

POETICS OF THE STRANGER

Dilemmas of the self and the stranger as poetic reflections
pointing to an anthropological perspective

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to the cat everybody is a stranger –
therefore there are no strangers.

anonymous

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The primary aim of this paper is to develop a concept of the stranger in relation to those dilemmas of the self which communicate themselves in the language of poetics.

This framework leads us to such experiences as »being strangers to ourselves« or what might also be described as »finding the stranger in ourselves«.

In a sense these experiences are also significantly associated with the concept of authenticity as we have come to know it from the works of such authors as D.H. Lawrence and Joseph Conrad.

All this points to the fact that in the present context the concept of the stranger occupies a key position which comes to light in relation to such themes as the dilemmas of the self, the nature of authenticity and the inherently poetical form in which they often come to expression.

The paper has been structured as follows:

- I Reflections on the concept of poetics and the concept of the stranger.
- II Implications of historically different world views and conceptual systems.
- III Analysis of the self and the stranger in relation to the constitutional framework of the human psyche.
- IV The concept of authenticity seen in relation to the self and the stranger.
- V Poetics of the self and the stranger in the culture of postmodernism.
- VI A study of the poetics of the stranger – some practical implications.

I The concept of poetics and the concept of the stranger

The word poetics is being used here in a broad and general sense that primarily distinguishes between the rational, analytical, digital mode of

categorising and defining as distinct from the expressive, the metaphoric, the emotional, the imaginary, the indefinite and the analogic mode of describing (see Granofsky, 1978).

At the same time the poetic is seen as a part of our human existence and our mode of being. It should perhaps be conceived of as a spectrum where it may come to expression in a weaker or stronger sense. This will also apply to our discussion of the stranger where the sense of poetics will in some cases refer to its more distant and general influence and in other cases it will be represented in its more direct and stronger sense.

Our immediate culture reaction to the word stranger is often that this is somebody who is not »us« and that this somebody is distant from me. But at some level of consciousness I cannot evade the inevitable realisation that the stranger is also a part of me, in much the same sense in which the problem of the self and other has been the subject of deep reflection in various disciplines such as philosophy, theology and literature.

We have a well known example in the controversy between Sartre and Merleau-Ponty: »For Sartre the other appeared basically as a threat, a rival reflecting perhaps Sartre's idealist position. Merleau-Ponty on the other hand was drawn by the poetic inspiration of Valery which embraced the other in a crossing of regards« (Cawasjee, 1990). Merleau-Ponty's vision of the self and the other is also very evident in the oft quoted paradigm of inter-subjectivity.

Though it is true that the other does not have to be perceived as a stranger, they – the stranger and the other – happen to be in the same existential dimension. It is the basic fact of belonging to the category of the human, from which follows our destiny that we are bound to all other humans in a deep psychological, and I would add, poetical sense. It may be said that the face of human history lies buried in the faces of men.

It is absolutely true that we can reject the stranger – but we cannot ignore him.

While what is said above is true and important, the word stranger does have many different connotations and references, stretching from the more sociological themes to the individual psychological realm.

When we refer to the groups of aliens and foreigners, the men from that distant cultural and ethnic world we are mostly in the realm of the sociological or the social psychological. But when we are using the language of the self and the other, of the fundamental division within our psyches, of the ambivalence in the nature of our identities, of the »strangers to our selves« (Kristeva, 1992), then we are very much in the psychological realm of the individual. It is the latter realm, where also poetics is most luminous, that will be of particular interest to us in this paper.

However, we will also be referring to the possible historical implications of different world views and conceptual systems on the framing of the stranger. In this context one may assume that certain conceptual systems and world views are more conducive and encouraging of the poetical way of perceiving and relating – that there are certain associative links between certain world views and the poetical framework.

We should perhaps try now to elaborate on our concept of poetics. Though this is a concept of which we all have an intuitive understanding and of which we all have differentially distinctive and similar – though not same – experiences, yet it is not easy to find an adequate language for it. Hence the intention is to try and draw a functional framework which will both convey the sense of what is implied in our use of the word poetics and subsequently lead us to sense its relevance in relation to the concepts of self and stranger.

