INTERPERSONAL RELATIONS IN THE MASS SOCIETY *

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A major concern of sociologists has always been the changes that have been wrought in the quality and style of social relationships as a result of the Western experience of modernization, and the joint impact of the processes of industrialization and urbanization in particular. Perhaps the most common way of approaching these changes has been in terms of ideal-typically conceived polar dichotomies. Tönnies' classical discussion of the emergence of gesellschaftliche-type relationships out of the Gemeinschaft is well known, as is Cooley's corresponding typology of secondary and primary relationships. Other theorists have worked essentially within the same kind of framework, however, on a more macro-sociological level, interpreting 'the great transformation' in terms of a change from one kind of society with a certain cluster of attributes to another with a different cluster of related features, whether these are conceptualized as role-types, predominant value-orientations, characteristic organizational structures, etc., or a combination of these.

If one turns to typologies like those of Tönnies and Cooley, one is faced with the methodological difficulties which arise when attempting to put them to empirical use, as well as the fact that they have limited utility when it comes to dealing with an order which is sufficiently different to require new insights and concepts. A major argument of this paper is that modern society is experiencing transformations of such magnitude that many of the established sociological dichotomies, such as the distinction between primary and secondary relationships, tend to be less and less applicable. While it is imperative to get beyond the facile generalizations that human association in modern society is 'fleeting', 'superficial', 'exploitative', and the like, the inferential and elusive quality of the data that has to be dealt with confronts one with significant problems. A few remarks concerning the scope of this paper are in order here. I shall be concerning myself with the United States as the technologically and scientifically most advanced modern society. In doing so I shall not be attempting to specify the causes of contemporary social patterns, but stick more closely to the descriptive level. I am, nevertheless, assuming (a) that many features of modern societies are structurally determined, that the process of modernization has an in-

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ternal dynamic of its own, and that modernized societies could therefore be expected to manifest certain structural similarities;² (b) that, at the same time, each society tends to maintain a historical continuity of its own, and hence develops characteristic and unique social patterns, or combines structural elements in novel ways;³ and (c) that societies can borrow elements of both material and non-material culture from each other and can therefore become more alike apart from any other influences. The particular social features of a people at a given point in time is always the result of an interplay between these categories of factors. Finally, it should be noted that while I assume the trend toward what I shall call 'sociable'-type relationships to be an important one, its relative predominance in different social groups and situations will have to be established through further empirical observation of a more systematic and controlled kind.

I shall begin by sketching the growing similarity of interpersonal relationships in different spheres, then analyse the dominant mode of association which seems to be emerging from this, and conclude with a few observations on the possible psychological impact that it might have on society.

1 THE 'GLEICHSTELLUNG' OF SOCIAL RELATIONSHIPS

Within sociology family and friendship relations have traditionally been viewed as intimate, involving the 'total' person, and as ones in which the individual is more or less unconditionally accepted for what he is, whereas so-called secondary associations have been looked upon as impersonal, segmental and transitory. Now these two types of association appear to be merging across the board. Some have looked upon this trend as an ascendance of secondary type relations at the cost of primary ones, which are merely being replaced.⁴ It has, however, been established that people who have a large number of business and other more impersonal contacts, or are members of various voluntary associations, also maintain a wider range of personal and friendship relations.⁵ My contention is that these sets of relationships have at the

² One obvious similarity which particularly affects the trends which I shall be discussing below is, for example, the increased rate of social and physical mobility which accompanies economic development.

³ Anybody who wants to draw hasty conclusions concerning the impact of advanced industrialism on the American 'character' should first have a look at Alexis de Tocqueville's Democracy in America (first published in 1830) and James Bryce's The American Commonwealth (1888), since he might find that some of the American characteristics which he ascribes to the process of modernization, go back to the early phases of American history.


same time become more like each other. Even if one takes into account the apparent ability of people to compartmentalize multiple roles, it seems reasonable to assume that just as much as individuals tend to develop a characteristic interactional style, there would also be a broad 'strain toward consistency' between different interpersonal situations and a tendency to carry over certain behavioral habits from one to another. On the one hand, as Simmel so perceptively noted already more than half a century ago, most relationships in industrial societies, including primary ones, tend to take on a more intellectual, rational, and calculative matter-of-fact character. In his own words: 

