Theory and History in the Human and Social Sciences will fill in the gap in the existing coverage of links between new theoretical advancements in the social and human sciences and their historical roots. Making that linkage is crucial for the interdisciplinary synthesis across the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, sociology, history, semiotics, and the political sciences. In contemporary human sciences of the 21st there exists increasing differentiation between neurosciences and all other sciences that are aimed at making sense of the complex social, psychological, and political processes. Thus new series has the purpose of (1) coordinating such efforts across the borders of existing human and social sciences, (2) providing an arena for possible inter-disciplinary theoretical syntheses, (3) bring into attention of our contemporary scientific community innovative ideas that have been lost in the dustbin of history for no good reasons, and (4) provide an arena for international communication between social and human scientists across the World.

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Editors

Memories of Gustav Ichheiser
Life and Work of an Exiled Social Scientist
Chapter 4
An “Iron Curtain” Between People: Theoretical Paradoxes in the Writings of Gustav Ichheiser

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His origins, his professional development, and the dramatic historic events shaping his life demanded Gustav Ichheiser to adjust to changed conditions without losing his integrity. We have reason to believe that this was not an easy task for him. His personal experiences, however, are not the focus of this chapter; rather, it is tracing how the intellectual and historical turns and challenges are reflected in his writings and how he, as a thinker and scientist, experienced them—in other words, which theoretical models and conceptions dominate his scientific work and how they correspond to the contemporary developments of theory in psychology and emerging social sciences today.

Approaching this question is in so far difficult as Ichheiser’s writings include explicit as well as implicit references to practically all topics considered important at his time. He did not engage with trivial matters. The topics that concerned him were all of fundamental nature. Consequently, when reading his work it appears as though he is aiming for no less than to use himself as an example with which to explain humanity and society at large. His writings are at once skillful and highly ambitious treatises, with which Ichheiser aims to play a seminal role in determining the application and development of certain scientific concepts, methods, and theoretical models.

For the following analysis, exclusively Ichheiser’s writings in German were examined. Of 32 published texts, eight texts that clearly portray Ichheiser’s most central thought patterns were selected. We assume that these—even if they seem erroneous 100 years later—are valuable products of thinking and insightful discussions of the unavoidable intellectual obstacles that psychology and sociology had to overcome at that time. Gustav Ichheiser was, and remains, an author with whom one can argue quite productively.
The Impossibility of the Mutually Shared Based on Psychological Premises

Gustav Ichheiser found it difficult to believe in phenomena such as shared realms of experiences, mutual interests or mutually pursued goals, solidarity or in similar ways of experiencing the world and feeling, shared worldviews, etc. We cannot judge whether these variations of interpersonally experiencing the world were alien or suspect to Ichheiser personally. As a scientist, however, he did not view the social world as primarily defined by shared experiences and meanings. Experiences of friendship and love barely play a role in his studies. Instead he devoted himself to inequalities and egoism. He started his thought premises from the view that feelings of isolation and loneliness were shaping the social existence of his contemporaries.

He saw the reason for the existential loneliness in the fundamental experience (Leiterefahrung)—which he thoroughly analyzed—that one's own worlds of feeling and thought are not accessible to others. According to Ichheiser, deception and disappointment dominate the interpersonal space, and thus, he attends to them in all of his scientific publications. Yet he surprisingly sparingly refers to the related concept of "alienation" (Entfremdung). One cannot find any indications suggesting Ichheiser had read Karl Marx and thus was acquainted with his concept of alienation. Neither will one find any references to the works of Georg Simmel dealing with the "problem of societal alienation" (Entfremdungssproblemstik), even though Ichheiser quotes Simmel in various contexts. Ichheiser tries to encounter the negative experiences of the social world above all as a psychologist, in his—as he called them—structure-psychological or structure-psychic studies (strukturpsychologische or strukturpsychische Studien).¹

Ichheiser presumes that you-centeredness of the human consciousness is one of its most important, constitutive features. The fundamentality of the you-centeredness is, however, simultaneously the principal problem: According to Ichheiser (1927a), it is accompanied by an essential split of the human consciousness, which he declares a "phenomenological primordial fact" and describes as follows:

The fact that we do not experience ourselves 'monistic' but 'dualistic' because we, as individuals, are constituted on the awareness level not as 'one-sided,' but 'two-sided,' — a fact representing a last instance — whereas the awareness of the one 'side' is established by individual factors, which can only be experienced by each individual themselves, while the other 'side' is established by shared factors; from which comes the absolutely original, but by no means arbitrarily constructed experience of a soul which 'dwells in the body' and through this body appears to the community and the you ... (1927a, p. 324)²

¹ See, e.g., "Das Du-Bewusstsein und seine ethisch-logische Struktur" Ichheiser, 1930a.
² German original: "Daß wir nämlich uns selbst nicht 'monistisch', sondern 'dualistisch' erleben, weil wir eben als Individuen bewußtseinsmäßig — was ein letztinstanzliches Faktum bedeutet — nicht 'ein-seitig', sondern 'zwei-seitig' konstituiert sind, wobei das Bewußtsein der einen 'Seite' durch individuelle, nur jedem einzelnen allein erfahrbare, das der anderen durch gemeinsame Faktoren gegründet ist, was aber eben das durchaus ursprüngliche, keineswegs aber nur irgendwie konstruierte Erlebnis einer Seele sich ergibt, die 'im Leben wohnen' und durch diesen Leib für die Gemeinschaft und das Du zur Erscheinung gelangt...."
It is the phrasing that is remarkable. Ichheiser talks about an “Insuperability of the chasm, which is destined to separate the I from the you and the this from the that forever,” and also from a “last-instance splitting of all consciously given into an ‘individual’ … and a ‘shared’” (ibid., p. 328). His conclusion is obvious: “The loneliness … of the ‘individually’ experienced existence must be assumed as a fact which necessarily and irrevocably results from the basic constellation discussed” (ibid.). Apparently, he was determined to portray the discussed “structure-psychological” facts as conclusively, ubiquitously, and omnipotently as possible.

In his essay *Das Du-Bewußtsein und seine ethisch-aesthetische Struktur* (1930a), Ichheiser assumes, however, that only a specific subarea of the consciousness comprises all of the “peculiar apperceptive processes” that form the picture of the other, what he calls the “you-centeredness” (p. 369). Weather just in part or as a whole, the relatedness of the conscience to other people always portrays, according to Ichheiser, a peculiar “double structure,” since the “partner” is not only accessible and experienceable, but also always inaccessible and unexperienceable. Thus, we always find ourselves facing a “fundamentally double-sided partner” (ibid., p. 374), whose concealed contents we cannot perceive. All contents of consciousness, according to Ichheiser, “as they are otherwise obtained and determined, are experienced by us partly as shared, but partly as only being experienced by us alone, only individually” (1927b, p. 310). A desk would consequently belong to the “mutually experienced environment” (or also to the “phenomenologically experience content as objectively and independent from the self”, ibid. p. 317), but the feeling of happiness would not. Feelings and emotions are only given to us individually. The shared contents are “independent of the self,” whereas the individual contents are always simultaneously idiosyncratic. Between these two extremes, nothing seems to exist.

This “double structure” is “indeed of a compulsive nature”; it is a “fact that discussion about becomes completely unnecessary” (ibid., p. 311). Yet it also reflects the actual experience of the other. Ichheiser is undeterred by the phrase in the last instance, but also surprisingly frequently uses the term *actual*. Sometimes it is written in quotation marks; sometimes it is not. Apparently, Ichheiser was aware that the term would need to be explained within a scientific context, but he never provides such an explanation. Sometimes he looks for appropriate synonyms: Only when we “[begin] to realize that, like our fellow human beings, they have a ‘soul’ that is different from their ‘appearance,’ we recognize the ‘basic framework’ of the respective ‘you’ image” (1930a, S. 374).

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1German original: “Die Einsamkeit […] des ‘individuell’ erlebtaben Dasein muß als ein aus der beprochenen Grundkonstellation sich notwendig und unablinderlich ergebendes Faktum hingenommen werden.”

