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The Return of the Blob, or How Sociology Decided to Stop Worrying and Love the Crowd

John Plutz

ON THE LOOKOUT FOR MELODRAMA in the most arid reaches of social science? You couldn't do better than peruse sociological writing about crowds. The pathos of large numbers is already there in Gustave Le Bon's dire warning that the crowd is the sphinx of our century, dying to consume us; it waxes in Sigmund Freud's worry that "groups" exist in no other form than ego-abasing worship of their ego-ideal leader; and it still burns strong in Serge Moscovici's pseudoscientific pronouncement that political riots only prove "the veneer of civilization is very thin." Even in the twenty-first century, you can still hear echoes of the oracular tone of Thomas Carlyle or Joseph de Maistre, post–French Revolution reactionaries who feared that any mass action from below would set the social order ablaze.

In the United States, a country that was arguably born out of crowd-fueled, democratically arrayed civil unrest, the fear of crowds was a lot quieter in the nineteenth century. It did, however, still reach a predictable apex in the McCarthy era. This generation can be rescued from crowd thinking, writes one 1950s hyperbolizer, only when citizens "discover that their own thoughts and their own lives are quite as interesting as other people's, that, indeed, they no more assuage their loneliness in a crowd of peers than one can assuage one's thirst by drinking sea water."

Perhaps largely derived from a distrust of totalitarianism most ably articulated in Hannah Arendt's The Origins of Totalitarianism, the "mass critique" of the social scientists of the midcentury extrapolated from the worst of Nazism and Stalinist communism a generally coercive force called "the social," which seemed now to be terrorizing not Germany and Russia but, in a different guise, America itself. Small wonder that Hannah Arendt called her account of Hannah Arendt, preeminent theorist of the threat that "society" poses to an orderly political realm, The Attack
of the Blob. For Arendt, social life—with its tendency to annihilate privacy and collapse public arenas into overseen and government-managed cages—had stopped being one aspect of human culture and become a dangerous underlying assault upon human freedom. "To writers like Arendt—those in her train included C. Wright Mills, Theodor Adorno, Elias Canetti, Richard Hofstadter, and arguably even the young Jürgen Habermas," the enemy was all the more terrifying for being uncanny, an aspect of our own familiar selves suddenly recognized as part of an external assailant.

We may not be quick to recognize the central worry of such mass-critique writers as panic about what crowds can do, because what they mostly described themselves as denouncing was instead "society" or "the social." The legacy of Mill trains us to see in their words mostly introspective unease about one's lack of control over one's own actions, rather than crowd-control protocols. But to these writers, worry about the unrestrained, licentious, and determinedly egalitarian danger of crowds was, in the final analysis, the way that "the social" became visible (and hence vulnerable).

Richard Pells describes what made the dominant intellectual liberalism of the 1950s distinct from preceding decades: "What the writers of 1930s called 'community' the postwar intelligentsia labeled 'conformity.' Cooperation now became 'other-direction'; social consciousness had turned into 'groupism'; solidarity with others implied an invasion of privacy; 'collectivism' ushered in a 'mass society'; ideology translated into imagery; economic exploitation yielded to bureaucratic manipulation; the radical activist was just another organization man." In William H. Whyte's 1956 *The Organization Man*, aggregation itself gets hyperstated into a collective noun with its own ideational motivations ("Is the Organization to be the arbiter? The Organization will look to its own interests, but it will look to the individual's only as The Organization interprets them"). And in *The Lonely Crowd* (1950), by Riesman et al., the underlying emphasis is on rescuing democracy by protecting individual difference from the homogenizing barbarism of the crowd: "the idea that men are created free and equal is both true and misleading; men are created different; they lose their social freedom and their individual autonomy in seeking to become like each other" (*LC*, 307).

Consider for a moment how greatly the suspicious 1950s divagated from the collectivist or at least crowd-cheering ethos of the 1930s. In King Vidor's 1928 *The Crowd*, for instance, much of the film's visual delight comes from conglomeration shots: lines of charing women leaving an office building at quitting time, spinning through the revolving door, or climbing together onto rides at Coney Island. In among these teeming masses, the occasional deviation is generally for disaster—the one man struck down in the street is distinct from the crowd that gathers around him. When a happy couple is picked out, they are applauded in their moment of most perfect conformity with their surroundings. That was a 1930s dream, of the average hero, but by the 1950s it reappears in Whyte and Riesman as a nightmare of stagnation and immersion.

This brief history of popular sociology's dependence on a paradigm that feared the social, particularly the social as manifested in crowd actions, may seem to omit key components of midcentury social theory—notably, sociology's flirtation with "hard" science. After all, beginning as early as his 1937 publication of *The Structure of Social Action*, wasn't the functionalism or "structural functionalism" of Talcott Parsons immensely influential within the circles of professional sociology? True, and yet the stunning popularity of such voluntarist and morally/politically prescriptive work as Arendt's and Riesman's suggests that the appeal of functionalist models beyond academia was limited.

If Todd Stillman is right to propose the dominance of a resolutely unselfconscious scientific sociology in midcentury America was "an exception to the rule" that "reflexivity
is a natural feature of intellectual communities," then perhaps the work of writers like Arendt can be seen as restoring to the discipline a striking measure of reflexivity, an assessment of how much the discipline's own vocabularies are shaped by its time and place. If so, then the popularity of these exceptions to the scientific sociology norm (with their abhorrence of data sets and their open rejection of what Harold Garfinkel dismissively called "Parson's plenum"—that is, the hypothesis of complete macrolevel mappability of society) may be consistent with a public desire, even in the 1950s, not for "objective" accounts of society, but compelling, inspiring ones.

That Whyte and Riesman were ultimately as inspiring to their generation as Hannah Arendt was terrifying is evident. Witness the manifest appeal of both Whyte and Riesman's books, which were both middle- and high-brow conversation books from decade to decade: Michael Schudson describes them as the twin bibles of his sociologically savvy childhood, the two classics whose status was unquestioned. Both are formative books for the 1960s generation—along with Betty Friedan's 1966 *The Feminine Mystique*, a book that manifestly shares the same anxiety about depraved social forces that underpin a misogynist suburban way of life.

What remains fascinating about this generation's antisocial manifestos is not how clear their enemy is, but how opaque, how confused and confusing. Both Riesman and Whyte posit as an enemy the aggregated hypostatized entity that comes into being when individuals assemble into a system larger than their individual volitions. In Whyte, this is called "Organization," and in Riesman, it is referred to as becoming an "other-directed man." This is their central figure for the crowd—the unavoidable social phenomenon that presses in on the individual with an unavoidable and exit-blocking social force, compelling a uniform response form each person so constrained.

But neither Whyte nor Riesman is looking for a way to diagram escapes from this overcrowded situation. In both writers, it is a reflexive feature of such crowd situations that participants are unable to see the crowd as something that necessitates escape. The overcrowding is thus "realized" only by the reader (and perhaps not even then). Those who are imprisoned by crowds by definition lose sight of that fact. It is not simply that they are trapped by Big Brother, or even simply that they grow to prefer Big Brother. In fact, they themselves change so that they comprise the core of the very Organization that is busy curtailing or compromising their own freedom. They do not flee Big Brother, they become Him.

One purpose of this essay, therefore, is to explore why this rather unlikely, almost masochistic account of crowd triumph succeeded so well in the 1950s. Why for so long did people choose a paradigm to explain their own actions that seemed implicitly both on the one hand to blame them for their acquiescence to social forces, and on the other to assume that their acquiescence or resistance was largely beyond their own control?

I also want to explore the swing of the sociological pendulum back toward an unexpected, rather troubling kind of affection for certain sociable crowds. How has sociology in the last decade come to embrace sociability in what once seemed its most "crowdlike" aspects? What makes Riesman's work revisiting in this context is how perfectly it seems to invert a certain troubling trend in present-day popular sociology.

If we are living in what looks more and more like a return to McCarthyite America in many respects—as regards the curtailing of civil liberties, the distrust of social protest, the valorization of certain kinds of religious cohesion—one glaring difference remains. It is clear that popular sociology nowadays has no interest in preaching a fear of either "the crowd" or of "the social" more generally. "Social capital" is the order of the day, and sociologists from Christopher Lasch to Alan Wolfe to Robert Putnam—alongside

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both left and right communitarians such as Michael Sandel and Amitai Etzioni—can’t hurry us back to church and PTA meetings fast enough. Nowadays, it’s de rigueur if not to love the homogeneous society, then at least to hate those who tell us to hate it, to fear those who favor withdrawing from it in fear. It is no longer normal to fear a crowd because it is a crowd, and it no longer makes sense to criticize suburbia for its mindless conformity.

Now social scientists speak of suburbia’s emptiness, it lack of “binding social capital” or its “dispersal” and “avoidance.” The enemy is what Zygmunt Baumann calls “glocalization,” in which the dual punishments of our privileged and our deprived are to be trapped, either in empty (lonely) motion of the deracinated and hence bereft rich, or in the privation of having to live, as a poor person, a great distance from the world’s real centers. Even our suburbs now have problems, society informs us, not because they brainwash us (as Riesman worried), but because they fail to make any demands on us at all.

It was not always thus. In the late 1950s and 1960s, suburban chroniclers like Edmund Wilson and John Cheever worried about the strange synchronization of private lives that Lewis Mumford condemned as “the collective effort to live a private life.” Like “the lonely crowd,” that phrase ominously stresses the ways in which our new exposure to one another in a collectivity is linked, inextricably and depressingly, with our alienation from one another. The closer to one another we grow (physically, socially), the farther away from one another (morally, politically, ethically) we become. It had been a common lament ever since Wordsworth’s The Prelude (ca. 1805), but the suburbia panics of the 1950s took it to new heights.