'... money economy and the dominance of the intellect are intrinsically connected. They share a matter-of-fact attitude in dealing with men and things; and, in this attitude, a formal justice is often coupled with an inconsiderate hardness. The intellectually sophisticated person is indifferent to all genuine individuality because relationships and reactions result from it which cannot be exhausted with logical operations. All intimate emotional relations between persons are founded in their individuality, whereas in rational relations man is reckoned with like a number, like an element which is in itself indifferent.'

On the other hand, impersonal relationships have come to manifest characteristics that were previously viewed as belonging, first and foremost, to the sphere of more intimate association. In the institutional sphere, Huizinga points out, secondary play-forms have been introduced into activities whose whole raison d'être lies in the field of material interest, while formerly 'free' and informal play activities such as sport have been raised 'to ... a pitch of technical and scientific thoroughness.' Thus a sales manager might arrange a game of golf for an important prospective customer with a well-known professional (at the company's expense, of course). At the same time the professional man may be occupied in his 'leisure time' with excess work related to his job, or be engaged in demanding 'do-it-yourself' tasks, not out of a desire for variety or because of any creative urge, but out of virtual economic necessity due to the rising cost of hired labor. On the level of interpersonal relations, personal qualities which were previously looked upon as irrelevant to work efficiency, such as congeniality, likeability, personableness and charm, are increasingly sought explicitly in job applicants. The trend toward 'being informal' (to the extent of calling supervisors by their first names) is symbolized, amongst others, by the decline of formal clothing and the invasion of the office by sports clothes. Personell Departments, in the words of one com-

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mentator, attempt '... to make company announcements resound with team spirit and other echoes of adolescent fellowship...'. Having some 'fun', even on the job, has assumed a new obligatory aspect. Whereas gratification of forbidden impulses traditionally aroused guilt, it is rather the failure to have fun that currently lowers self-esteem. As Lerner notes, the Protestant ethic with its emphasis on effort, ambition, achievement, struggle and success, seems to have made way for the new creed 'playing it cool', and 'having a good time', and an apparent commitment to the lifeways of non-adversity. Thus, relations with work associates have become less and less sharply distinguishable from those outside the work context. On the one hand, implicit standards of performance are being accepted in intimate relations, while, on the other, unique attributes of individuals are increasingly recognised in so-called secondary associations.

Foreign visitors are often struck by the fact that most Americans have little difficulty in 'doing business' with friends: that is, that they seem to be able within the same relationship, or even single situation, to switch from an attitude of unconditional friendship to calculative behavior, and in extreme cases from generosity to meanness (and vice-versa, one might add, provided that the situation is appropriately redefined) with little apparent awareness of conflict. The operating principle seems to be that it is legitimate to look after one's own interests, even within intimate relationships, on the assumption that the other person is doing the same. This contrasts with the covert and polite bargaining process in many other cultures in which the same kind of situation is handled in terms of a 'barter' arrangement based on an elaborate system of traditionally defined mutual obligations. Within this framework each person looks after the other's interests — or at least is careful to make it appear that way — with the confidence that the other party will reciprocate by looking after his. The effortless fusion in the mass society of behavioral orientations which elsewhere are generally viewed as anti-

11 Daniel Lerner: 'Comfort and Fun: Morality in a Nice Society', The American Scholar, 27, 1958, p. 155. It should be noted that this is happening at a time when technical performance standards are continually being raised and actual competition is getting more intense in many occupational fields. There are, of course, latterday heirs to the Protestant ethic, such as the 'jet-professors' in top American universities, as Joseph Bensman pointed out in a lecture on 'Emerging Life Styles in the United States' at Berkeley in July 1966. In spite of their considerable affluence of late, they combine a degree of asceticism and hard work which perhaps goes back to a time when teaching was still a religious profession.
12 Perceptive observers like Geoffry Gorer have noted, for example, the highly competitive nature of American 'dating' practices. Even within a wider sphere being successful is equated with being 'well liked' or loved, and vice-versa. Cf. The American People, New York, 1948, Chapter IV.
thetical, is often a source of perplexity for those who are not initiated in its ways, and who may misconstrue ostensible indications of friendship and trust on the part of others as representing a greater measure of personal commitment than is actually the case.