As stated earlier the concept of poetics is being promoted in a broad and general sense in contrast to the analytical and scientifically defined mode of categorisation, which also means that traits that are sometimes defined under aesthetics, or art, or music are included within this general framework. The term aesthetics is not being used here in its more technical sense. Furthermore, the practice adopted here does not seem to be that unusual looking at some of the recent publications: Eagleton (1990), Bowie (1990) see also Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, Hospers (1967).

This, of course, does not imply that we shall not be emphasising certain approaches that we consider as being particularly relevant in relation to our theme of the stranger and the self – e.g. the concept of the aeolian mode developed by Murray Cox and Alice Theilgaard (1987) to which reference will be made shortly.

1. The entry under »Aesthetics, Problems of« in the Encyclopaedia of Philosophy, vol. 1, p. 36-38, Hospers (ibid.) seems in parts to be quite interesting for our purposes. The following features may be worth reflecting on.
 - (a) there is the important point that we need the aesthetic experience, the ability to perceive aesthetically to define objects and events as aesthetic. This suggests that *the human mind is gifted with a particular mode of relating itself to the world which has the quality of novelty, suspense and imagination.*
 - (b) »The aesthetic attitude, or »the aesthetic way of looking at the world« is most commonly opposed to the *practical* attitude, which is concerned only with the utility of the object in question To view a landscape aesthetically one must »perceive for perceiving's sake«, not for the sake of some ulterior purpose«. This is also what we know as the non-instrumental mode of contemplation.

(c) The aesthetic attitude is also different from the cognitive. A student may look at a monument in order to categorise it historically – but to enjoy the experience of viewing the building is another matter.

(d) »The aesthetic way of looking is also antipathetic to the personal, in which the viewer, instead of regarding the aesthetic object so as to absorb what it has to offer him considers its relation to himself the man who goes to see a performance of *Othello* and instead of concentrating on the play thinks only of the similarity of Othello's situation to his own real life situation with his wife, is not viewing the play aesthetically«.

(e) »Internal and external relations. When we are viewing a work of art or nature aesthetically, we concentrate on internal relations only, that is on the aesthetic and its properties«. The aesthetic state is in a sense totalizing.

(f) »Aesthetic attention is always to the phenomenal object, not to the physical object the attention must be focused on the perceived characteristics not on the physical characteristics«. It is interesting to consider the implications of this in relation to the »stranger«.

2. In this journal Nielsen, who is both a psychologist and an artist working with sculptor describes a work of visual art in relation to two dimensions (i) the *immanent* as manifest in the concrete material presence and (ii) the *transcendental* as a symbolisation referring to something beyond the specific object of art. Nielsen also suggests that in a work of art there is always the interplay between the immanent and the transcendental. We are also provided with illustrative material and descriptions that seem to harmonize well with our own experiences.
3. Cox and Theilgaard (1987) have developed a very rich and inspiring theme in what they call the aeolian mode. It holds the metaphoric image of a harp that is moved by the slightest breeze, turning it into music. The book develops this theme in relation to dynamic psychotherapy, a field in which the authors have a great deal of practical experience. If I have got it right then it is an attempt to find an in-depth relationship between the poetic language, the experiencing mind and the interpersonal world. This general framework is also used effectively for understanding the release and communication of repressed material in clinical practice.

The contents of the book and some of its follow up, (Cox, 1992) is too extensive, rich and detailed that justice can be done to it here. But it might still be relevant to give a few stray illustrations to convey the flavour of the project and its potential significance for »the poetics of the stranger«.

(a) In speaking of the aeolian mode reference is often made to the unknown, to the novelty, to the sudden turn in feeling, the changes in thought – the endless variations in the movements of life (the mutative metaphor).

(b) The particular relevance of the metaphor is appropriately expressed in the language of Beardsley (1967) – »Metaphor is a linguistic phenomenon of peculiar philosophical interest and importance because its use in various domains raises puzzling questions about the nature and image of language and knowledge. ... a metaphorical attribution differs from a literal one by virtue of a certain tension between the subject and the modifier: we are altered by something special, odd, and startling in the combination« – Cox & Theilgaard (*ibid.*, p. 93).

