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## **Between Two Worlds**

Transforming the past is an uneasy after-play of regime changes. Obviously, the past will never pass away, and it will be rightfully and repeatedly rewritten. However, the past to be rewritten due to a regime change is a different case, since all of us are still here and can remember who we were, what we did and did not do. All the world revolves overnight at the time of a regime change. What was good will be bad and what was bad will be good.

### *New Roles for Old Actors*

Some people undertake to continuity. They remain who they were even if their roles have changed. Some of us win, others lose. And there are many survivors who want to win. They immediately appear wherever new roles are given out. Chameleons, mercenaries, neophytes and new nasties trample on each other's heels on the stage of regime changes. They carry with them the past which they deny in the present. They are lying, and they do have something to lie. They paint the color that they formerly called white as black now, and vice versa. The majority is not affected by the sweeping regime change: their social status is merely given a new name, but it does not alter.

### *A Peculiar Role*

The enactment of roles provides for harmonic social coexistence, in the course of which the incumbents of particular roles mutually trust each other that they are really the ones who they seem to be. A change in the system allocating those roles does not affect this function. When times change, people can also change, can't they?

However, there is a role which would not let its holder go once it had been occupied. This role begins to reflect change well before any sign of a change in the system could be detected. It had been carrying the future in the past, and when future turns into past, it will eternally become a part of the present. What can a person who has already changed, while he had to remain who he was, turn into?

Goffman applies the term 'discrepant role' to a role whose incumbent becomes more and more loyal to the expectations set for that role as he makes more and more efforts to deny it. This process leads to the creation of a double reality. One side of that reality is manifest in our everyday lives, the other side remains invisible unless it is faced in the looking glass.

All organizations strive to survive, and they maintain discrepant roles in order to survive. In normal cases these roles can be performed professionally, when their incumbents are driven merely by propensity, temperament or other kind of predestination. Spies, secret agents, undercover detectives and agents provocateurs always were and they always will be.

### *Authoritarianism and the Discrepant Role*

Authoritarian systems blur the boundaries between organizations and ignore the requirements of a reasonable distribution of work. The people who maintain and run such a system offset the lack of legitimacy for authoritarianism through the total expansion of control. Having subdued whatever is public, the authority has only one rival: the private sphere.

The functions denied from the public sphere necessarily submerge into the private sphere, and thus the system brings forth the very thing it is most afraid of: a forum for resistance, criticism and dissent.

There remains only one method to penetrate the private sphere, namely, the deployment of the secret service. The system creates an organization whose members pretend to be like other people in everyday life, while they cannot be like those others. In fact, they are very different; but the more they differ, the more cautious they have to be not to differ from those whom they are obliged to watch, on whose everyday resistance they have to report to their assignors.

### *Staking Out*

In systems that strive to exercise total control over society the secret service is not only one of many organizations, since it pervades all other organizations from the fire departments to the

mass media. Penetrating the private sphere, the secret service is able to see through society in its entirety.

Let us imagine an organization which can see everything, while the organization itself cannot be seen. Such an organization is not confined to professional employees only. On the contrary, its members have to be deeply embedded into specific segments of society, they have to perform the conventional roles credibly, otherwise they would be useless.

These people have to exist in two worlds. Not everyone can perform this role. In fact, it is hard to be a good friend or a loving partner. But this role demands an almost superhuman person who can remain, while “performing”, a good friend, a loving partner, a reliable associate or a devoted worker. Simultaneously he evades the expectations ascribed to his roles, and breaks the rules of cooperation betraying the other person. The other believes that his partner *looks*, not knowing that he actually *lurks*.

Who can do that?

### *Marginality*

First, it is worth mentioning the motivation evoked by the basic sociological situation called marginality. In sociological terms, the *marginal man* is a person who does not belong to the world he yearns for. As Merton (1968) argues, the case of the marginal man is typical of relatively closed social systems, where the members of one group adopt, as a positive frame of reference, the norms of a group from which they are theoretically excluded. In such social structures anticipatory socialization becomes dysfunctional for the individual, who falls prey to some of his own ambitions that he fails to realize or hopes that remain unfulfilled.

The system of state socialism, which replaced a rather static and semi-feudal regime, opened up channels of social mobility and unleashed the forces of ascent for millions of people. These forces, however, proved to be insufficient for satisfying individual ambitions when the system lost momentum and power. Previously ‘bright breezes’ had faded, promises had dimmed, and latecomers were desperately seeking the promised positions which had all been occupied by the early birds. But there was no way back. Who would long for misery, to return to the wretched people depicted by Hungarian writers – unruly shepherd boys (Mór

Jókai), barbarians (Zsigmond Móricz), the people of the *Pusztta* (Gyula Illyés) and proletarians (Tibor Déry) –, when he has already set out to seize the fortresses of intellectual and material welfare and to climb the social pyramid?

Naturally, the psychological energies which were liberated by marginality but had not provided gratification could be absorbed by the awesome machinery which was able to make people believe that it would give whatever fate had failed to give.

### *Amorality*

Crossing intergroup boundaries inevitably relativizes morality, which rests on the belief that the norms and values acquired through socialization are self-evident and inherent, while everything that differs from those norms and values is not only alien but also abnormal and unnatural. The one who is wavering on the border of two worlds may boldly say what the murderer replies to his victim in Pascal's parable:

‘Why do you kill me?’