The *gleichstellung* of social relationships might just be a part of the broader reasoning that whatever is effective and proper in one sphere must also be in another, which Roshwald has referred to as a "confusion of spheres". Elements and methods which other might view as belonging to different autonomous spheres are allowed to interpenetrate and mingle with great freedom. Thus, if aggressive advertising works in business, it is quite legitimate to utilize it in politics. Or '... a snapshot of praying children would be viewed as promoting both religion and the legitimate interests of Kodak, not to mention the joy of the customers.' Roshwald continues: 'What to the European seems chaotic, to the American looks dynamic; what the European regards as proper and civilized, the American views as queer and stagnant.'

More specifically, the attempt to create a more relaxed and intimate atmosphere within previously 'formal' relationships and the deliberate 'quest for community' might be a reaction to an awareness of the growing threat of impersonalization. One is indeed struck by the fact that a self-conscious society like the United States has a certain built-in dialectic of its own. The high level of awareness of real or imagined social trends, also among individual citizens, as a result of the popularization and wide diffusion of social-scientific knowledge (and sometimes, unfortunately, journalistically inspired myths as well) through the mass media, often seems to foster conscious efforts to compensate for, or mitigate the effects of trends which are deemed undesirable. Thus, it is not uncommon to see serious advertisements which promise 'significant personal encounters' and the opportunity to discover yourself and others in a small group setting — at a fee, of course!

I might note that the *gleichstellung* which we have been discussing, could be viewed as the interpersonal equivalent of the cultural homogeneity found on certain levels of the mass society. These two aspects are, of course, not unrelated. Functionally speaking, this characteristic of modern societies greatly facilitates the process of entering into, or adopting new roles in a fast-moving and ever-changing social world, due to similarities in the 'form' of social relationships. What then are the essential features of this common form?

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14 Ibid., pp. 247, 249.

15 Consider the following example from a student newspaper: 'Interested in unique, gut-level, weekend-group interaction experience (non-chemical, non-sexual, non-church) that can change your feelings about self, about others, and about life? Write ...' *Daily Californian*, Wednesday, January 11, 1967.
In contemporary society interpersonal relationships find their unity more in their form, than in the substance on which they draw. Simmel referred to such form-al relations as sociability, however, conceiving of it as a limited category encompassing specifically the pure 'play-form of sociation' in which people engage for its own sake, with no other aim than the success of the sociable moment itself. As such it is expressed *par excellence* in the shadow-play of coquetry, or in pleasurable conversation which has no ulterior or objective purpose beyond itself. In order to be meaningful, however, it ultimately has to be connected with the 'depth and wholeness of reality', just as theatre and art at its best does address itself to reality. Recently, Riesman and Watson have worked with a very similar conception of sociability in their study of 'persons at play', in this instance largely in the 'party' context.

It is regrettable that they could not extend their observation to a wider range of interaction situations, since one is struck by the fact that many of the characteristics of sociable interaction which both they and Simmel mention, are precisely those which can increasingly be observed in a wide variety of contexts.

In order to be able to determine to what extent the sociable mode has become common interactional currency, and to move in the direction of developing an operational definition which would have utility in empirical research, it is essential to get a clearer picture of what its defining characteristics are. I would list the following:

a) First, sociability is marked by its generally positive affective quality, its amiableness, and the concomitant attempt to avoid any form of interpersonal conflict which might threaten the emotional balance of the relationship. In Bales' terms it focuses on manifesting 'solidarity', 'tension release', and 'agreement', or positive socio-emotional reactions. In everyday language we would say that it attempts to show 'friendliness', even if this degenerates into the obviously forced sweetness of the female drug-store assistant who insists on addressing all customers of her own sex as 'Honey', or the mechanical 'And how are you today?' of the supermarket checker.