By the late 1990s, though, D. J. Waldie’s Holy Land sees only empty squares, burned-out conscience, a city hall that is no more than a way station for sparsely attended zoning hearings—the bowling alley deserted, the softball teams disbanded. Baumgartner tells us now (1988) that the Moral Order of a Suburb is characterized not individually but by excessively other-directed cohabitation, as Riesman feared, but by the same kind of “avoidance” that Eskimos and the plain nomads of West Africa use—no violence, no adjudication, no confrontation; mere anomic is loosed upon the world.

Science fiction’s tale is the same. The days of Invasion of the Body Snatchers and The Stepford Wives (that 1970s phobic fantasy of the 1950s) are gone. In their place, Ang Lee’s brilliant film de siècle logic in The Ice Storm entails his argument that suburban Connecticut is a nightmare because the suburbs are empty—all human contact is prevented from occurring by a thin and deadly sheet of ice. In Ray Bradbury’s Martian idylls (The Martian Chronicles, 1950), small-town Ohio is imagined as a durable enough community to reestablish itself creepily on Mars. Fifty years on, though, the worrying enemy is not overly cohesive community and a smothering social life but society’s absence. In The Matrix (1999), Sunday picnics have been replaced by the big empty skies and by empty minds; all that computer brainwashing only covers up the fact that each human is lying alone in a vat somewhere. The nightmare is not our collective insertion into the world of dreams but the fact that beneath that dreamscape, we “really” vegetate in solitude. To dream alone is the worst delusion of all.

We have entered an era in which sociology’s most popular book, Robert Putnam’s Bowling Alone, the only current contender for Riesman’s sociological best-seller title, is an encomium to just the sort of all-encompassing group activity that Riesman warned us about. Exhortatory social science texts now are cautioning us to tune in, turn on, and drop in—to a church social, a party meeting, a bowling league. Gaining a rejuvenated social life appears to entail accepting the compulsory and arbitrary nature of propinquity and cherish it. The crowd that haunted us fifty years ago beckons us today.
The Lonely Crowd’s Crowd

Between 1950 and 1965, the same impetus that spurred the “mass society” critique spurred an unprecedented battery of phobic writing about crowds, from Arendt’s influential 1951 *Origins of Totalitarianism* to Elias Canetti’s memorable 1960 *Crows and Power*. Alongside placid Eisenhower Republicanism and rabid McCarthyism sprang up social critiques whose suspicion of the actions of ordinary social forces bordered on the paranoid.

There did exist, certainly, a kind of moderate social critique. Pells emphasizes the way in which most critics of conformist “false consciousness” still strove to have their cake and eat it too: “Most intellectuals who tried to maintain their critical perspective . . . could not ignore the psychological and cultural costs of middle-class affluence, or the moral compromises involved in the individual’s readiness to embrace the attitudes and expectations of his peers. So while they accepted the basic structure of society, they believed that the private citizen must somehow resist the enticements of material comfort and the pressures to conform.” However, Riesman and Whyte were more blistering than the mainstream Pells describes—and it seems clear that it is on account of their extremity that they were more successful in their day—and widely read even today. Indeed, Pells himself concedes that the dominant mode of critique in the age was laid out by Whyte’s “barely concealed antagonism to the collectivist sentiments of the 1930s” and by Riesman’s (extreme but not anomalous) contention that “much-praised voluntary associations were ‘not voluntary enough’; they intensified ‘the pressure on any individual to join, to submerge himself in the group—any group’” (*LC*, 233–34, 244).

The point worth stressing here is not simply the widespread fear that certain kinds of social aggregation would submerge individual identity. It is, rather, the all-inclusiveness of the dread of social life that strikes us in retrospect as extreme. In Riesman’s account, dromenification is simply what groups do. Riesman, like Whyte, brushes aside ostensible distinctions between organizations, or types of organizations. That phrase “any group” gets Riesman’s tone perfectly. The putative voluntary nature of the groups, in Riesman’s account, disguises the fact that the pressure is overpowering to sign up somewhere, and so lose the traction of withdrawal, the apathy that is the only present form of meaningful dissent.

Even joining, say, a civil liberties group is in Riesman’s account only another form of conformity to groupthink, rather than a substantive protest against the deliberalization of the age. It turns out that *The Manchurian Candidate* was even righter than its makers knew. It is not just costume parties concealing communist agents (Angela Lansbury dressed up as the Queen of Hearts) that are dangerous. In fact, all costume parties are part of the rot. Anybody dressed as a card is part of the corruption. At times, the barest hint of freely transacted social interaction is enough to send Riesman off in a fury. We should recall his denunciation of medals for the best children’s books, as well as his hatred of *The Joy of Cooking*: a book he thought was guilty of encouraging a freely social attitude towards mealtimes and of promulgating the notion that meals must be “pleasant” (*LC*, 142).

The hyperbole connected with the imagined loss of individual agency is a notorious feature of both 1950s and 1960s social science. Looking out at World War II’s horrible detritus, what writers from Heidegger to Clinton Rosett saw was not so much lost life as lost meaning.” “What we fear,” Riesman wrote, “is more than total destruction, it is total meaninglessness.” The crucial development here appears to be a sense that the aggrandizement of a crowd form of life has deprived us—that perhaps even democracy itself has deprived us—of individual agency, of opportunities for meaningful consideration and attainment. What looks like
the open skies of liberalism are in fact fixed flight paths: the palpable fulfillment of our wishes in fact bespeak our very implication in a machine that seems to serve us but truly rules us.

This leads both Whyte and Riesman to embrace a fruitful set of paradoxes like Riesman’s title: solitude is actually crowdedness, consumption actually means being consumed, moving actually means being anchored to one place (in the corporate chain). These paradoxes are frequently inconsistent and in tension with one another; their palpable strangeness helps to clarify how seriously Riesman, White, and others took their diagnosis of complete social immersion. At one point, for example, William Whyte points to the ceaseless movement of junior executives in “the organization” from one town to another as proof not of their atomization but of their ultimate acculturation to the desires of the machine (OM, 268–73). Such movement, because nationwide and predictably replicated by other execs, makes them all better in tune with one another and better, not less, able to function in a group. Atomization breeds not individual isolation but inescapable conformity—out of loneliness comes the crowd.

Jason Kaufman has recently argued that in America’s golden age for voluntary associations (1890–1920), the social groups that Riesman sees as nothing but homogenizers were in fact created for just the opposite reason: precisely to serve the cause of heterogeneity. That is, such groups were either markers or actual producers of ethnic or vocational division, convenient ways to disaggregate society—distinctly not party to “massification” or the rise of social homogeneity. Riesman would be able to make nothing of this argument; in fact, the existence of meaningful ethnic or national homogeneity within our social fabric as a whole never emerges as a possibility in The Lonely Crowd. In Riesman’s thinking, the social always comes back to another incarnation of the omnipresent crowd.

“Enforced and empty gregariousness” (The Lonely Crowd’s preface labels this our worst current enemy) is the smile we muster in response to other smiles; and it is the acquiescence that a fourth grader gives to a friend who wants him to agree that a particular comic book hero is stupid, or that a plot twist was “neat.” In a gradually more impassioned crescendo of simple social compulsions cataloged—although each on its own means little more than common courtesy—Riesman argues that the modern world is unable to stop other people’s thoughts, voices, and values from spoiling into our own heads. Like the John Cheever story “The Enormous Radio” (in which a woman goes mad eavesdropping on her neighbors) Riesman’s “other-directed” psychic eavesdroppers tune in to others so well that their own navigation systems seize up.

The metaphor that readers tend to remember from The Lonely Crowd is that of the “radar” that “other-directed” persons are said to be equipped with—the diabolical opposite of the “gyroscope” that an earlier generation’s “inner-directed” people had. The catch is that in a world of radars, you’d risk crashing into everyone else if you flew by gyroscope.

The enemy in Riesman is finally this kind of adjustment. Randall Jarrell’s wry version of the same notion is Riesman’s in spirit: “President Robbins [a character in Jarrell’s novel Pictures from an Institution] was so well adjusted to his environment that sometimes you could not tell which was the environment and which was President Robbins.” Todd Gitlin oddly describes David Riesman as wanting to “counsel society, not lecture it” (foreword to L.C., xiv). But counseling and society are the two things that Riesman feared most—counseling connoted the therapeutic culture of an “other-directed” age, in which aspired to perfect adjustment. And society as a word for the whole of the country’s culture—well, it was just that inclusive model of sociability he wanted to avoid.

As only Dissent magazine was churlish enough to note in
his obituary. David Riesman began his professional life in the law, writing "briefs for the anticomunist Rupp-Coudert Committee, hunting down Reds in the city’s schools." There were a great many reasons for young liberals to feel and act anticomunist in the early 1940s, but Riesman’s commitment to unearthing communists at work in the schools has a macabre resonance with his later inductive against schools’ susceptibility to the creeping conformity of materialist capitalism. In each case, what he feared was that we’d be corroded into conformity, into crowdishness, without knowing it.

Fictional Knowledge: The Double Life of Conforming Novels

The striking thing about Riesman’s prognostications, in retrospect, is how much such gloom and doom seem to fit rather than bravely defy the culture of the 1950s. If Riesman depicts a world in which everybody but a few lonely social scientists is busy forfeiting individuality for a shot at complete social integration, the texts of a wider cultural realm suggest that his concerns were shared and his diagnoses implicitly echoed—even in the very realms where Riesman believes he is seeing the worst kind of conformity. What makes Riesman and his sociological ilk far more interesting than their notions alone would warrant are the ways in which texts in the broader popular culture realm at times echo the very Riesmanesque diagnoses that would seem to apply most perfectly to that pop cultural realm itself.