An example of a highly effective metaphoric expression is found in a quotation from Edith Sitwell (1948) relating to the imagery of the blood-theme in *Macbeth* »The bed of the ocean from which the ocean has fled« – Cox & Theilgaard (*ibid.* p. 30).

(c) Important to the authors way of thinking is also what they call the aesthetic imperative. It is »manifest in the autonomous authority that great literature carries«. It indicates the »pattern that connects«. It has the quality of making »an irresistible, summons to action«. As the authors say »In particular, it is the precise, action of making a therapeutic intervention« (*ibid.*, p. 26).

In a sense this sounds similar to the concept of authenticity which is used later in the text in relation to D.H. Lawrence and Conrad.

The aeolian mode could no doubt help us to capture the different faces of the stranger and perhaps even surprise us with the narrative of the self that looks into the mirror and sees the stranger.

Cox & Adrian (1991, p. 111-113) have already reflected interestingly on the theme they name »The Crucified is no stranger« and »The Crucifier is no stranger«.

4. Art has obviously much to do with the communication of feelings – as Leo Tolstoy (1960) states »Art is a human activity consisting in this, that one man consciously, by means of external signs, hands on the other's feelings he has lived through, and that other people are infected by these feelings and also experience them«.

In many forms art has a certain rhythm and flow which effectively alters body states and feelings.

5. The artistic and the poetic symbolises in a manner that provokes endless degrees of connotations. It opens for different possibilities

represented in the notions of multiplicity and pluralism where the experiencing mind is, internally, always in a dynamic state; there is always a sense of movement within.

6. Has a tendency to generate experiences of a holistic nature, pointing to the universal. This is a manifest in the symbolisation and the expressive form. In a subtle way this is often present in the metaphoric language, it takes you beyond the given to the general and further to the universal, when it is poetic.

It may be said that what we are talking about is the integrative meaning providing experience, where there are no limits and where the momentary and the eternal are interlaced in a dynamic state comprising both the immanent and the transcendental (Nielsen, *ibid.*)

7. Stern's (1985) work on child development provides us with some very influential concepts in the context of our study.

(a) Stern talks of the nature of subjective experiences in relation to *affect attunement*. In this process the child not only assumes that the mother has subjective experiences similar to its own, but also that the mother is aware of the child's subjective experiences, of the child's anguishes, fears and joys. Affect attunement refers to »the quality of feeling of a shared affect state without imitating the exact behavioral expression of the inner state pure imitation does not permit the partners to refer to the internal state ... to the quality of feeling that is being shared« (p. 142). Indirectly this suggests what we often leave out in our relationship to the stranger and that which is vital to authentic interpersonal relationships.

A very important feature of affect attunement is its amodal character, which means that »different behavioral expressions occurring in different forms and in different sensory modalities must somehow be interchangeable« (p. 152). Stern then displays the insight that the qualities of experience that most effectively define both affect attunement and intermodal fluency are intensity, time, rhythm and shape.

It seems, and Stern is inclined to say as much, that the quality of experience related to affect attunement and intermodal fluency is closely associated to the nature of art and music which in various forms generates non-representable states of the human mind.

Stern (*ibid.*, p. 54) refers to a certain category of experiences as »vitality experiences«. They are represented by such terms as »surging«, »fading away«, »crescendo«, »decrescendo«, but are generally very difficult to articulate verbally. They are characteristically amodal which, as already stated, means that they are not related to any specific sense modality. These vitality experiences seem

in some obvious sense to have a poetical quality which binds them significantly to our framework.

It appears to me that many of the things that have been said here are not very far from what Cox & Theilgaard have been trying to say in their aeolian language.