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18 Riesman, Watson and R. J. Potter are undoubtedly aware of this, since they cite evidence of the wider diffusion of sociability in our day: 'Sociability, Permissiveness and Equality', *Psychiatry*, 23, 1960, p. 326.

which is exactly on the same level as the 'Dollar-nineteen, thirty-nine cents...' etc. that immediately follows it. The canon of the avoidance of possible conflict, again, means that appropriate 'tact' has to be exercised, and that any disagreement has to be conveyed mitigated by humor or some other conversational convention which would not deflate the other party's status.

b Closely related is the implicit requirement that interaction should not become too 'serious' in either content or psychological mood, since this would threaten to impose a strain on the situation. Thus, intense topical discussion might bring to the fore conflicts of ideas or values. Likewise, the failure to exercise appropriate control over personal eccentricities, emotions, or interests might unduly raise the level of tension. Few things are as devastating to the sociable mood as an agonizing self-revelation or psychological unburdening.20

c In spite of the importance of control, the recognition of individual qualities is an important feature of sociability. Simmel notes that qualities such as amiability, refinement, and cordiality, if properly exercised, contribute significantly to the unfolding of sociable interaction.21 Watson, again, points to the fact that personal interests are the chief conversational resource in this kind of association.22 It might be added that ego is not only expected to react positively toward the content of alter's communication, but that he is also expected to be finely attuned to the nuances of alter's psychological mood.

d This last-mentioned quality also explains the essentially unstructured, impromptu, and fluid nature of sociable interaction. Since individual qualities and responses are often unpredictable, participants in the situation are more or less expected 'to play it by ear'. In fact, a quest for new experience seems to be an important part of sociable interaction.23

d Finally, sociable interaction is democratic by its very nature.24 The acceptance of participants as equals — or 'playing' equal — if not the calling of each other by first names, is mandatory in order for it to develop. Hence any person who dominates the situation too consistently, conversationally or otherwise, or who, in Bales' terms

20 A good test for the 'neutrality' and non-serious nature of sociability is whether it can be terminated at any point, with the necessary rituals of leave-taking, of course, without leaving a sense that something has been broken off in the middle or is still incomplete. At any given moment, sociable interaction is more or less 'complete' in itself, and if broken off only leaves a lingering pleasant sentiment.
21 'Sociability', op. cit., p. 45.
22 'A Formal Analysis...', op. cit., p. 270.
23 Ibid., p. 278.
24 Riesman, Potter, and Watson, op. cit., p. 330ff. Watson points out that sociability used to be an exclusive 'game' of the aristocracy and that it has only gained wider currency as a result of the democratization of leisure. Cf. op. cit., p. 272.
'shows antagonism' and 'deflates the status' of another, impedes sociability.

One may contrast sociable behavior with several other types, such as habitual or ritual behavior,\textsuperscript{25} behavior which is directed at immediate conflict-resolution, and more strictly work- or task-oriented behavior in the instrumental sense, to mention some which readily come to mind. It is significant, nonetheless, that it has become quite common for such non-sociable types of behavior, and task-oriented behavior in particular, to be sandwiched in between two little sociability sessions.

A few of the characteristics of sociability as well as their implications for broader behavioral patterns, call for further comment. First, as has been pointed out, sociability is not designed to handle interpersonal conflict, but rather functions to emphasise common experience, common identity, and the willingness to offer mutual support, even within the constant search for novelty. Any jarring element immediately constitutes a threat to sociable interaction, whether it arises from an unwarranted introjection by some individual of a subjective matter which falls outside the others' sphere of interest, or the tendency for sociable intercourse to be drawn to a too serious objective goal. This might be connected to the broader tendency which Simmel has noted, for individuals in modern societies to leave the regulation of strain in human relationships to law enforcement and other specialized agencies.\textsuperscript{26} Recent decades have witnessed a phenomenal increase in the number of counselling, 'human relations', and other specialized occupations whose sole purpose and task could be put under the heading of tension regulation. At the same time, people seem more ready to evade the necessity of confronting any conflict situation themselves by referring it to the appropriate and 'responsible' professional, counsellor, or agency. Thus, it is typically easier for sociable man to call the police to try and bring down the noise level at the neighbours' late night party, even though he might know such neighbours quite well. Also on a wider level the sociable society seems to have succeeded in institutionalizing many of its more disruptive strains out of sight, whether it be death, deviance or disability.