It is immediately noticeable that even the very texts that William Whyte and David Riesman single out as typical of the small-minded conformism of the period are themselves busy preaching against small-minded conformism. And it is the texts that now seem to us the most dated, the most perfectly typical of the depressing era of McCarthy, jitterbugs, and brainwashing phobias, that present the most seemingly heartfelt indictments of just the phenomena that sociologists like Riesman most feared. Take, for example, Sloane Wilson’s novel, The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit (1955), which was made famous by the 1956 film starring Gregory Peck.

If this book lingers in our memories at all, it is as an indictment of the era’s lockstep conformity in business matters, in praise of its hero’s ability to buck the system and win. And yet, why? Indeed, William Whyte calls the novel one of the acmes of “sanctimonious materialism,” an indictment that makes perfect sense given that the hero leaves a job with a philanthropy to go to work for a go-getter corporate type, straighten out his foundation work, and get his boss the national recognition he craves. Where’s the critique in that?

It lies, seemingly, in the attitude with which the author and the protagonist gaze down at the Byzantine coilings of the machine. The book is admittedly autobiographical in parts—in fact, its successor, the deservedly forgotten Man in the Gray Flannel Suit, is an out-and-out memoir, and openly laudatory of its hero’s success in both climbing and gently shaking the corporate ladder. In any event, the love-hate relationship established between the novel’s protagonist and the ordinary world of striving nine-to-fivers seems to be shared by the author of the book. However, a closer look at the novel itself reveals why it was such a confusion and delight to Wilson’s once-legion readers. The novel is two things at once: very quick to criticize the conformist ethos of contemporary business, and its “Organization” underbelly—but also quick to diagram how inadvertently easy success in that material and vocational world can be, once one has attuned oneself properly to the social surroundings.

In a pair of linked scenes that probably best synthesizes the whole novel’s concerns, Wilson issues an indictment of his society—and then reveals his own dependence on the

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very phenomena that he criticizes. It begins when young business executive and protagonist Tom Rath has a chance to meet with his boss to tell him what he really thinks of him and his ideas. Rath explains carefully to his wife that this meeting is a transparent exercise in what Erving Goffman (in a 1957 article) was about to label “face work.” But if for Goffman (as we shall see below), face work is simply what we do all the time in order to avert embarrassment, then in Wilson’s account, the careful social acquiescence involved in such face work is particularly suited to the servile truckling that the corporate hierarchy demands of its low dogs. Rath explains to his wife what will happen when he goes in to meet his boss:

There’s a standard operating procedure for this sort of thing. . . . It’s a little like reading fortunes. You make a lot of highly qualified contradictory statements and keep your eyes on the man’s face to see which ones please him. That way you can feel your way along, and if you’re clever, you can always end up by telling him exactly what he wants to hear. . . . For instance, I’ll begin by saying, “I think there are some wonderful things about this speech. . . .” If Hopkins seems pleased, I’ll finish the sentence by saying “and I have only the most minor improvements to suggest.” But if he seems a little surprised at the word wonderful, I’ll end the sentence with “but as a whole, don’t think it comes off at all, and I think major revisions are necessary. . . .” As I say, it’s standard operating procedure, the first thing the young executive must learn.24

This cynical passage seems to align Wilson as well as his character with the “mass society” critics because it suggests that the Organization has a comprehensive logic all its own, to which one must religiously conform in order to gain advancement—at the cost of one’s own ego and personal honor. Tom’s wife Betsy, who knows that for Tom’s salary to increase he must go into the corporation wholeheartedly (and hence willingly), reprimands Tom’s cynicism. The face-off seems clear: Tom stands for a Riesmanesque skewering of social conformity, while his wife buckles down and does what society demands.

Given Tom’s anatomy of what’s required of him, you expect his showdown with the boss to end in disaster or passive acquiescence, either in the open revolt his critique seems to require, or in the yes-sirring his wife urges on him as the best way to a fat paycheck. What’s striking about the novel, however, is that neither occurs.

Rather, the carefully guided sycophancy that Tom was describing to his wife gets reenacted, but with this difference—that Tom doesn’t feel he is a licksipple. In the “face work” interaction, he finds a way to kowtow while feeling that he’s being his own man. At the moment that Tom is about to speak, the novel enters into a free indirect discourse that renders us greater immediacy of his thought processes and his actions than we’ve yet had—an entrance marked by Tom’s own sudden awareness of the gap that opens up between what he thinks and what he actually does in the world. Tom finds that he is so acutely tuned in to his surroundings, so engrossed in the present moment as both human and organizational encounter, that what he says has everything to do with his boss’s magnetic effect on him, and nothing with what he had planned to say before the actual meeting: “The hell with it, Tom thought suddenly, so clearly that he half thought he had said it. Here goes nothing. It will be interesting to see what happens. In defiance of his intentions he heard himself saying aloud in a remarkably casual voice, ‘To tell you the truth, Mr. Hopkins, I read the latest draft of your speech, and I’m afraid I question it pretty seriously.’” And of course that (Tom’s minor criticism, offered brashly but with an implicit solution built in) is exactly what the boss wants to hear. The free indirect discourse at this moment allows Wilson to convey that Tom’s body clearly knows what to do, without his conscious mind knowing that he knows it. Tom’s social being has taken over completely for the exchange; he’s become a cog in the machine—but a cog so willing that his behavior doesn’t even feel mechanical. Nor is this a horrifying moment (my body is acting without me). It is instead a ful-
fillment of the promises that the corporate world holds for Tom. Through the corporation, he can not only be part of something larger than himself, he can even find a self that is guided by social directions he need not consciously understand for them to work upon him.

The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit suggests that the novels of the period were capable of bemoaning the ways in which social conformity was enacted—and yet simultaneously capable of exhibiting as valid or attractive the very forms of behavior that most perfectly exemplify such conformity. But the point about Sloane Wilson goes deeper. Why is it that this generation was so attached both to the sort of behavior that Riesman criticizes and to critiquing that behavior? Why wish to guide one’s social actions by the strong force of other’s opinions and bodily coercions surrounding one, and at the same time to bemoan one’s society’s tendency to do just that?

What’s the pleasure in anatomizing the very same things that one upholds, in cowering the values that are, apparently, one’s own and one’s society’s? Especially if one is committed to an account, as Riesman and his ilk obviously are, that collapses the will, agency, viewpoints, and ideology of each member of the society into a larger social viewpoint. In other words, if we are all operating under the shared assumptions of an inadvertently homogenized society, what possible pleasure can be derived from flagellating one’s own flesh, from gravely describing as errors the very same behaviors that one doesn’t only endorse, but actually practices? Can this have been a generation that enjoyed being told its pathologies almost as much as it enjoyed having them?

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**Face to Face with**
**Erving Goffman**

When individuals are in one another’s immediate presence, a multitude of words, gestures, acts, and minor events become available, whether desired or not, through which one who is present can intentionally or unintentionally symbolize his character and his attitudes.

—**ERVING GOFFMAN, Interaction Ritual**

If so, then it must have been a generation utterly flummoxed by Erving Goffman. Pleasure there may be in watching others’ autonomy slipping away, or in thinking of ways to win back from the suburbs, or the communists, the precious free agency that our ancestors had. But what pleasure can lie in being told that the very notion of individual agency subsequent to social forces is itself an illusion? What satisfaction can the conformity fighters have derived from the argument that there is no way to behave or even to be in public which is not by definition conforming? In such an account, individualist ethics and politics abruptly vanish, along with the fear of the crowd. What’s to be feared if the crowd is no different from any other kind of social interaction—and if there is no prior selfhood against which the counts as an assault?

Goffman, whom Blackwell’s recent **Companion to Major Social Theorists** called “arguably the most influential American sociologist of the twentieth century” even though he “does not fit easily fit within a specific school of sociological thought,” offers the most innovative way, between Riesman’s pessimism and Putnam’s Panglossian optimism, of rethinking the appeal and alarm of the social realm. But he does so by repudiating entirely the notion that there might be a moral stigma or a moral value attached to the social realm as completely as he does the notion that the social and the political realms might be disassociated from
one another. Yes, there is an ideal state of what might be called "socializing," but it makes no sense to orient oneself for or against that state. It simply is where human beings dwell.