A brief summary noting the main points of the general framework – working model – that has been attempted above:

1. Primacy of the poetic experience itself
2. Nature of experiences are »internal« and subject-oriented
3. Communication of feelings are predominant
4. Emotional intersubjectivity and intermodal fluency
5. »Vitality« experiences of an emotional-aesthetic character totalising the mental and bodily states
6. The highly evocative nature of the metaphoric mode of communication
7. The interplay of the immanent and the transcendental
8. The holistic quality of the experiences
9. Multiplicity and change as symbolically expressive of the eternal and the endless
10. The non-instrumental and non-utilitarian mode of relating and experiencing

It may be proposed that art and poetics is meaningful in such manner as to suggest a kind of resonance with certain inherent structures of the experiencing mind – which we are attempting to connect to the problem of the self and the stranger.

Our interest is fermented as we begin to explore what visions of the stranger appear when we begin to see him in the light of our creative frameworks.

One of those visions might appear as a threat to our own identity, but at the same time propelling us towards an experience of authenticity.

II As our next step we shall be concerned with the possible implications of historically different world views and conceptual systems for our relationship to the »stranger«. We shall be looking at some relevant features of European history in order to trace what conceptions of self and world have prevailed. It being implied that these conceptions could have a bearing on the understanding and framing of the stranger. This means presenting a process oriented world view characterised by varying context, change and uncertainty, and contrasting it with the enlightenment and modernist view of knowledge and the self.

The basic problem of knowledge, of man's different conceptualisations of the world, can be traced all the way back to Heraclitus and Parmenides about 500 B.C. (Regel, 1976). Heraclitus and philosophers such as Democritus propagated the idea of *process*, change and flux and they stressed the sensory and experiential basis of knowledge from concrete perceptualisations. For them growth and becoming are the essential principles of the cosmos. Parmenides and the Eleatic philosophers were against the Heraclitian ideas of both the sensory basis of knowledge and the theory of flux and change. They believed in the existence of abstract principles, rigorous and universal. This is the voice of singularity, of defining the world in terms of unchanging abstract laws. In a sense it is what may be said to have developed finally into the theory of objectivism and unity based on the application of modern scientific methodology.

Though it cannot be assumed that the Heraclitian world view and conceptual forms are representative of the poetic, yet they could be seen as being in greater resonance with, more conducive to the poetic framework.

These two streams:

- (i) The one offering sensory or contextual particularity but with continued process and change, the other
- (ii) Defining abstract theoretical foundations beyond the particular, as the basis of knowledge
 - have existed as important conceptual systems and cultural forms for over two thousand years of European history.

The two streams, as indicated earlier, should tell us something about their influence on the lives of individual people – the way people come to see the world and the way they come to see themselves. This in turn can provide a fruitful platform for reflecting on the status of the strangers within that prevailing world view – within that stream, as we have been referring to it.

A couple of cautionary notes may be in place at this stage.

It should not be forgotten that it is not the intention of this paper to unravel all the different aspects that are tied up with the concept of the stranger. The intention is to explore certain limited perspectives which reflect that nature of the human subject which we have tried to formulate broadly in the language of poetics.

The other cautionary note suggests that it would be quite unwise to view any historical period as totally defined by one or the other of the world views/streams. It would also be quite inappropriate to assume that »poetic minds« are limited to any particular age.

Having said that, it is still a fact that the different world views tend to differentially characterise different historical periods and that their influence does filter down into those processes which are active in the shaping of the human mind and the human subject.

When critically reflecting on the modernist tendencies of »factualisation«, of centering the arguments on abstract rules of verification and truth or holding the light to the individuals inviolable personal identity, we are often referred to the very different age of the early renaissance (Toulmin, 1991).

We hear about the variability in the social order, the much more open space in which the individual could wander. The picture is that in this world view, both the world outside and the world inside the person are non-codified systems. There is not a single restrictive code that legitimates activity. There is not a totalising unity such as characterises, or has characterised modernity.

As we can see these conceptual systems create different realities of the world and of personal identities. If one can imagine *operating with something like fixed identities and closed knowledge systems, the stranger will have little chance of moving outside the category he has been allocated. And the more alarmed we become the more will the logic of the categories tighten their hold.* This risk is backed by the world view which provides the incontrovertible link between the abstract principles with their methodological tools on the one hand and the only true story of knowledge on the other.