Owing to the immigrant origin of its population, the common diversities of everyday life have often held an explosive potential in the United States. This has been a sufficient reason to ignore differences of tradition, background and ethnic identity in order to find a basis for forging an unified nation. This has, without doubt, also influenced the common style of interpersonal intercourse, which would make it necessary for somebody asking a question which might point up important differences of opinion or values, to preface it with the apology: 'I do'nt mean to

\textsuperscript{25} The compulsive salesman's sociability mentioned under 'a' would, of course, be more aptly classified here.

\textsuperscript{26} The Sociology of Georg Simmel, op. cit., p. 100.
put you on the spot... This hypersensitivity with regard to the possible uncovering of fundamental value conflicts often results in Americans being at a loss to know how to handle visitors, particularly from Europe, who are accustomed to vociferously hold forth controversial opinions in private conversation.

In contemporary society traditional diversity, however, has been compounded, and in many respects replaced by a different order of diversity, viz. the heterogeneity induced by increasing physical and social mobility, lags caused by the unevenness of change, and increasing specialization at every level. The effects of the latter process is witnessed in the diversification of organizations, the multiplication of both formal and informal associations in different institutional spheres, and the extent of occupational specialization in recent years. The danger of fragmentation due to the centrifugal forces inherent in these processes is further aggravated by the fact that many of the changes take place in a relatively autonomous and uncoordinated fashion. Because of increased population concentration in limited areas and high rates of mobility, this confusing diversity is now brought into close proximity and contact. While the central areas of cities were generally seen as epitomizing this situation, it is increasingly true of suburban areas where residence in a particular area is chiefly and virtually exclusively determined by certain broad income limits. Apparently there is a considerable amount of neighboring in such areas, but at the same time social contacts do not have much to build on in many cases, other than common problems with lawnmowers, children who have to be educated, T.V. talk, and possible a passing interest in current events.

The absence of a common language of any significance is underlined by developments in commerce and industry where both work organization and communication is becoming more 'mechanized' through the use of

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27 Being from Southern Africa, a simple for or against verdict regarding the policy of apartheid is often required of me very soon after acquaintance (generally preaced by the above remark). I have sometimes watched — not without amusement — the growing consternation, even approaching proportions of terror, on the faces of polite interrogators if I start with a few careful qualifications and do not come up quickly enough with a damning and unequivocal denunciation of White supremacist policies, as the suspicion creeps upon them that they might possibly be confronting a racist.

28 Cf. William H. Whyte Jr.: The Organization Man, Garden City, 1956, p. 313. Dobriner contends that most new suburbs go through an early phase when the population is relatively homogeneous, but become progressively heterogeneous afterwards. He claims to have counted the following people living on one street in Levittown, Long Island: 'A Catholic second-generation Italian housepainter, a Protestant 'old American' college professor, a Jewish second-generation automobile mechanic..., a Protestant 'old American' salesman, a Catholic third-generation German blue-collar worker, a Catholic 'old American' research physicist, and a retired elderly couple who had just moved in.' Class in Suburbia, Englewood Cliffs, 1963, p. 15.
computers and automated processes. Information and instructions are transmitted by dictaphone or computer rather than through the human chain, while machine coordination of production processes has obviated the necessity of much of the earlier human planning and supervision. It is envisaged that computers might soon take over most of the intermediate-level executive decision-making functions, thus widening the 'gap' between top management and the lower echelons of organization personnel. At the same time the higher cost of labour, as well as the introduction of automation has put greater responsibility on fewer workers who often have to work in relative isolation from their fellow-workers. In service industries workers are required to 'process' more customers because of the rising cost of their labor per time unit. All this leaves little opportunity for the development of shared interests, a common work culture, or even a substantial shared conversational base. Paul Goodman comments somewhat poignantly on the effects of the social fragmentation on many fronts:

'This leaves us only friends, friends with whom one has no vocation in common, no sexual or parental relation, no political or community enterprise, no deep respect for one another's skill or authority. It is not much to go on.'