2Translate from the German: “… mögen sie sonst wie immer auch beschaffen und bestimmt sein, werden von uns teils als solche erlebt, die gemeinsam gegeben, teils aber als solche, die jedem von uns nur allein, nur individuell erfahrbar sind.”

3German original: “zu meken [beginnen], daß wir, wie unsere Mitmenschen eine ‘Seele’ haben, die anders ist, als ihre ‘Erscheinung,’ erkennen wir das ‘Grundgerüst’ des jeweiligen ‘Du-Bildes.’”
First and foremost, Ichheiser mentions hypocrisy, lies, misunderstanding, and embarrassment, as in the relationship to the other these experiences lead to the full unfolding of the "implicitly designed two-sidedness of the you-consciousness" (ibid.). The most important postulate thereby reads as follows: interpersonal relationships are not allowed "to be" (ibid) but only "to play a role" in a way that makes an authentic participation in a relationship impossible. In other words, the actual cannot be shared or socialized. It is inaccessible to others. The actual is not social. The other remains a secret. Just like one's self, the actual self always remains inexperienced and incomprehensible to the other. One's self remains a secret, a fact about which Ichheiser seems neither fascinated by nor even fond of; rather, he is deeply concerned.

Already in these "structural-psychological" elaborations, Ichheiser's conception of man—bearing significant socio-critical features—takes shape. It is the idea of a human fundamentally split in by and society into the actual and the concealed, a human that in his social being is always also a deception. In Ichheiser's expositions, a society is a system of deceptions and misunderstandings. As a psychologist working within this society, Ichheiser hardly dares to touch upon the "actual" in the human being. Instead, he sees himself obliged to soberly record that the recognition of the other in his authenticity is impossible. In his opinion, the key task of psychology (as well as philosophy) is "to determine the fundamental boundaries of all communication between the immanent souled and the alien souled" (1927a, p. 329). Remarkably, this contemporary critique of society mixes with the postulate of a time-independent anthropological constant.

With significant interest and pedantry, Ichheiser devotes himself to the investigation of different varieties of the reciprocal deceit between the split individual, always obfuscated to the outside. In his studies one is reminded of Nietzsche:

With all that a man can make visible, one can ask: What is it to conceal? What is it to distort the view from? What prejudice should it bring forth? And then, how far does the refinement of this adjustment go? And where is he making a mistake? (cited in Andreas-Salome, 2000, p. 39)

It is this relationship Ichheiser aims to capture social-psychologically or—in his own words—sociologically. Indeed, he tries to explain the obfuscated human in his relationships to his fellow humans psychologically and to analyze the consequences of the almost total obfuscation social-psychologically.

In this way, he concludes from the fundamental absence of the "actual" in interpersonal relationships that fellow beings themselves are, in principle, unpredictable. They contain a range of (unpleasant) surprises. One cannot rely on them because only the knowledge about their "actual" would, according to Ichheiser, would allow for such a prediction. The reciprocal misjudgment is, thus, the fundamental social experience. It is, so one can interpret Ichheiser, the only real mutual experience that humans make among themselves and that really connects them. It sounds paradoxical.

The Sociologically Justified Impossibility of the Authentic

This paradoxical postulate is followed by the thesis on [The] over-estimation of the personality's unity as a source of illusion in person perception, as the title of his 1929 essay states. With his (what he calls) social-psychological considerations, he aims to show how the overestimation of the unity of personality emerges from a deeply rooted and delicately veiled—one might almost say cunning—a system of deceptions and obfuscations, which reciprocally lean on each other" (ibid., p. 281). Through the systematical revelation of the mechanisms of deception, Ichheiser hopes to enable a professional psychological assessment as free of deception as possible.

