until the new ones have linked in a new structure.

Another question is: Is the decrease of class significance a city phenomenon or is it a general development, unfolding in the city only at a faster pace? Tentatively I believe it is a city phenomenon, but one that, with increasing urbanization, will spread all over society, reaching last those communities most remote from the city and most resistant to change. The existence of class in our days depends on the insistence of the people on being a class and on nothing else.

A third question is: If, with the structural change in society, the communities in this society, those rooted in place and those rooted in other things, change, what happens to the established values and the ways of life they guard? For society this may clear the road toward those values we call the values common to all mankind. Any established pattern is a deviation from these values. Even when the pattern preserves them in substance, they are not common to all because the insistence on expressing them by a different pattern makes them unrecognizable to outsiders. The pulverization of human society in rooted communities is one of the greatest threats to our values. The other one is the giving-away of individuality as exemplified by the masses.

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