On the one hand, therefore, the sociable mode of interaction is both a symptom and a cause of the desire apparent in mass society to avoid interpersonal tension, as well as of the increasing inability to deal with it at all on an individual level. On the other hand it is clear that an uniform subsoil of sociable resources is largely lacking, while it is difficult to create such common ground 'out of nothing' owing to the very nature of the sociable process itself, which only deals with the fundamentals of human existence at a distance and in somewhat diletantish fashion. Stein notes the extent to which the vocabulary through which people can converse impersonally has grown since the 'twenties, as has its diffusion to all layers of the population. He claims that we are all so accustomed to 'interacting segmentally' that we find it hard to do anything else. This has given rise to an advanced stage of urban sophistication which is characterised by a blindness to socio-cultural differences, to historical processes and individual idiosyncracies which are not sanctioned, and a tendency to ignore, if not deny, the existence

29 There are few good studies on the social effects of automation in the plant. One by W. A. Faunce, however, indicates that there was significantly less social interaction on the job because of the greater distance between work stations, fewer jobs demanding team-work, and the close attention which automated jobs require. Cf. 'Automation in the Automobile Industry', American Sociological Review, 23, 1958, pp. 401—407.


31 Riesman, Potter, and Watson, op. cit., p. 327.
of different moral worlds.\textsuperscript{32} One is led to conclude that while the mass society has evolved modes of social interaction which can serve as common currency throughout its diverse whole, these forms constitute an inadequate framework for the fulfilment of the whole range of man's social and psychological needs, since they only supply opportunities for individual support and tension release on the short run. Hence, for example, the inclination of some to retreat from society into narrower familial patterns of interaction in search of social and personal security.\textsuperscript{33} The emergence of distinctly 'unsociable' and cohesive divergent sub-cultures, whether these be of deviants, occupational cliques, adolescents, or ideologically oriented groups, can be interpreted in the same way. There is little question that the behavioral and psychic insecurity created, amongst others, by the increasing predominance of sociable forms of interaction, makes members of modern society more vulnerable to socially and normatively 'closed' and relatively self-contained social worlds.

It is instructive to note what effect the growing acceptance of sociable patterns of interaction have on those who do not 'fit' for some reason or another. Seeing that everybody is supposed to enjoy sociability, and is equally responsible for its success,\textsuperscript{34} it is taken amiss if somebody does not do 'his part' in company, has to be prodded along in conversation, or leaves it too much to others to avert the building up of unnecessary tension. Worst still, the eccentric is severely punished through exclusion or other forms of social sanction, since there is little opportunity of diverting or channelling his attention and energies in sociable intercourse.\textsuperscript{35} It is also noticeable how ill at ease people can be in the company of anybody who, because of a different cultural or class background, has not been socialized properly for sociability. In the case of foreigners, a conversation in less sophisticated circles might easily degenerate into an anthropological-like quiz session on political and social arrangements (right down to eating habits) in the person's home country, because of the lack of any other suitable con-

\textsuperscript{32} Cf. Maurice Stein: \textit{The Eclipse of Community}, Princeton, 1960, pp. 278—279. In speaking of 'interacting segmentally' he doesn't seem to be referring here to secondary roles, but more to interaction which only relates to a limited sector of reality as the individual experiences it.

\textsuperscript{33} Watson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 273.

\textsuperscript{34} Riesman, Potter, and Watson, \textit{op. cit.}, p. 330ff.