This world view, this mode of thinking goes back some three centuries when man decided that the correct picture of the world could only be achieved through man's rationality.

But we have seen that *there is another conceptual framework which directs attention to a process oriented approach where we do not meet fixed and final identities, where thinking does not anticipate final endings and where feelings and context guide our immediate responses – this is another world, with the possibilities of another kind of narrative.* In this context see White's (1983) discussion of Charles Peirces' concept of abduction involving the principles of aesthetics and simplicity.

Here the stranger has a chance of entering our horizon without a fixed label, without a pre-conditioned role model. All events concerning the stranger will not be considered equal and we will hopefully not have theoretical abstractions of a totalizing character. This changeable and contextually varying picture of the stranger will find its reflection in the perceiver's own life world.

We should be aware that in both cases we have been drawing a somewhat idealised model and that in individual cases the picture is bound to be more complex. We should also remember that at the present level

of discourse we are relating to the more tangential representation of the poetic mode.

It may be argued that while certain world views and conceptual frameworks may be conducive to a liberal attitude and an open and creative response, there can be and often are, other factors, political and economic, which might overrule such expectations. To an extent this must be true, but it is very difficult to say what would have been the case in the absence of this particular world view.

In summing up it may be said that in an age that sets a premium on self-conscious individuals the stranger will keep on emerging in the different narratives associated with self-identity and with the search for meaning – often in the provoking and stimulating company of the poetic metaphor.

III The summing up, in fact, directly points to the next level of discourse which has to do with the analysis of the self and the stranger in relation to the constitutional framework of the human psyche which constantly evokes journeys into the realm of poetics.

The concept of the stranger is not intellectually or reflexively derived, it initially emerges as a natural category of experience in the first year of life.

With time the experience and the concept grow and become more diversified. And as is the case with most other categories of experience they become relevant themes at different levels of apprehension and consciousness. Amongst these, there is the experience of the stranger as an inseparable part of the dilemmas of the self, the eternal problem of the individual and the world – the self and the other. In the context of the present paper, it is at this level that the discussion invites particular attention.

To develop this theme we shall use certain frameworks relating to the dilemmas of the self in which the experience of the stranger emerges inconspicuously, but significantly, as part of the dynamics of our consciousness. It is also *at this level* of the experiencing self that poetics is most demonstrative.

1. We have already referred to Kristeva's (1992) recent publication with the interesting title »strangers to ourselves«. The basis for this idea seems to reside in the nature of the human subject.

For Kristeva (1989) the human subject is in some basic sense divided and ambivalent. Her orientation (Kristeva, 1989; 1992) is essentially psycho-analytic and she distinguishes between the pre-verbal and post-verbal representations which are the source of the separation and the prevailing sense of indifference and melancholia. Kristeva also talks about the role of art and religion as a means of »healing the gap«.

However, if there is one thought we can develop as being of significance for this paper it is that *this sense of separation and incompleteness leads to the creation of a poetics of meaning which enfolds the stranger within itself.*

2. The idea of a fundamental division in the psyche, in the nature of subject and object has been discussed at some length by Katzenelson (1983) in his paper describing the evolutionary history of man. We are presented with a perspective that calls forth the world, the self and the other, and the questions of doubt and ambivalence that arise from it. That this may stimulate poetic expression to reach out to meaningful experiences could certainly be a suggestion. It could furthermore be suggested that these meaningful experiences bring with them the »inalienable« vision of the stranger.

3. Kierkegaard (1962) too expresses the dilemmas of the self when he is talking about confronting *the* truth, introducing the unconditional, facing despair and the cry of alarm (Cox & Theilgaard, *ibid.* p. 210). Cox & Theilgaard also provide an appropriate quotation from Dunne (1967):

»Kierkegaard underwent both dread and despair and attained at length to an assurance and transparency by facing, though not abolishing, the ambiguity that was the cause of his dread and despair Faith for him consisted of facing this dreadful thing, his own individuality and accepting it, like Saint Francis of Assisi kissing the leper«.