Goffman's lasting contribution to American sociology was his account of the well-nigh irresistible social role played by "face work"—a phrase that fuses in Goffman's account a universal concern for "saving face" with a similarly universal notion that all meaningful human interactions are those that take place "face to face." This makes the notion of the "social" in Goffman a happy fusion of the considerations of immediacy and of intimacy. As Adam Kendon points out, Goffman's perennial concern is the question of "co-presence" or mutuality. According to Goffman, persons sharing the same physical space (however broadly defined) are always either in a "focused" or "unfocused gathering" in relationship to one another—even pedestrians passing by in the street have an unfocused interaction in which each one both "gives" signs (by a wave or a deferring bow, say) and "gives off" unintended information about action (by a purposeful acceleration). 25

There is little or no room for deep agency in Goffman. Rather, sophisticated social structures cast a shadow that resolves as a kind of shallow agent within what Bourdieu would call the habitus. Persons matter for the parts they are willing to play in an extant order; parts that are foreordained not because they have been programmed or have had their freedom removed, but because there is not much to human agency apart from its enactment of these roles. In Goffman's account, the "interaction order" provides so rigorous and well developed a basic structure that very little is required from individual actors to play their parts in it: interaction sequences establish slots, and slots can be effectively filled with whatever is available: if you haven't got a sentence, a grunt will serve nicely; and if you can't grunt, a twitch will do. 26

Goffman's approach is manifestly radically divergent from Riesman's. Rather than being immersed in an interaction order which in its turn constituted selves from its interests, in Riesman, selves precede the interaction order and are perpetually at risk of being lost within it. Although Frederic Jameson is wrong to assert that Goffman can only imagine selves emerging from formal recombination of social parts because he is responding to the freewheeling and overly existential 1960s (Goffman's face work pieces were first published in the 1930s), he is still right to discern in Goffman a deep skepticism about any plan—political, social, or ethical—that presumed a way to develop or maintain a self without reference to the constitutive force of society. 27

The space that opens up between Riesman and Goffman may seem primarily defined by this disagreement: about where agency resides. Riesman holds a contradictory notion of subsumable free agency (we were free, then the crowd/society took it away from us). Goffman (in a move that Giddens criticizes for its avoidance of the complications of real arguments about agency) says that the external social world is where decisions reside and occur, and the persons who feel themselves behind the social realm matter far less than they think: "not, then, men and their moments. Rather, moments and their men." 28

One upshot of this radical (for an American sociologist) account of agency is that both "the political realm" and "privacy" disappear into what might be called the social matrix—or, more aptly, the omnipresent crowd. Simply put, nothing is not a crowd to Goffman. Although Goffman works hard to distinguish between pedestrian interaction (unfocused) and conversational face work (focused), he also makes it clear that there's no bright line in social action. Shared physical presence is enough to make a social scene (and hence in effect a crowd) for Goffman; no amount of vicarious contact can substitute for it, and no amount of avoidance can erase its facticity. Solitude is a quiescent interlude only.
I vividly remember first reading Goffman’s acute observations about how people share or fail to share seats on a bus. It is not that Goffman erases consciousness from that fact—indeed, he even includes an apt account of what people feel when yielding or being yielded a choice seat. It is just that even such feelings are for Goffman—as they were for Marcel Mauss in his account of gifts—epi-phenomena of the social process, rather than personal, particular, and precipitating factors that somehow precede or originate the social practice. You might think of Tom Rath suddenly finding himself telling his boss “the truth” about his speech: that kind of action before thought, or against one’s prior judgment, is just what Goffman predicts that face work will produce: moments making their men, not the other way around.

Ultimately Goffman’s is a god of small things, easily wounded by pertinence, easily charmed by the completion of what might strike many as a totally minor social transaction—what might strike Riesman as mere acquiescence to a coercive society. Here, for example, is how Goffman imagines the sad fate of a character we might usefully compare to Virginia Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway:

At a small social gathering the hostess may be expected to join in with her guests and become spontaneously involved in the conversation they are maintaining, and yet at the same time if the occasion does not go well she, more than others, will be held responsible for the failure. In consequence, she sometimes becomes so much concerned with the social machinery of the occasion, and with how the evening is going as a whole that she finds it impossible to give herself up to her own party.

For Goffman, the moment of “giving herself up” to a social interaction is the acne, the light of the world, precisely because he has scant time for any kind of mental activity that takes place otherwise than in face-to-face interaction. So it is for Mrs. Dalloway too—but in Woolf’s novel, the creepiness of her involvement in her social life is expressed by the fact that the suicide of a young man, Septimus, is what it takes to make her “feel the fun of it all.” Woolf is anatomizing and undercutting Mrs. Dalloway, showing how limited her life is because everything in her life is experienced with reference to the “fun” of social goals. In Goffman, such goals really are all there can be to life. In fact, it is worth noting that Goffman even has considerable difficulties dealing with what might be presumed to be an easier case for a student of interaction studies—namely, the meeting of different cultures. For Goffman there must always be normative and then deviant social behaviors.

What light does Goffman have to shed on the waning of a Riesmanian account of social lives, and of the threats that crowds were or were not felt to pose to our American autonomy? It may seem that the most salient point here is the comparative failure of Goffman’s views to sway his contemporaries. It is admittedly dangerous to theorize too broadly about a field that has changed so much in fifty years, and undergone several conceptual revolutions around just this question of agency and social determination. But it is fair to say that Goffman made it possible to see the incursion of an omnipresent crowd mentality in all social interactions not as an abomination or a loss of freedom, but as an everyday irrefutable fact of life.

Although Goffman himself never reached any kind of mass audience, however, he has had a sort of trickle-down or flow-through effect in some thoroughly unexpected ways. So too did the roughly contemporaneous “ethnomethodology” of Harold Garfinkel, which—with less wit but a broader claim to theoretical generality than Goffman—also proposed studying ordinary behavior in public with a view to understanding the laws that govern interpersonal behavior that we may be mistakenly tempted to see as autonomous. Salient to both Goffman and Garfinkel is the notion that sociability is so purely omnipresent that embracing it, or indeed failing to embrace it, has no ethical valence at all: that Goffman’s work on people who failed to
be properly social was largely contained in his most famous book, on *Asylums,* tells us enough about Goffman's account of what it would mean to deny the necessity of playing by generally agreed-on rules.

One thing that seems to follow from Goffman's rejection of the ethically overloaded, the practically paranoid accounts of agency in writers like Arendt or Riesman, is that the ground is cleared for a fascinating kind of ethical inversion. From being simply what we do, in our everyday social lives, face work becomes, in an increasing number of social scientists of the very late twentieth century, an actual teles of human culture, something to aspire to rather than simply to enact.

You might simplify the movement from the 1950s to nowadays like this: Riesman told us that we were being lumped together into one blob when we'd be better off trying to establish ourselves as autonomous islands; Goffman came along to proclaim that no man was an island; Putnam righteously opines that we'll be better human beings if we cut out being islands. Goffman's position is really no closer to Putnam's than to Riesman's because both Riesman and Putnam are prescripting about a phenomenon of social life that Goffman endeavors only to describe. Yet it is easy to see how Goffman's studied value neutrality on that hot-button topic of sociability's role serves to clear the ground for thought like Putnam's. The remarkable evolution of William Whyte's thinking from the 1950s to the 1980s is perhaps the best test case for how the gradual transformation from sociophobia to sociophilia could occur.

Endearing Sociable Elements:
The Changing Work of
William Whyte

The downfall of the mass society critique is certainly striking, and it would be putting the cart before horse to ascribe it, as many do, to the radical experimentation with anti-authoritarian anarchy in the 1960s. The change in disciplinary logic that I have argued is strikingly evident in Goffman can be seen to precede the most explosive years of the 1960s—and to unfold more slowly and thoroughly throughout the 1970s and 1980s. One way to chart the gap between the "mass society" worries of the 1950s and the turn back toward the virtues of homogeneous sociability is to chart the evolution of the work of William Whyte.

As an early adapter of Riesman's ideas, Whyte can hardly be bettered in the world of popular sociology. True, his Organization Man, published only six years after The Lonely Crowd, quotes Riesman by name only twice, only one of those involving the phrase "other-directed." But the prevailing influence is evident. Whyte fears both a hypostatized Organization that is the acme of the group-minded suburbanite and the "moral imperative" that makes individuals treasure the group living "that defines our era" (OM, 394, 393). In Whyte's formulation, the "generation of technicians" runs the risk of becoming instead a generation of machines: "they are becoming the interchangeable elements of our society and they accept the role with understanding" (OM, 594-95). Whyte's 1956 logic in many ways perfectly mirrors that of Riesman—save that he is even more willing than Riesman to hypostatize the invisible enemy of the social realm and call it "Organization."

So it is all the more striking, thirty-plus years later, to come across Whyte's valetudinary 1988 City: Rediscovering the Center and the accompanying film, The Social Life of Small Urban Spaces. City—which sparked major crowd-friendly changes in New York's urban planning—speaks of "sociable elements" as the extreme desideratum of street life, and praises the kind of park benches that allow (or, more usefully, actually force) people to clump together in groups of two or three.

Whyte also has a compelling and detailed study of the movement of street traffic around corners and other places
of high traffic, showing that people seek out high-traffic areas for their interactions rather than moving out of the flow of pedestrians. That is, although people questioned about their beliefs will report disliking crowds, they will still be observed unconsciously moving into the flow of pedestrian traffic on "100 percent location corners" so as to be bathed in it. Gazing down at the timed interactions on the plazas, discovering how easy it is to predict when one person will leave a lunch, when another will move into the center of the street for a conversation, Whyte does not, as he did in The Organization Man, bemoan regularity. Rather, he now delights in predictability, knowledge about pedestrians that is deeper than their own self-knowledge. Whyte's suggestions are all geared toward increasing the kind of clumping and temporary confinement that city dwellers want (without knowing) out of their streets. Despite what we think about ourselves, Whyte explains at one point "we come to its green spaces not to escape from the city but to partake of it."

Whyte's book is unmistakably marked by Jane Jacobs's magisterial 1961 The Death and Life of Great American Cities, with its compelling plea to the vital necessity of "useful great city diversity." In Jacobs's account, the existence of multiple voluntary associations, and the "hop-skip" weak ties that link such organizations, are the ligaments of a urban skeleton, and perennial pedestrian interaction is the city's lifeblood: of the four "generators of diversity" that Jacobs deems indispensable to a city neighborhood's life, the one that still leaps out at us is "3. Most blocks must be short; that is, streets and opportunities to turn corners must be frequent."* In some sense Whyte's entire book is an effort to extrapolate from the brilliance of that categorical topological insight.

And yet Jacob's work alone is not enough to explain Whyte's emphasis on the underlying predictability of a flourishing organic urban street life. Jacob's mantra was urban diversity, her keynote was complexity, and her descriptions and prescriptions all rely on a separation between sociologically homogeneous associations and inherently polymorphous urban interactions.