\textsuperscript{35} The intolerance of many Americans toward socially incompetent individuals should be understood in the light of the implicit belief that one's personality, like most other things, is not 'given' but is formed and hence can be changed. Just as obesity is viewed as being due to intemperance and lack of self-discipline rather than a persons physical constitution, and failure in business due to laxness or ineptitude rather than misfortune, social inadequacy is looked upon as a manifestation of lack of interest in 'getting along' (which is essential to 'getting ahead') or perhaps even of a fundamental inconsiderateness toward other people.
versational material and the frequent inability of such strangers to sustain small talk.36

3 THE MARKS OF NON-INVOlVEMENT:

I conclude with a few remarks regarding the possible psychological impact of life in the sociable society, a topic which has already received some attention in recent literature on alienation. In taking about the social adjustment of the mobile 'organization men', Whyte remarks:

'They have to be professional. On the one hand, they cannot sink roots too deep. They will be moving on some day, and if they become too involved they risk an emotional shock they do not wish to sustain. On the other hand, however, they cannot forever wait for the eventual home, for they do not know when, if ever, they will find it. They must, in short, make a home of the home away from home, and to accomplish this feat they must act in the present.'37

In modern society deep emotional involvement in personal attachments becomes too costly for most. However, an attempt is made to make up in breadth for what is lost in depth in social relations; to compensate for the loss of intimacy in 'primary' relationships by maintaining freer and more cordial 'secondary' relationships; to put a premium on the number and variety of social contacts rather than the quality of the interpersonal sentiments which develop in the course of such contact. At parties one seems to be expected to meet as many 'interesting' new people as possible, regardless of what such a meeting might constitute. A British sociologist reports that during interviews which he conducted with a sample of American housewives, several of them were perplexed at his attempt to draw a distinction between friends and acquaintances. As a result of numerous out-of-home activities, they said, they have so many friends. One woman maintained that all thirty members of her church circle were her close friends.38

Sociable man does not only shun involvement because of the desire to avoid the pain of rending close bonds when the time has come to move on once more, but also finds it increasingly difficult to commit himself at all due to a fundamental lack of self-confidence, all appearances to the contrary! The 'other-directed' person comes to view the self-image which is projected to him by the sociable society with some suspicion because of the nagging feeling that it is not true to real life.39 Con-

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36 Unlike the case in many other cultures, silence is generally not accepted as a part of conversation in the sociable society, since it is immediately taken as a sign of the incipient breakdown of the sociable moment itself.
39 The eagerness with which many seem to identify with the collective image of their group as it is presented in the mass media or revealed in the popularized
sequently, as Zahler notes, '... involvement with another person is sometimes felt to carry a threat to one's inner psychological integrity. Since many people are no longer wholly certain that they constitute selves, thorough, spontaneous involvement with others is felt to entail unbearable risk.' 40 Much of modern man's loneliness must be attributed to this inability to move outward.

It is true that sociability allows freer expression of many personal qualities, and that its success largely depends on the unique social skills of the participants in interaction. Yet, the extent of intimate expression and revelation is circumscribed within very definite limits. Just as sociability gives the individual few clues regarding many of the stark problems of life, as he undoubtedly experiences them, it does not offer him the opportunity of airing some of the most deeply felt emotions and tensions. This might explain the oft-noted willingness of Americans to unburden themselves to strangers in chance encounters while travelling, or under like circumstances in which the knowledge they reveal about themselves is not likely to jeopardize their position and relationships outside the passing encounter. 41

One would expect, in terms of the principle of the natural dialectic of 'the self-conscious society' which was stated earlier, that an awareness of the unsatisfactory nature of many relationships would lead to attempts at compensating for it. Among the younger generation there is indeed much talk of 'middle-class hypocrisy' and the artificiality of much human association in our time, coupled with a search for 'genuine experience' and 'real encounters'. Riesman mentions the 'sincerity cult' which is becoming more prevalent among young adults and particularly young intellectuals, which is manifested, amongst others, by the tendency to debunk oneself, the 'absent' appearance, and by indirectly, asking for help. 42 It appears, however, that this, just like the making and breaking of friendships and the sharing of intimacies, also takes place in a rather facile and emotionally detached fashion. Perhaps modern man finds it increasingly difficult to take himself completely seriously. The long-term consequences of these trends for mental health and the integration of society have yet to be established and understood. Yet it seems that we have to do here with the evolution of shared modes of interaction in modern society which are just as tenuous and insufficient in terms of the total needs of the human person as the symbols of mass culture which he shares with his fellow man.

40 Zahler, op. cit., pp. 228—229.
42 Ibid., pp. 334—336.