This self-posed task leads to a sharp social criticism. Again, the psychological argumentation mixes with the sociological:

With the irresistibly progressive rationalization of professional work, the tension between the private and the professional character strata becomes ever more lively. The more profoundly, the more personally, the more desperate the professional achievements are, the more intensively will all the "animating" personal forces of the psychical life try to pass over into the private sphere of existence: in the struggle against the demeaning of the entire existence the need for a distancing and detachment of all personal-private forms of life are increasingly vigorous and emphatic. (ibid., p. 284)

However, the question Ichheiser is pursuing has nothing in common with sociology. It reads as follows: "How now is . . . the respective individual in question actually? The clear answer to this question is of the utmost importance" (ibid., p. 285). The psychologist within Ichheiser seems to be overwhelmed by his sociological findings. How can a psychology looking for the "actual in the human" live up to the modern, flexible, split individual alienated through socialization? His answer: "And the real realization first provides the relativization of the characterological structures: the relativization, i.e., the assignment of specific character structures to specific (especially: social) environmental situations" (p. 286).

4German original: "... durch welch ein tief verwurzeltes und fein gewobenes, man möchte fast sagen raffiniertes System von sich wechselwirkend stützenden Täuschungen und Verschleierungen die Überschätzung der Einheit der Persönlichkeit geöffnet wird."

7German original: "Mit der unaufhaltsam fortschreitenden Rationalisierung der Berufsaufgaben, wird das Spannungsverhältnis zwischen den privaten und den beruflichen Charaktereigenschaften in uns immer lebendiger. Je sachlicher, persönlichkeitserener, entscheidet der beruflichen Leistungen sich gestalten, desto intensiver werden alle 'bezeichnende', persönlichen Kräfte des psychischen Lebens sich in die private Daseinswelt hinüberzusetzen versuchen: im Kampfe gegen die Entfaltung des gesamten Daseins wird das Bedürfnis nach einer Distanzierung und Lösung aller persönlichen Lebensformen sich gegenüber sachlich-rationalen immer lebhafter und nachdauerlicher geltend machen."

8German original: "Wie ist ... das jeweils in Frage stehende Individuum nun 'eigentlich'? Die klare Beantwortung dieser Frage ist von größter Bedeutung."

9German original: "Und die eigentliche Erkenntnis bietet erst die Relativierung der charakterolo..."
therefore always different, situational, and split in contextual “characterological structures.”

Ichheiser’s analyses of the relationships between disguised individuals cannot avoid looking at various mechanisms of manipulation that can occur within them or come about logically. It is no coincidence that he is later cited by Karl Rogers. And it is no coincidence that Ichheiser devotes a passionate treatise to Niccolo Machiavelli, with whom he believes to share the view that the social (and surely also the psychological) reality of the human is a fair (partly unavoidable) hypocrisy.

The essay about Machiavelli bears the headline Die Antinomie zwischen Politik und Moral nach Machiavelli. Ein Beitrag zu einer ‘Soziologie des Erfolges’ (1927b) and constitutes the beginning of a whole range of texts that Ichheiser calls success-sociological studies, the most important of which is the book Kritik des Erfolgs. Eine soziologische Untersuchung, published in 1930b. In it, Ichheiser attempts nothing less than to establish a new discipline, the sociology of success, which is to regard the phenomenon of success as an important indicator of modern life. As starting assumption the following socio-critical statement applies:

The social order of life comes with the double claim to us: we should behave according to norms and we should be successful; for social success is regarded as a sign, as a symptom of “internally standing the test.” There is a hidden contradiction between the social norms and the factually relevant conditions of success; and so we must first recognize by way of personal experience that we have been faced with an insoluble task by the double demand that we behave normatively and successfully. (1930b, p. 61)\(^{10}\)

This model is already known to us—a “double structure” (this time within society) that causes inner tensions and forces to disguise. The issue of deception remains central: The successful (Erfolgstüchtige) prevails according to Ichheiser by means of obfuscation. However, there are also several new notions.