Jacobs's work was so revolutionary and so beneficial to urban redesign because it predicted urban success on the basis of a city's openness to multiple uses—simultaneous, overlapping, and even over time, so that people could change jobs or lives completely but remain living in the same neighborhood. It made the fact that people lived among others with whom they had nothing but geography in common, that they found multiple ways of living with others with whom they felt no positive alliance into a virtue of city life, not a negative. The very fact of our changing jobs and life interests over time, so that we might not even like or care to talk with our own younger selves, is exactly why, Jacobs argues, a city is a great place to live: we can make those changes, snub a whole different set of neighbors, without leaving the same block.

But Jacob's work as it filters down to us through the lens of Whyte's City erases that account of diversity and complexity in favor of Jacobs-inflected descriptions of how statistically predictable pedestrian flow can be massaged and ameliorated. This selective reading of Jacobs is certainly preferable to Robert Putnam's mistaken assertion, in Bowling Alone, that Jacobs endorsed the concept of ultimately homogenizable communities. But Whyte is still "following" Jacobs where she never intended to go. Whyte misreads Jacobs in this way, I believe, because City was published in an age when "sociable elements" already seemed a laudable and integral part of public life, when politicians of the left and right alike were both groping for rhetoric of togetherness. Adjustment had come back in—perhaps because Goffman said that there was no action that was not either successful adjustment or a failed attempt at it, perhaps for some other reason altogether, related to the irritations of "the Me Decade" or to the success of successful business forces in portraying their corporations as leaders of an all-inclusive community.

*The Return of the Blob 215
Whatever the chain of causation, Whyte's book in retrospect does not look like the continuation by other means of Jane Jacobs's prescriptions for a city of social complexity and sidewalk accessibility. As attractive as those nuts-and-bolts prescriptions are, as engaging as Whyte's short film about behavior on sunny and shady streets is, *City* still strikes me an early and unheralded member of a wave of books that, without being communitarian per se, managed to make respectable the idea that simply being involved in social activities with other bodies, no matter what the activity or what the nature of the interaction, was a positive good in and of itself. And that is a line of thought that may have found fertile soil in Goffman's apparent endorsement of face work—but one that was not to find its most outspoken, and wildly popular, exponent until Robert Putnam published first an article and then a book on the phenomenon of "bowling alone."

**Putnam's Passion for Crowds**

Robert Putnam's *Bowling Alone* may not yet have entered into the same retail league as *The Lonely Crowd*, whose sales of 1.4 million tower over all sociological competitors. But the more than fifty thousand copies sold in its first three years are not the only way to gauge the impact of both the book and the 1995 article on "Bowling Alone" with which Putnam began the "social capital" furore. "Bowling alone" shows up in mainstream newspaper articles a staggering 650 times since Putnam's article came out in 1995. By the same token, "social capital" (a phrase Putnam did not invent, but did popularize) appears 244 times just in the last year in major newspapers, and more than 1,000 times over the past ten years, 411 times in major journals.

As Benjamin Barber's memoir *The Truth of Power* demonstrates, Putnam had a clear impact on Bill Clinton's presidency; a series of celebrated appearances in England, Ireland, and points farther east in Europe shows that Putnam was a knight errant of "social capital" overseas as well.

It is crucial to note how completely Putnam's thinking and his phrase-making have shaped even concerted opposition to what his ideas are understood to be. When rebuters assail Putnam (a professor of public policy at Harvard University), they are still liable to talk in manifestly Putnamesque terms like "kicking together." Even the Web site Meetup.com, a progressive rallying point for local activists that is explicitly opposed to communitarian tendencies, invokes *Bowling Alone* as philosophical inspiration.

Both for those who love him and those who hate him, both for the left and
for the right, Putnam has articulated not only the problem—absence of bowling leagues and similar associations—but also the range of debatable solutions. Some of these solutions are explicit in his work—Turn your TV off! Copy North Dako
ta! Don’t come from the South!—whereas others are only implicit. Might women not do better as homemakers with plenty of volunteer time than as overtasked professionals? Couldn’t the young imitate the Depression generation?

It is true that Putnam’s brief is for “social capital” specifically—meaning the value derived in part from the sharing of norms and the assumption of predictable homogeneity in other’s ethical stances—rather than “sociability” in general. But the response to his work certainly leans toward the sociable side. Critics and fans alike, with a few vocal exceptions in the heart of academia, agree that social capital’s version of sociability is good, and whatever we can do to increase congregation must in itself be a good thing. It is also worth noting that even popular writers whose inspiration clearly comes from the rational choice theorists of the Chicago School find reasons, sometimes arcane ones, to throw in their lot with an ideology that values what one such free marketeer, James Surowiecki, calls “the wisdom of crowds.” Although Surowiecki is at pains to emphasize that a market-based individualism is manifestly the best way to govern a country or to operate an economy, he makes ingenious arguments about the collective powers of individuals operating en masse (for their own interest) as a way of wedging the best of free markets with the desirability of some sort of crowd-based social cohesion.

The key to Putnam’s argument is that he finds it nearly impossible to conceive of any kind of social assembly that is not in and of itself a blameless good. So for example, critics of his 1995 article pointed out that by Putnam’s logic, even violent street gangs would be a good thing. In Bowling Alone, Putnam responds by agreeing—violent drug gangs are good things! Such gangs have great social benefits (increasing camaraderie, looking out for one another, developing a strong sense of community). He then goes on to admit that such palpable benefits do, alas, get outweighed by a gang’s violence, interruption of educational and economic opportunities, and so on.

At the heart of Putnam’s diagnosis is his vision of the erosion of social values that held our society together in the 1950s, a high-water mark of voluntary associationism. “Bowling Alone,” the 1995 article that laid the groundwork for the book that followed, began simply by claiming that the decline of league bowling was a leading symptom in a general decline in America’s civic life. As we failed to associate with one another for play—play being the very realm where Riesman saw the oppressing their subjects) (ca. 1555). François de la Noue is of a different sentiment when he writes in 1587 that “il semblera peut estre que ceste foule soit petite; mais je pense qu'elle se monte . . . par an” (it may seem that this oppression is small, but I think it is rising . . . each year). He’s referring, of course, to new taxes.

It is around this same time that fouler regularly begins to refer to the action of a mass of people as well as of things. Montaigne writes in his Essais of the common occurrence of people struggling to be first: “les ames [que] seroient a se fouler a qui prendroit place la premiere” (the souls who would press to take the first place). A century later, at the opening of Racine’s play Athalie, Atner describes a crowd of worshippers thus: “le peuple saint en foule inondait les portiques” (the devout people in large numbers inundated the church porticoes). One notes here two opposing images of the multitude: stagnation, as in the example from Montaigne, or power, as in the example from Racine. Although fouler could mean to stamp one’s feet—the same action used to stamp fresh wool or grapes—it never developed the sense of forward motion, that is, of gushing or streaming. Another set of images quite apart from those of textiles or the harvest (and often clichés) had to be added.

Italian has the words foliere and folia from the same Latin root, and it takes a similar course from the textile mill and the winnepress into the streets; however, the ron forms in French and Italian have divergent histories. In French, fouler was used to refer to a multitude of people in one place as early, as the thirteenth century, although more frequently it was used to mean the place where the action of “pressing,” literally or figuratively, occurred. Italian, however, doesn’t produce an equivalent in folla.
until the seventeenth century. Modern dictionaries always cite the example of the Jesuit orator, Paolo Segneri, who in a work from 1673 writes, “Non vedì tu ciò che accade in un’altra folla? Quanto entra in chiesa chi allor fa forza ad entrarvi, tanto pur v’entra chi lascia in essa portarsi dall’impetto della calca, che gli vien dietro” (Don’t you see what happens in another crowd? However much one might struggle to enter a church, so much easier it is to relinquish one’s movement to the force of the crowd which comes behind). Here folla begins to describe not just a mass of things under pressure, but specifically a mass of people. Before Segneri, and indeed for some time after, the transitional location was “folla di gente” or “folla del popolo” (mass of people).

In both French and Italian the idea of pressure inherited from the Latin Fullo finds specific application in the crow. But in France, at the end of the eighteenth century, there is yet another wrinkle: the idea of pressure becomes internalized in the pair retouillement and défouillement, which express the notions of repression and release, respectively. When, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Freud’s works were translated into French, these words become official psychoanalytic vocabulary.

complete cooption of formerly autonomous individuals—so too would we fail to participate in any of the meaningful markers of our shared political and social lives: fail to vote, to help one another out in need, to assist the needs in our neighborhoods. And it is to the desertion of the broadly defined public realm, a realm that is social and political together, that all our other present woes can be traced.

Putnam hails the very features of the 1950s that Riesman dreaded. As he sees it, the social world in an ideal era of associationism actually becomes the political realm, and a good thing too. It is not just that small social groups taught America political skills; it is that they actually constitute a kind of Jeffersonian freehold realm, politically vibrant in bowling alleys and Kiwanis bars. It was an era when those Putnam calls “moderates of all stripes” actually went to local political meetings so that “extremists” didn’t get control of local organizations (BA, 339–41).

The first key to understanding Putnam’s direct connection to the crowd alarmism of the 1950s is to note that like Riesman and company (and like Goffman), Putnam effectively erodes the distinctions between any sort of social organizations and the larger “crowd.” The social simply is a form of crowd life—one is out in the larger world, forced to rub together with everyone else and to come to share their judgments in due course. Putnam offers many reasons for liking local organizations, but each time, these return to one of two things. On the one hand, he praises the generalizable features of such associations, the way that they fit seamlessly into a national fabric. On the other, he embraces local manifestations of national collectivity as the only medium whereby properly compulsory physical meetings can ever happen. In other words, the local is admirable in other words because only locally can one become part of a properly compulsory crowd. This may be Putnam’s most curious wrinkle: he likes getting local because there is no getting away from these (unchosen) others around one: we must all perform get along, since none of us is going anywhere.