One could perhaps add, though Kierkegaard may not have intended to say so, that in accepting his individuality he was also accepting the stranger in himself. Perhaps one could also suggest that the processes that Kierkegaard refers to, facing the truth, introducing the unconditional, are aided by a system of poetics. Kierkegaard's approach embracing the existential and the paradoxical was to an extent poetical, though the final resolution was to rest in Faith. See Schultz, this journal.

This subject can also be formulated by stating that Kierkegaard's deep reflection on the existential self, expressed as introducing the unconditional, facing the truth, has in some sense the poetical as a necessary vehicle.

It seems that the division and the basic doubt within the human psyche provokes what might be called a quantum leap to which we have attempted to relate the concept of poetics and the concept of the stranger. To say it again in other words, the associative link that is being referred to here between the constitution of the human psyche and the stranger is significantly related to what Kristeva has suggested as the existential problem of man.

But there is another feature of the human psyche which it seems should be brought into this context.

Human life is basically pluralistic and contextually variable which can be the cause of similar existential problems. Life seems to be a constantly moving and changing stream without any certainties or ultimate destination – this creates a sense of ambivalence and the need for meaning. Here again it may be suggested that this generates the poetical expression to transcend the limitations and to create a sense of meaning which lies in the creative expressiveness of the experiencing subject. It may be proposed that this expressiveness contains the stranger as an inalienable part of the dilemmas of self and herein the endless recreations of meaning, as part of the human condition.

IV Concept of authenticity seen in relation to the self and the stranger
There is another avenue which is worth exploring in relation to the theme of this paper. What is being proposed here is the concept of authenticity seen in relation to certain authors and their literary works. The logic of this reason runs as follows:

The level at which we become aware of the »strangers to ourselves«, Kristeva (ibid.) or the stranger in ourselves has something to do with that sense of authenticity that is part of our existential self and leads us in the search of the meaning of our lives.

At the same time it is perhaps that degree of heightened fear and despair which Kierkegaard noted in confronting the unconditional, the real truth, that keeps us from facing the stranger within us, from the experience of being strangers to ourselves.

In a way this vital sense of authenticity that we have been referring to comes clearly and forcefully to light in the works of some of the foremost authors of the 20th and 19th century, such as D.H. Lawrence, Joseph Conrad and Charles Dickens.

A brief excursion in this direction has been guided by an inspiring book by Price (1982) called »Forms of Life« where he comments on the works of a number of authors including the ones named above.

Firstly what is common to all three authors is the view that man's existence in modern society is steeped in convention and inauthenticity.

For Lawrence there were different levels of consciousness and man had to search the deeper levels for authentic life. As Price (ibid., p. 273) says of Lawrence: »*The surface gives way to reveal depth, then begins to reform anew with a consciousness of all that lies below it. The terms in which the self is conceived give way to new terms.*«

Lawrence himself says: »... *You mustn't look in my novel for the old stable ego of the character. There is another ego, according to whose*

action the individual is unrecognizable and passes through, as it were, allotropic states which it needs a deeper sense than any we've been used to exercise to discover our states of the same single radically unchanged element«. (Moore, 1962).

As a more violent expression of the search for authenticity we have the words of Birkin in »Women in Love«: *»There is ... a final we which is stark and impersonal and beyond responsibility. So here is a final you. And it is there I would want to meet you – not in the emotional loving plane – but there beyond, where there is no speech and no terms of agreement ... because one is outside the pale of all that is accepted, and nothing known applies*« (Lawrence, 1962. Quoted in Price (ibid. p. 272)).

Conrad it seems, was very distrustful of people's beliefs which he considered were powerful instruments in their lives directing their behaviour to ultimate goals which in principle were illusions.

Price (ibid., p. 234) speaking of Conrad asks *»why did he like to insist that all beliefs are illusions, that all innocence is ignorance, that all consciousness is pain or conflict, that fidelity to a cause is lapse of thought, that whole heartedness is blindness? In part, it seems to satisfy his need to see through the shifts and pretexts*«. Subsequently Price (p. 239) touches upon what seems to be the ultimate motivation *»Conrad cannot resist the pleasures of disenchantment, making it I should say, for detachment, perhaps for wisdom*« (my emphasis).