Remarkable, for example, is the differentiation between the acting and the observing human—two social roles everyone occupies. The observer role seems to be more relevant for Ichheiser. It is the observers, after all, that are the source of the manifold deceptions. Accordingly, he bewails the negligence of the “social-psychologically decisive role of the observer... but foremost the role of the mechanisms of deception that he is subordinated to in the assessment of his fellow humans” (ibid., p. 63) in the education and in science. To disclose these deceptions and hence probably be liberated from them would mean increased courses of action. Ichheiser talks about an “inner liberation of the actor from a down-dragging observer-centeredness,” whereby “the overall level of the ethical-social life would be raised” (ibid., p. 65).

\(^{10}\)German original: “Die soziale Lebensordnung tritt mit dem doppelten Anspruch an uns heran: wir sollen uns normgemäß verhalten und wir sollen erfolgreich sein; denn der soziale Erfolg gilt als Zeichen, als Symptom der ‘inneren Bewährung’. Daβ zwischen den sozialen Normen und den faktisch relevanten Bedingungen des Erfolgs ein Widerspruch besteht, bleibt verborgen; und so müssen wir erst im Wege persönlicher Erfahrung erkennen, daß wir durch eine doppelte Förderung: uns normgemäß und uns erfolgreich zu verhalten, vor eine unlösbare Aufgabe gestellt werden.

\(^{11}\)German original: “Nicht die innere Gesinnung ist es, sondern das Anerkennungsbedürfnis, das Bedürfnis, “positiv” von den „Zuschürein“ bewertet zu werden, das in der Regel über Art und Richtung unseres Verhaltens zu entscheiden pflegt. Diesem Anerkennungsbedürfnis gegenüber erweist sich meistens unsere (unter Umständen) anders orientierte Gesinnung als machtlos: nicht vor der (inneren) Schuld fürchten wir uns meistens, sondern wir scheiden und im Einzelfall...
a reserved-distanced attitude, behind which an existence in need of resonance is concealed.  

This critical reflection sounds like an echo of various similar critical theses of other authors of that time, later advancing to classics of sociological thought. In the case of Ichheiser, this critique of modern rationalization mixes with a peculiar critical view on the social itself that is situated beyond historical and temporal contexts: "The contacts and relationships between people are ... steered and shaped by the social, i.e., essentially the "external" situations and positions" (ibid., p. 254). This critique, occasionally containing the intonation of a complaint, targets the quality of the relationship between humans: they are not authentic. Conversations and personal proximity are merely variations of a role rather than being real or deep enough. Proximity and connection are merely external and spatial and serve a specific purpose. Thereby, one grows apart from oneself. Again, Ichheiser criticizes the systematic mix-up and disguise between persons:

Therefore only the social relevant sides of the personality get in touch with each other, the individual relevant sides remain in the shadow; and still frequently not those but these are experienced as the actual essential mental layers of the own self. (ibid., p. 255)  

As a result, within society, the individual and its relationships are deprived of the foundation of authenticity. Ichheiser writes, "From a cultural historical perspective ... this tension between the psychologically and socially essential exasperated more and more with us and in us" (ibid.),  

and it is a rare example of culture-historical perspective. In numerous other places, he tends to repeatedly aim to describe "the impartially observed social reality" (1927b, p. 299) that is happening "at all times" (ibid., p. 300) and is accessible to a "clear depiction" (ibid.). He talks about "fundamental, time-independent" (ibid.) relationships and tries to understand them in "their full content of truth" (ibid.). Therefore, he introduces "solely legitimate" terms (1933, p. 104). Such thinking is in no way sociological, at least not looked at 100 years later, after the discipline has established a well-esteemed self-awareness and a specific epistemological perspective.

Sociologists—provided they have not fully fallen for structuralism—are opposed to view society as a time transcending structure, something ahistorical. Neither do they believe in "social constants" spared from societal change. In this study—which can only partially be called sociological—Ichheiser, in contrast, remains far from all

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13 One could encounter this sentence, almost word for word, in some contemporary sociological treatises. In the second half of the twentieth century, the concept of resonance found its way into sociological theory, for example, through Niklas Luhmann or Charles Taylor. Later, it will play a central role next to "alienation" and "acceleration" in the cultural sociology of Hartmut Rosa, which understands itself as a critique of modernism and capitalism, compared to Hartmut Rosa, "Resonanz: Eine Soziologie der Weltbeziehung" (2016).