This leads Putnam to some very odd claims. He dislikes computer socializing, but only because there is too much freedom associated with it. One can post and run away, one can choose to speak only with other BMW owners, one can avoid neighbors while seeking out distant mental kin. Earlier ages had a useful kind of group balkanization he maintains, which allowed for comforting sameness within the group. Today, however, we are cursed with a universally accessible medium (the Internet) that has the effect of allowing places where identities can vanish and pure volition can reign: as the New Yorker cartoon puts it, “on the internet, nobody knows you’re a dog.” For Putnam, the obligation to huddle together with others is precisely what made the groups of the 1950s (from bowlers to readers) desirable.
and the failure of today’s social networks is precisely that they have succeeded in becoming too inner-directed, leaving individuals free to turn on the television.

Television is Putnam’s emblematic bad individual choice—not because, as earlier critics like Adorno had it, such media consumption will synchronize one with other members of the lonely crowd, but because television is the one social activity that doesn’t synchronize us in any way: it requires no investment of self in the difficult but necessary social face work that Putnam so valorizes. You might compare Richard Hoggart’s moving description, in *The Uses of Literacy* (1957), of a thousand lonely viewers each getting programmed by exactly the same show. The great good thing in Putnam is the great bad thing in Hoggart—socialization, into the vast involuntary grouping that is a nation taken all together.

The recent history of television as a social activity seems to suggest an underlying national agreement with Putnam’s critique of TV’s atomizing force, as we witness a remarkable upsurge in forms of collective television watching. This shift is not necessarily visible in the field of television studies, which has always (even in the 1960s, long before it was delineated as a field) tended toward the sociological, not the aesthetic, and hence has always tended to oversimplify and overestimate the significance of generalizable “group reaction” to television as medium. It is therefore not surprising that most academic work on the topic of television has—despite what Robert Allen has identified as a 1970s turn toward valuing “popular” cultural forms and hence toward developing reading and analytical strategies for television shows as texts—generally stressed the experience of viewership and of television’s “influence” far more than its “content.”

Despite that orientation, scholars, with a few laudable exceptions such as Anna McCarthy, do not seem to have dwelt on the recent explosion of what might be called “watching together.” The sort of group TV watching that used to be reserved for neighborhoods with few televisions, or for spectacularly publicized events like the Super Bowl and the last episode of *M*A*S*H* has now become a weekly part of many people’s lives. Parties for something mildly unusual, such as, say, the final episode of *Survivor*, have given way to simple weekly group consumption of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* or *The Sopranos*. Television is bad alone; well, then, let’s screen together. Again, as with *The Man in the Gray Flannel Suit*, we can witness the culture in a striking kind of lockstep with the dictates that emanate from popular sociology. It is almost as if people were reading Putnam, as if groups from California to Maine mobilized to fight the diagnosis of “watching alone” as soon as Putnam told us how troubling a trend it was.

However, this synchronicity represents not Putnam’s ability to set trends but to

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9B My Summer of Solitude

David Humphrey

New York in 1976 was much darker than it is now, especially downtown. Black clothes seemed blacker then. The municipal government was broke, and nights in my neighborhood were lit by the regular torching of abandoned buildings and stripped cars. I moved to the city that aggressively cold winter, dazzled by the activities of people making new art in big, cheap industrial spaces. I was twenty and attracted by what I imagined was solitude en masse; it was my existential/romantic notion of the urban artist/loner. I remember entering the determined tides of work-bound people each day to realize, months later, that I had never recognized a single person I had passed previously.

Independence Day that year was the Bicentennial. New York hosted a proud and very fancy Disney/Macy’s celebration with fireworks at the bottom of the island. Purposeless curiosity and loneliness propelled me that day from my home in the East Village down Broadway into the enveloping dusk. A slow trickle of people thickened with each southward block to become a crawling density at the recently completed World Trade Center. I don’t think the streetlights were working—I remember the space becoming less and less discernible, slightly disorienting, even threatening. Thousands of us eventually impacted to a complete halt in the dim canyons just below the tow
ers. A collective sense of frustration nearly boiled over as the first booms of the fireworks rolled over us. A slow surge forward squeezed away personal space we thought had already been surrendered. There was no way to get out and no way to see the show except in flickering reflections on the upper windows of the after-hours skyscrapers. The anticipated astatic fusion with the national television audience and cheering crowds who lined the harbor never happened. We missed the biggest pyrotechnical entertainment spasm in history. Ten thousand pleasure boats had joined the massive fleet of tall ships watching from the water along with hundreds of thousands of people on shore. Marines, Coast Guard, and the Army Corps of Engineers took orders from a command center in the Trade Center's south tower. We, the blocked ones, could only hear the countless shells and mortar fusillades launched from barges and islands. The next day's newspaper informed us that we also missed patriotic music, celebrity readings, and a helicopter pulling a giant flag across the sky. That same paper also contained news of an almost simultaneous raid by Israeli commandos to free hostages held at Entebbe airport in Uganda.

Thousands of us had been cut off. We were failed witnesses, clotted and stagnant, blinded by the buildings meant as a backdrop for the television audience relaxed safely at home. It was an indignity for us to be smeared against the very cause of our frustration. We were an inconvenience to each other and to the crowd-control authorities. I naively hated those people. They were the others, the ones art was happy to offend or confuse. They were the undifferentiated ones we artists needed to frame our absurd singularity. My conception of this art-world "we," however, was articulate them, to unburden the American conscience of what has been troubling far more people than simply Putnam himself. Why assume that sixty minutes of gangland badinage unites any worse than thundering pins, if we simply agree to participate together? You might ask Putnam that question; or you might ask the growing numbers who, although they haven't yet joined bowling leagues or the PTA, are willing to sign on for this piece of social capitalization.

Long Live Face Work!

Putnam's praise of compulsoriness as the way out of our current social anomie—television viewing parties would be good, one imagines Putnam saying, if an entire apartment block were required to attend—makes clear what exactly Putnam conceives his debt to Goffman to be. For Putnam, the upshot of Goffman's interaction studies is simple: meeting face to face is a good kind of sociability, whereas technological mediation allowing communication beyond the immediate vicinity is bad. One of Putnam's Goffman footnotes is appended to the following claim: "experiments that compare face-to-face and computer-mediated communication confirm that the richer the medium of communication the more sociable personal, trusting and friendly the encounter is" (BA, 176). Putnam doesn't despise computers. Instead, he detests "cyber-balkanization" because he hates the idea that a thoroughly interest-driven conversation can be sustained online. (Unsurprisingly, Riesman fantasizes about just such a medium being available for a lonely school-child to connect up with others who truly think like him.) Putnam fears people being brought together via our most pressing interests: "A comment about Thunderbirds in a BMW chat group risks being flamed as 'off topic.' Imagine by contrast the guffaws if a member of a bowling team or a Sunday school class tried to rule out a casual conversation gambit as off-topic" (BA, 178).

Putnam's claim is more than merely wrong: it is revealingly off base. After all, if I brought up Thunderbirds in a Sunday School class, I would risk, if not eternal damnation, then at least strong disapprobation. Why can't Putnam see that? Because his ideal model for social interaction is an all-in form of social universality, where each group, no matter what named or doing, will feature just the same sort of face-to-face interaction and the same kinds of conversations. He wants to believe that the voluntary associations of his own youth were, in exact counterpoint to what Riesman argued, a laudable model of compulsory universal community. Philip Larkin begins a 1974 poem with an unappealing invitation:
My wife and I have asked a crowd of craps
To come and waste their time and ours.14

In Putnam’s world, there can be no finer sort of invitation, no better promise of future happiness than this: mutual waste.

Refusing the Blob

Of course, this Tocquevillian take on modern America malaise is not just Putnam’s. There has been a notable resurgence of people who endorse community self-policing—often, as in Amitai Etzioni’s work, without much sense that individual rights ought to stand in the way of an overall social decorum. And in fact there is a mainstream of sociological thought now that left and right look to “civil community” or (most famously in Eastern Europe) “civil society” to save us from the depredations of state and economic pressures alike. Moreover, in a wide range of left-wing sociology, the dominant emphasis has been of documenting the decline of the old networks and “weak ties” that formerly ensured economic survival or social inclusion.

Thus, for example, Eric Klinenberg’s Heat Wave achieved national prominence (and a review in the New Yorker) because it documented the same loss of civic nodes that Putnam bemoans—here, it was the decay of a neighborhood’s social fabric that allowed many old people to die when Chicago boiled in the summer of 1995. And Sidewalk, by the prominent young sociologist Mitch Dunier, circles back in its conclusion to the same insight: that the key difference between success and failure on the streets of New York is how much a neighborhood chooses to define its street people as “part of us”—how much latent social capital is in place, in other words, to enable trusting activities like letting the homeless use a bathroom proceed.44

In short, Putnam’s call for a return to the glory years of “social capital” resonates with those on the right and the left who are looking for a way to climb out of the hole that many believe was dug by the 1960s insistence on autonomy and on the individual’s separability from society. It is not only sociologists who are telling us to forget the claim to un-crowd ourselves and accept that even in our most existential moments of putative separation from the world, the cheery crowd was grinning over our shoulder all along—or should have been.