This idea of detachment it seems is closely related to a philosophy of unspoiled nature. A philosophy which seems to be reflected in the thoughts of both Lawrence and Conrad as a reality and as a symbol of authenticity. But simultaneously, we find that this realisation has a poetic constitution where the immanent is also transcendental. This means that we can hope to see the stranger in another dimension than the one we have been used to, not only outside ourselves but also inside ourselves, made possible it seems by our common heritage as creatures of Nature.

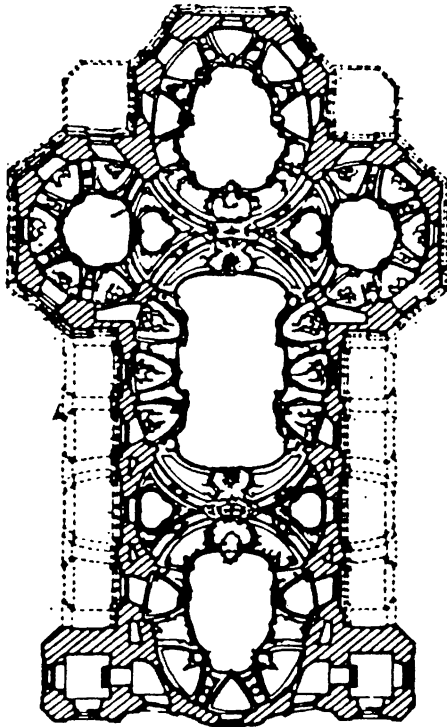
Dickens on his part was deeply concerned with the evils of society and its unending recreations in the lives of individuals. He could see that, while there is a world, within a world, within a world, they share in significant manner the same designs. Price (p. 115) says that *»Dickens' novels circle around the theme of dehumanisation ... The most striking feature of the system Dickens presents is the penalty it places upon generous feeling. Those who succeed are oblivious of others, superably efficient operators but deficient persons ... distributing almost everywhere some version of success or superiority to console the actual emptiness*«. (My emphasis). More concisely *»Dickens presents ... patterns of humbug, commercialism and pretentious*« (p. 129). One might say that *»the actual emptiness*« refers to a latent urge for authenticity.

In summing up it might be said that when we shred the layers of our illusions and pretensions in pursuit of the authentic nature of our beings, as Lawrence and Conrad would have us, then we come inevitably to face the stranger within ourselves and find that one important dimension of this knowledge and experience lies in the realm of the poetic.

In other words as long as there is that false veneer we will not be able to see the stranger in ourselves and take that leap into authenticity which is graced by the poetics of our nature.

At this stage it might be interesting to present *an illustration of how a particular symbolic representation can extend the limits of our individual selves to embrace our identity as humans, where the stranger is no longer outside ourselves.*

Illustration: The church in Bamberg



Goodman (1988) describes, as shown, the ground plan of a particular church which displays the complex assimilation of two systems, a bi-axial organism and the conventional Latin cross. The spatial metaphor as Goodman explains is highly effective in an intricate manner. However, for our purposes the main point is that the interpenetration of the Latin cross and the human figure evokes a transformation from the specific to the universal. This opens a new world, where, as Price said of Lawrence »The surface gives way to reveal depth«, a depth that we might articulate in our language as authenticity. This authenticity also brings the realisation that I and the stranger have the same existential nature, reflected in the constellation of our simultaneously immanent and transcendental modes of being. This realisation has inevitably a poetic dimension to it.

V Poetics of the self and the stranger in the culture of postmodernism
 The nature of the discourse relating to postmodernism/late modernity (in future only the term postmodernism will be used) provides an obvious incentive to discuss our topic of the stranger in that context.

Despite the differences amongst different authors concerning the descriptions and explanations of postmodernism there does seem to be a wide-spread agreement that many of the entrenched beliefs of modernity, about truth, singularity, the objectivism of science and personal identity have all been challenged in a radical manner, giving rise to a consciousness where reflection, doubt and ambivalence have become more the order of the day.