14 German original: “In Berührung miteinander treten also stets nur die sozial relevanten Seiten der Persönlichkeit; die individuell relevanten bleiben im Schatten; und doch werden häufig nicht diese, sondern dieselben als die eigentlich wesentlichen seelischen Schichten des eigenen Selbst erlebt.”

15 German original: "Dabei verschafft sich, kulturgeschichtlich betrachtet ... dieses Spannungsverhältnis zwischen dem seelisch und dem sozial Wesentlichen an uns und in uns immer mehr"
supposed to give the social world the desired certainty and familiarity that he was not able to attain in his theories?

We cannot assess whether Ichheiser was aware of the earlier versions of semiotics. Even if he were, they would have hardly been convincing to him. Either way, semiotics was emerging during his lifetime. The most important of its postulates were formulated before Ichheiser started his academic career. Ferdinand de Saussure, for example, gave his lectures—proving fundamental for the development of modern semiotics and discourse theory—between 1906 and 1911 in Geneva, positing, among other things, that the importance of an element of language, a sign, could only emerge in relation to another sign. Does a sign independently possess meaning or is it its meaning never final and absolute? Is it flexible and movable and changeable in relation to other signs? The same principle is viewed as the basis of modern society by the later classic of sociology, Georg Simmel. In semiotics as well, language is understood as a type of a societal contract.

Ichheiser's works emerged in the beginning of the age of dissolving borders, whether geographic, linguistic, or cultural. Even today, the theme of the own and the alien dominates almost all humanistic and social-scientific disciplines. The uncertain and merely ephemeral borders trigger an explosion of information, communication, and consultation sciences, and the semiotic—with its epistemological theses and figures of thought—will pragmatically dominate throughout the twentieth century. Essentially, it still does. His contemporary form—which has partly become fashionable and ideological—dominates the idea that everything is a question of successful communication, from business to family life and even to psychotherapeutical treatment. As much as the focus of Ichheiser's considerations was on the central concepts and questions of the arising communication paradigm, just as much were his theses directed exactly against this upcoming paradigmatic pattern of thought.

The Art of the Modern Life: Welcoming Ambivalence

Gustav Ichheiser read many of his famous contemporaries, including Max Weber and Georg Simmel. Most of all, however, he read the co-founder of the German society of sociology, Alfred Vierkandt, who was strongly influenced by Ferdinand Tönnies, Edmund Husserl, and Emil Durkheim and greatly inspired Ichheiser. Thus, not surprisingly, Ichheiser himself frequently pursued genuine psychological questions from the perspective of an (epistemological) interest critical of society. His conclusion, however, remains the same within both disciplines, which he actually meant to strictly separate. He attested the personality structure as the social order with an inner fragility and duality that cause distortions, deceptions, and insecurity. The interpersonal and social existence are difficult challenges because they rob the human of its actual and, with it, one's freedom. For Ichheiser, society is only conned with loss. He scarcely sees possible gains resulting from interpersonal relations.
This is even the more surprising, as Ichheiser read Husserl. At least in his arguments, he continuously refers to phenomenology. Furthermore, in some places he sounds like phenomenology's passionate supporter and even defender. While the phenomenological studies of Alfred Schütz (1899–1959)—a student of Husserl and another contemporary of Ichheiser—were based on the concept of shared experiences and led to a proto-theory of the cooperative action of humans and a book about the meaningful structure of the social world, the theoretical considerations at which Ichheiser arrived were fundamentally different. He completely omits any notion of collaboration being possible between individuals even though they are not necessarily accessible and visible to one other in every way. The social other can be ignored, used, and exploited. According to Ichheiser, the other does not contribute to reciprocal acceptance, to the inspiration of the relationship, the self-awareness, even though it is precisely this that constitutes the most important finding of the humanities and social sciences inspired by modernity.