Hannah Pitkin wrote The Attack of the Blob to point out the error involved in supposing that rather than simply an adjective like “political,” “public,” or “pri-
vate," "the social" is a blobbish enemy, a crowd endowed with superhuman agency and capable of subsuming individual lives and agency uninvited. Pitkin's critique of Arendt's attempt to divide "political" and "social" too strictly from one another applies equally well to Whyte (ca. 1956) and to Riesman. We are lucky no longer to see the world through such blinkers.

Still, there is no need to embrace the opposite extreme. Robert Putnam's mellifluous praise of a general American social life that is compartmentalized into smaller (compulsory) locales without forfeiting its potentially nationwide (or global) hold as a social force deserves as comprehensive a critique as Pitkin's of Arendt. The challenge now is to achieve the same kind of clarity about Putnam and the partisans of the Blob that Pitkin achieved about foes of "the social."

Some questions arise. Are we justified in mounting such a contemporaneous attack? Pitkin, after all, waited until thirty years after Arendt's death before pinpointing her faults. And you might reasonably object (communitarians and followers of Michael Sandel certainly will object), to attacking social capital with full-gale force in any event. After all, wasn't such extremism in the putative defense of liberty the vice that got Riesman and his antisocialists into such trouble in the first place?

The worry is a false one: Putnam's errors are made no smaller by the fact that fifty years ago Riesman and Whyte fell into an opposite mistake. Nor should the genealogy I've sketched exonerate Putnam. Putnam's wholehearted attempt to make full social participation into the only ethical path forward may indirectly derive from Goffman's notion that to be social is inescapable. However, it grievously misreads him. At worst, Goffman is fatalistically suggesting that everything we do is oriented not toward our own perceived intentions, but toward social conformity or "embarrassment avoidance." Goffman's determinism cannot translate into a positive endorsement of becoming more caught up in the daily whirl of social activities. Wherever we go, in front of the TV or bowling (alone or together), we bring social energy with us. And to begin proclaiming such a wholesale embrace of the more directly coercive and compulsory of such actions a good thing is as misguided as proclaiming it, like Riesman, a bad thing.

Putnam's is a worldview that calls for us—all to do our best to form social units with those around us, regardless of what the political or ethical implications of such a grouping may be. Putnam never calls the social capital that he wants to endorse "the realm of the crowd." But he might, because what he idolizes is an undifferentiated space of social agglomeration that prevents any individual from exercising judgment about how one form of association differs from another (he even produces statistics purporting to find that membership in one group, any group, can double the years of life remaining to you—and that joining a second will add half as much again).

Putnam assumes—that one form of social life is exactly equivalent to another. Therefore he forgets, or deliberately passes over, the crucial political category that Hannah Arendt called "solidarity." To Arendt, there are two ways to decide to aid our fellows, one requiring face-to-face contact and the other equally effective with and without such contact. The former, "compassion," results from the chance to share another person's feelings, or to be swayed by their social needs, or even to be moved in their immediate presence, by the desire to avert embarrassment. By contrast, the best forms of political "solidarity," Arendt believed, could be achieved as well sitting alone in a room as they could be out on the barricades.

"I am least alone when by myself," Arendt wrote (quoting Cato), because contemplation allowed one to draw away from one's immediate surroundings, and the result was that one could best connect with those whose thoughts most closely and interestingly aligned with one's own. Solidarity need not occur in solitude—it can occur in a prop-
erly political public realm, where we meet others as particular, nonfungible members of a species which we are indebted to as a whole." But alone or together, we will be moved by solidarity to do well by others. And for that, we need neither bowl with them, nor share an ethnic grouping with them, nor (to refute Riesman) protect ourselves from their tangible presence in our rooms or in our hearts. Given the proper frame for encounters, we can exercise individual judgment to override both the thrill of solitude and the social excitement of being among the crowd.

Florence Nightingale's Cassandra mentions the gruesome feeling that a young Victorian lady feels when she has finally begun to pursue (in private or in correspondence) something that genuinely interests her: she has to appear among her family and friends, to lose the possibility of "imagination" and "power" to meals times: "If she has a knife and a fork in her hands during three hours of the day, she cannot have a pencil or a brush. Dinner is the great sacred ceremony of this day, the great sacrament." 16 The bedroom (like the street) is a place of refuge, a site of abstraction where we can potentially perform any kind of intersubjective or private action, and dinner is the kind of "convivial" and compulsory social space (laudable because compulsory, remember) that Putnam would like to prescribe for all of us.

Communitarianism and its near relatives need not go as far as mandating "community standards of morality" to begin trespassing on meaningful aspects of our intellectual emancipation. Putnam makes repeated effort to convince us that our imaginative forays—pursued alone or via abstracted affiliations on Internet or paper—are worth less than the shared commitment to waste time together. Each time he does so, we should feel behind his imposing statistics on membership and longevity the dead hand of an earlier age's conformity pressing our arms. Are our interest groups, our advocacy and our strikes, really best viewed through their resemblance to bowling leagues? Is what we say and do in them of less concern than the fact that they, like a Victorian dinner party, exist to give shape to our week and order our intersubjective action?

Putnam is probably right to be contemptuous of using the Internet to do nothing more than find other BMW enthusiasts, with whom one can discuss BMWs and only BMWs for as long as one wants. But mental dislocation, attained through a novel, a TV show, or an Internet search, can also have that otherworldly quality that Proust describes in the opening pages of Swann's Way: "I had been thinking, all the time, while I was asleep, of what I had just been reading, but my thoughts had run into a channel of their own, until I myself seemed actually to have become the subject of my book: a church, a quartet, the rivalry between Francois I and Charles V." 17

Riesman's near-paranoia can certainly stand a reminder that social practices are at the heart of imaginative, rational, and physical lives, and that we ignore our sociable existence at our peril. But by the same token, Putnam could stand to be reminded of something that Goffman never quite admitted: that there is more to our lives, more that goes on in our thoughts, than simple association with those who surround us can explain.

As I write this, I am locked in a not-quite interaction with all the other patrons of my library's reading room, a companionable agreement to allow one another to visit whatever peculiar haven our own computers, documents, or paperbacks allow. I avoid catching their eyes as I wool-gather; they agree not to bump into me as they search for reference books. Are we in the kind of nonbinding social interaction that Goffman proposes? I suppose so. And yet we are also, like Proust's reader, potentially anyone and anywhere. Why should Putnam fault us for foregoing the occasional Recycling Committee meeting for that? Some of us will connect to the world most perfectly in that committee. Others will do better, feel freer, know their neighborhood better, by roaming unaccompanied down dark streets.

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82. Kentridge explains his position in these terms: "Aware of and drawing sustenance from the anomaly of my position. At the edge of huge social upheavals, yet also removed from them. Not able to be part of these upheavals, nor to work as if they did not exist." Cited in Carolyn Christov-Bakargiev, *William Kentridge*, ex. cat. (Brussels: Palais des Beaux-Arts, 1998), 56.

83. Kentridge cited in ibid., 75.


88. According to Kentridge, the megaphone derives from "a photograph of Lenin speaking into a megaphone I had seen in John Willet's *The New Sobriety*. Also one often sees that born in Max Beckmann paintings," cited in Benezra, "William Kentridge," 15.

CHAPTER 8A


CHAPTER 8b


CHAPTER 9

I am grateful to Linda Schlossberg, Sean McCann, Alex Star, David Cunningham, Peter Knight, Jeffrey Schnapp, and Matthew Tiews for conversations and insightful critiques of an earlier draft of this article.


3. Habermas's *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is far more indebted to Arendt's work on "the social" and "the public" than it acknowledges, and surprisingly ready to align itself with John Stuart Mill's fear of "the social" as invidious internal enemy.


6. As I discuss below, the functionalism that dominated midcentury academic sociology produced fascinating value-neutral orientated responses like that of Erving Goffman, as well as the resolutely microstructural "ethnomethodology" of Harold Garfinkel, usefully summarized in Anne Rawls, "Harold Garfinkel," in *The Blackwell Companion to Major Contemporary Social Theorists*, ed. George Kitzer (Oxford: Blackwell, 2003), 122-3. I do not mean to underestimate the sway that Parsons held, merely to suggest that our account of the 1950s in social science is radically incomplete if we neglect the historicist, agent-oriented, and resolutely preachy sociology of writers like Arendt and Riesman, for whom the problem of social forces destroying individual autonomy oozed through every intellectual crack.
12. In fact, the latter-day descendant of The Stepford Wives, the 1996 television movie Stepford Husbands, effectively inverts the logic of the original because it presumes that women are horrifying precisely because they want to make their husbands into emasculated losers. In other words, the horror of suburbia is that it removes men from their ordinary round of social activities; it traps them at home. In the original, the horror resided in the idea that men were robotizing women precisely to make them into nothing more than reliable social beings, members of golf and sewing clubs.
13. Robert Putnam, Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000); hereafter abbreviated as BA. Putnam’s 2003 Better Together, written with Lewis Feldstein and Don Cohen (New York: Simon and Schuster), continues the logic of Bowling Alone by way of twelve case studies of “restored American communities” ranging from UPS to Craigslist.org to a Boston union. In each case, the laudation is reserved for those who decide to agglomerate for the pure sake of agglomerating—the UPS vans that meet for lunch, the church that offers a coffee bar as well as a service. Cohesion for its own sake is king.
14. Pells, Liberal Mind, 232.
15. Todd Gitlin, in a moving memoir appended as preface to the 2001 Yale edition of The Lonely Crowd (xi–xx), insists that Riesman’s later work was dedicated to nurturing just such forms of opposition group. But the language of The Lonely Crowd is clear in its distrust of any organizing against organization.
16. Riesman also laments that Ayn Rand’s The Fountainhead didn’t go far enough in praising individuals. In any case, he believes it exaggerates the freedom an architect would actually have in the oversocialized present; “to be admired perhaps by the reader but too stagey to be imitated” (LC, 156).
19. Nor is it social science alone that manifests this fear. As a number of recent histories, among them Timothy Melley’s Empire of Conspiracy (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 2001) have argued, the popular culture of the 1950s and 1960s was bombarded with images of alien infiltration and mental cooption. Compared with the paranoid heights of some utterly mainstream science fiction writing and films of the era, the feverish ravings of Philip K. Dick sound anodyne.
21. Examples drawn from various chapters in The Lonely Crowd, including 3:2, 4:3, 6:1.
22. There is a fascinating analogy here to Erving Goffman’s accounts of city walking as the ultimate form of “face-to-face interaction.” Goffman’s empirical contention is that walkers in a city virtually never collide with each other because they are constantly making microscopic adjustments to avoid what otherwise would be statistically inevitable bumps. For Goffman, this demonstrates how implicitly we rely on our social radar, even when we think of ourselves as “abstracted” or “alone.” To Riesman, it might seem another germ of corruption.
40. See also Drew and Wooton, introduction, 1–13, and “Goffman as a Systematic Social Theorist,” 50–79.