In particular, attention has been paid to the concept of heightened reflexivity (Giddens, 1990; 1991; Ziehe, 1989; Sass, 1992)¹.

Sass (*ibid.* p. 371-72), for whom heightened reflexivity is one of the crucial concepts for his understanding the relationship between schizophrenia and modern culture says referring to Giddens (1990) » ... Anthony Giddens, stresses the unsettling quality of modernity's »wholesale reflexivity« – which is turned not only on all traditions but even on the nature of reflection itself, resulting in the dissolving of anchored vantage points and a universal »institutionalisation of doubt««.

Ziehe (*ibid.*) also refers to the very significant role that reflexivity plays in the understanding of present day youth culture.

The implications of this for our theme »the poetics of the stranger« are not difficult to see but we need to elaborate just one other point before these implications emerge more convincingly.

1. I am grateful to my colleague Henrik Brogaard for introducing me to the works of L. Sass.

Hartvig (1993) referring to youth points to the devaluation of the social dimension and a shift from the social paradigm towards the cultural – symbolic paradigm.

This story of postmodernism – though Hartvig does not appear to use the term – continues with a description of different Utopias suggesting various shifts and alliances between such dimensions as the social, the cultural, everyday practices, the media and the commodity form, and not least of all aesthetics.

The very significant influence of aesthetics is apparent when Hartvig (ibid. p. 6) says: »*The reactivation of the aesthetic paradigm in relation to youth – cultural phenomena might introduce into the scientific culture of objectifying understanding an essential element of non-understanding. Such an element might generate a recognition of the »other« and create an open space of understanding*«. While the reference is to youth there is little doubt that much of this is generally applicable to postmodernism.

For the purposes of this paper we could summarise our findings along three major dimensions characterising the postmodern age:

- (i) heightened reflexivity and self-consciousness
- (ii) a shift to the culture-symbolic paradigm
- (iii) the regulative influence of the aesthetic paradigm

What could this imply concerning the dilemmas of the self and the stranger?

- (i) Conventional belief systems no longer carry the same conviction. There is a much greater awareness of change and flux, of radical alternatives involving different parameters.
- (ii) There seems to be a constant search for meaning in which the aesthetic/poetic approach is the medium through which the meanings are constantly articulated and rearticulated. This stimulates opportunities for creativity as an integral feature of human subjectivity.

The message it seems is that postmodernism could provide us with some exciting possibilities for the realisation of what we have been referring to as being »strangers to ourselves« or the stranger in ourselves.

It could also be said that we are living in an age which has the potential for a dynamics of authenticity, a concept we have discussed earlier.

While I do subscribe to the idea that certain important changes have taken place in the history of modernity, and some very radical changes concerning self-consciousness during the post-war years, I am not so sure that we fully understand what is going on.

Yet for the present it would be a justifiable proposition if we said that

postmodernism when formulated in terms of heightened reflection, in terms of its pre-occupation with the culture-symbolic dimension and in terms of the aesthetic paradigm, offers us new and creative possibilities for confronting the dilemmas of the self and the stranger. That we can perhaps both, look forward with hope and at the same time devise schemes of encouragement for generating that realisation of being strangers to ourselves which so often reveals itself in the nature of poetic knowledge and experience.

VI Some practical implications

It would appear that the ways in which the message of this paper can be conveyed are likely to be of a literary, philosophical and psychological character.

The traditions that seem best to harmonize with the spirit of this paper are the phenomenological, the hermeneutic, the existential and what has come to be named humanistic psychology.

When we turn to literature we find that we have been frequently and acutely made aware of the search for identity and meaning, of the inevitable linking of our natures and our destinies with the »other« and the stranger. Kafka, Camus, D.H. Lawrence, Conrad and Beckett are moving examples of this.

The plan is that using this background some of us want to write a book that can be used as a paedagogical tool to convey this message and stir the imagination of youth who are studying at the gymnasium, or equivalent institutions, and are approximately 16 - 20 years of age. It means bringing that awareness and those experiences of »strangers to ourselves« closer to their own consciousness and their life histories.

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