Another contemporary of Ichheiser, the internationally renowned Soviet philosopher and cultural theorist Mikhail Bakhtin (1895–1975), also intensively investigated (among other things) the question of how to overcome the isolation and the monadic existence enclosed in itself. Central to his thinking was the concept of a specific reciprocity among equal consciousness that, however, remain separate and do not merge or penetrate each other in any way (1963). Yet, although they remain separate, the specific reciprocity between them pursues the goal of overcoming the isolation and achieving unification. Bakhtin calls this kind of unification dialogical, multi-voiced, or polyphonic. According to him, the interpersonal polyphony is the highest form of unification—a unification simultaneously maintaining personal autonomy and the originality of character (ibid.).

And the polyphony reciprocity of equal and unpredictable consciousness or awareness leads according to Bakhtin (1963) not only to loneliness being out of question but also to freedom per excellence. Since freedom means that the actions of the actor always remain ambiguous open ended, action is only action if it is ambivalent. According to Bakhtin, if freedom, truth, and/or human thinking follow the dialogical principle, they emerge where "various consciousness's touch each other" (ibid., p. 107). Thus, logically, the object of a social science must be at least two people or consciousness or the reciprocity between them—a view shared by Husserl and later Schütz. Just like Husserl recognized an inevitable and infinite variety of perspectives within the social reality, Bakhtin already knew that within the social world—the world of action—nothing could be unambiguous or finite.

For Georg Simmel (1858–1918), alienation resulting from social differentiation and monetary economy was also a central social phenomenon. He, like no other, gave distinction to the concept of reciprocity within society. He believed in the "historical dissolution of all substantial, absolute, finite in the flow of things, in the historical variability" and tried to substitute with his sociology the "substantial solid values with the lively reciprocity of the elements themselves" (cited in Levine, 1995, p. 324). The prevailing mood of an existential uncertainty became the framework of his sociology of modernity. Simmel's thinking was entirely focused on the fleeting movement of the moment. In his logic and style, he was always searching; to him, nothing was finite (Lehmann, 1995). To him, a modern society was one in which everything had turned into movement. Consequently, he exchanged the concept of society for socialization because it was better fit to express the dynamic and rational of the social life. A society is not a substance but, rather, an occurrence.

His language also adjusted to the object that was to be conceived through his sociological considerations. Simmel’s essays tried to "express a then unreal relation to reality intellectually and linguistically. They are not based on the gestus of acquisition and domination. Within this a breaking up of the traditional scientific disposition is reflected. ... He does not force his thoughts on the real" (ibid., p. 160). The real remains an airy phantom, and Simmel never tried to turn it into a classification system. This shows his theoretical and personal openness toward modern ambivalence and also the conviction that social sciences will have to deal with ambiguous action in the future.

To realize this required quite a lot of courage, which is why, in retrospect, some authors are fond of Simmel. Günther K. Lehmann admires Simmel's "painless objectivity," knowing that Simmel suffered all his life from feeling he was an outsider, a stranger. And write in an essay remarkably titled Die Ästhetik des flüchtigen Augenblicks:

Topics that made Kierkegaard and Schopenhauer nearly sick, and drove Nietzsche... later into madness, others to suicide, dissolve in Simmel’s writings into impressions, phenomenological sequences and events. They blend into a diffuse fabric of witty, still today linguistically impressive, ideas. (Lehmann, 1995, p. 115)17

Gustav Ichheiser could be mentioned alongside these listed thinkers. His studies attribute a central role to the you-relationship, which, however, remains entirely negative. He was, nevertheless, fascinated by the scope of this relationship and devoted himself to it with much analytical passion. The discussion with others was tedious and problematic for Ichheiser. However, he correctly recognized the central theme of sociology and psychology in the following century. He just did not connect it to hope.

References


17German original: "Themen, die Kierkegaard und Schopenhauer fast krank machten und Nietzsche ... in den Wahnsinn trieben, andere später zum Selbstmord, lösen sich bei Simmel in Impressionen, phänomenologischen Sequenzen und Ereignissen auf. Sie fügen sich zu einem diffusen Gewebe von gestreichen, heute noch sprachlich beeindruckenden Ideenverbindungen."