32. Ibid., 120.

33. In one odd moment, Goffman goes out of his way to explain that different social modalities around one’s intrusion of self into a conversation (saying “I,” speaking of oneself, and so on) will lead to awkward breaks in conversation when members of different cultures meet. Goffman then moves quickly to gloss such moments of cultural confusion by urging that we treat such interactions not as representative of the personality of the member of a foreign culture but instead as determined entirely by cultural practices: “It is to these differences in expressive customs that we ought to look first in trying to account for the improper behavior of those with whom we happen to be participating and not try, initially at least, to find some source of blame within the personalities of the offenders” (Interaction Ritual, 123). This odd passage perfectly typifies some of Goffman’s risks. He presumes that a discovery of difference will inevitably lead to the judgment that the other’s behavior is “improper” because it is not the same as one’s own—an implicitly ethical valence that Goffman then moves to neutralize by saying that the culture, not the person, is to blame.


35. Or, as he puts it in City, “What attracts people most is other people. Many urban spaces are being designed as though the opposite were true, and what people like best are the places they stay away from.” William Whyte, City: Rediscovering the Center (New York: Doubleday, 1988), 9.


37. Excepting perhaps Marx and Engels’s The Communist Manifesto—if it counts as sociology, and if sales figures were available for it.

38. The phrase has been variously attributed, most reputably to Glenn Loury, and the concept certainly has a substantial intellectual life among economists. Gary Becker and James Coleman, among others, have made independent use of it.

39. All numbers are derived from LexisNexis. Interestingly, “lonely crowd” had 212 recorded usages in journals and newspapers over the last ten years, still a fairly respectable showing for a fifty-year-old phrase.

40. I am grateful to Alex Star for the reference to Barber’s memoir; the most famous European flap involves a junior minister in Tony Blair’s Labour government reportedly demoted for criticizing Putnam openly during one of his high-profile visits to Downing Street.

41. There also seem to be a sizable number of venture firms and young entrepreneurial organizations with variations on the phrase “social capital” in their title: Googling the phrase yields, for example, SocialCapitalPartners.ca, a Canadian “social venture” firm, and a range of other quasi-commercial undertakings above the link to Putnam’s own site, BowlingAlone.com.

42. See the special issue of American Prospect (Winter 1996).


44. Putnam finesse the difference between the 1990s and the 1890s, which were, according to Jason Kaufman, the true high-water mark of such associations. By Kaufman’s account, in the 1890s, virtually all such organizations were explicitly ethnically segregated. As associationism declined in the early twentieth century and mutual insurance became a less important reason to join a club, memberships became more segregated by class than by ethnicity. Hence what Putnam sees in the 1950s is by Kaufman’s logic only a feeble trickle-down from the great flood of fifty years earlier—and in fact a trickle that is certainly segregated by class, a fact that is disguised because class and neighborhood correspond so perfectly. Putnam can call it neighborhood assortment of a common nationwide phenomenon, but by another reading, the numbers reveal associations still devoted to assorting people by class status.

45. William Schambra endorses Edmund Burke’s notion of local legions of decency in “All Community Is Local,” in Community Works: The Revival of Civic Life in America (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998). Only in loyalty to our nearby platoon, writes Burke, do we understand our loyalty to the world—a line of reasoning that resonates well with Putnam’s account of a social life mediated by small groups but ultimately potentially uniform on the national level.
46. Thus, for example, Putnam lauds Baumgarten’s *The Moral Order of a Suburb*, which criticizes suburbs for having an “avoidance” mechanism for resolving conflict, instead of fights or legal remediation, which are the admirable alternatives practiced by small towns or well-functioning city neighborhoods.

47. Putnam may want to take warning from an Internet experiment that attempts to overcome the medium’s inherent permissiveness and potentially free access and exit. Judith Donath of the MIT Media Labs, who introduced something called Chat Circles (http://chatcircle.media.mit.edu/about.html), a Web site that is open uniformly to everyone on the Web; avoids mandating any kind of conversational topic or avatar; and tries in small, technical ways to replicate the human crowdedness of a real conversational space, like a kitchen at a party or a meeting hall. Chat Circles, however, has been unsuccessful, perhaps because it makes physical movement through its “circles” deliberately difficult, and perhaps because it does not offer a topic like BMWs for members to discuss. Conversely, however, one of the most clearly successful features of the Internet has been instant messaging among teenagers, whose conversations are voluntarily restricted—with no technical assistance from Internet modalities—to the chat circles they have chosen to form with their own classmates at school.


50. McCarthy’s *Ambient Television: Visual Culture and Public Space* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2001) is a deft discussion of the phenomenon of attending mass televised spectacles, such as going to a stadium to watch, on giant screens, a game being played elsewhere.

51. Whether the effect of the Internet is to balkanize viewership is a topic of much current debate.

52. Philip Larkin, “Vers de Societe” (1974, in *High Windows*), reprinted in *Collected Poems* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), 147. To be fair, the poem does go on to muse, “funny, how hard it is to be alone” and it ends by almost seeming to accept the awful invitation: “Beyond the light stand failure and remorse/Whispering *Dear Watlock Williams: Why of course*—”


55. In a suggestive set of essays translated as *Solidarity, Solitude* (trans. Lillian Vallacca [New York: Ecco, 1990]), the Polish poet Adam Zagajewski argues that even the most socially conscious and collectively minded thinker is obliged to retreat into solitude in order best to serve the forces of solidarity. Zagajewski’s formulation is slightly different from Arendt’s but equally provocative. For Arendt, it is in the very act of seeking solitary thought that we can best “represent others” to ourselves, through a proper understanding of their words and thoughts. For Zagajewski, “the collectivity doesn’t have to be the subject or the severe and immediate judge of emotions or visions. It does after all consist of single, solitary (since using this word I want to deprive it of the perverse poeticalness existentialism has lent it) individuals who, if they are consumed by a spiritual quest, need not check every minute to see if there is a leash tying them to the rest of society” (88). To Zagajewski, then, it is only our report back to the “collectivity” that bespeaks our solidarity. For both thinkers, however, the social is redeemed not by sacrificing to it the individual impulse, but by finding a framework within which what the individual does and thinks best can be returned, after suitable hiatus, to social play.


57. Marcel Proust, *Swann’s Way*, trans. C. K. Scott Moncrieff (New York: Random House, 1934). 3. Apropos of the question of whether the Internet can perform the same kind of mental transport that a book does, it is intriguing to note that there are recent accounts of schizophrenic patients reporting that they are convinced that their thoughts or their mind are being “surfed” from one Web page to another. They describe that motion as being controlled not by themselves, but by someone else’s Internet browser. This paranoid fantasy of long-distance manipulation...
showcases in extremis the sort of imaginary mental travel that can occur via the World Wide Web.

CHAPTER 10


4. Werner Sombart, Der proletarische Sozialismus (Jena: G. Fischer, 1924), 2099.


7. Le Bon cited in König, Zivilisation, 147.


10. Ibid.

11. Ortega y Gasset, España invertebrada, in Obras completas (Madrid: Revista de Occidente, 1957), 3105; hereafter abbreviated as El. Translated by Mildred Adams as Invertebrate Spain (New York: W. W. Norton, 1957); hereafter abbreviated as IS. I occasionally modify the American translation of España invertebrada, or avoid it altogether when it deletes passages or is otherwise wide of the original. On such occasions, I indicate my recourse to the original by referencing the Spanish version.

12. Ortega, Rebelión, 1791.


14. Ortega repeatedly insists that his use of the words aristocracy and masses does not necessarily connote class distinctions. What he has in mind is something far less mobile than the unstable modern categories of class. His mass men and elite men are innate qualities, which predetermine their members to leadership or obedience according to immutable cosmic laws. The distance between them is unbridgeable and social malaise the result of the perverse disavowal of that distance.

15. Werner Sombart, Der Bourgeois: Zur Geistesgeschichte des modernen Wirtschaftsmenschen (Munich: Duncker and Humblot, 1913), 461.

16. Werner Sombart, Händler und Helden (Munich: Duncker and Humblot, 1915), 107, 120.

17. Ibid., 99.


26. Ibid., 143.


28. Ibid., 18.


30. Antonio Vallejo Nágera, Higiene de la raza: La asepsia de los posípaxos (Madrid: Ediciones "Medicina", 1934), 8; hereafter abbreviated as HR.

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