‘What! do you not live on the other side of the water? If you lived on this side, my friend, I should be an assassin, and it would be unjust to slay you in this manner. But since you live on the other side, I am a hero, and it is just.’ (Pascal 1958)

It is a basic experience for the marginal man that whatever is truth at ‘one side of the water’ is falsity on the other side. In his monograph about George Gustavus Zerffi, an infamous mid-nineteenth-century Hungarian informant, Tibor Frank condemns his protagonist for cynically ignoring ethical norms (Frank 2000). In fact, Zerffi was the ideal type of the marginal man, constantly suffering from the desire to conform, while knowing that he would never be a true Hungarian, Serb, or Englishman, and he would always remain who he became after the fall of the 1848 freedom fight forever: a spy for the Austrian government to be disposed of when his services were not needed anymore.

A short story by Maxim Gorky, *Karamora* (1924) reveals the most about the psychology of whistle-blowing. It is a single monologue of a man once recruited by the Ohrana, who gives an account of his past when unmasked after the regime change. The text oozes with moral blindness: ‘I realized with my brain that I was behaving in a low manner, but this

realization was not confirmed by an appropriate feeling of self-chastisement, repugnance, remorse, nor even fear. No, I felt nothing of all that, nothing except curiosity...'

### *Personality Traits*

Although no-one turns to a career counselor in order to ask whether he is eligible for an informant's job, the personality profile of a would-be informant can be easily drawn. When one lives in a no man's land, the sole reality that counts is that of danger, adventure and experimenting. As Gorky's protagonist says, 'for us, when the insatiable thirst to know all, to try everything, to go through every fire, overcomes us – it is a hard struggle.' The thrills of leading a double life work as a narcotic whose amount has to be increased continuously. That is why the informant is not able to stop and forget. Spying on, documenting and reporting on other people's secrets gives one a magical power, which is devilish and divine at the same time. In comparison, everyday routines seem to be trivial, dull and trite activities evoking insufferable boredom.

### *Necessity*

In a case study Robert Darnton discussed the story of Jacques-Pierre Brissot, a Girondist participant of the French revolution, whose reputation was tarnished, even during his lifetime, by allegations that he spied for the police of the absolutist state before the 1789 regime change. When released from the Bastille, Brissot did everything to be recognized as the perfect revolutionary. Besides bragging about his arrest and captivity, he made day-by-day declarations of the revolutionary spirit, to be documented by echoing the teachings of the Encyclopaedists and worshipping Rousseau. Whatever he did not speak of was known only to him and police chief Lenoir. Darnton shows that Brissot, being a literary hack, could not hope for success in France's intellectual life, he went bankrupt, with a seriously ill wife, and was unable to provide for his family. He had found the way out from his desperate situation through offering his services to the police, which was eager to accept. His dossiers disappeared, not by accident, in the years of the revolution, so we cannot know on whom and why he reported to the police (Darnton 1982).

### *Susceptibility to Blackmail*

A distinct category is formed by the enlisted who were cornered by the secret service due to some defect or passion which was considered shameful or had to be concealed. The secret services discovered, well before Freud, that humans are 'polymorphously perverse' beings, as they also knew exactly that abnormal sexuality is by no means so rare as ordinary people, maimed by the taboos of everyday thinking, believe. Sexual marginality can remove one from the frame of life he considers habitual and natural just as sociological marginality does. The difference lies in socialization preliminaries, whose interiorized norms make it for the person unbearable to face himself. Recruiters knew the enormous power of clutching the guise of normality, which by far exceeded the power of rejecting a double role. Revolt from being stigmatized as a pervert defeats aversion to the equally terrifying role of the informant. One's being exposed to blackmail could also originate in lesser episodes, when the enlisted person took refuge in the discrepant role from being labeled as a criminal.

### *Dedication*

The idealist motivation, when the recruited person believes in the justice of the ideological system represented by the organization, may emerge in the case of spies functioning in foreign countries rather than standard secret service assignees. As KGB-bribed British spy George Blake argues in his autobiography, published in 1990, such a career or, rather, vocation can be chosen only by one who has a strong belief in some idea or serves a great cause (Mitrokhin and Andrew 1999).

The idealist motivation can be self-verification or it can be real conviction, which also works in the domestic domain. In the latter case the person poses in the role of the resolute protector of the just cause, which suppresses all other opposed moral or psychological considerations. This role concept had been naturalized – and perfected – by the Inquisition.

### *Ambivalence*

There is no informant without a person to be informed against. The depth and peculiarity of this relationship cannot be compared to any other interpersonal relation, particularly when positive feelings arise in the informant toward his victim, who has no idea about who the

other person really is. And it is very likely that positive feelings do emerge. No matter how big the difference between the target person and his surveillant is, the latter has to pretend maximum similarity to the person under his surveillance in terms of values, attitudes or tastes in order to get close. Believing that this sham similarity is true, the target person feels sympathy with his partner, considers him a friend and adopts him as a confidant.

The surveillant is entrapped, since it is hard to respond to honest love with dishonest love. Psychological consequences are minutely described by Antonis Samarakis in his novel *To Lathos (The Flaw, 1965)*, and a similar situation is depicted by Péter Nádas in his brilliant essay about Sacha Anderson, a perfect agent for the East German State Security Service (Stasi). The gist of this catch is that the agent, whether he wants it or not, protects the one whom he should harm. Having been unmasked, he cannot even decide what kind of relation he had with his partner, whether he was a friend or a foe, improving or worsening the other's situation.

### *Crime and Punishment*

Whistle-blowing is a series of events which incorporate punishment itself. There is no need for an outsider to pass judgment. Irrespective of whether the informant's acts are revealed or not, the role itself is so profoundly inconsistent that once someone adopted it, intentionally or accidentally, he will not be able to cast away the psychological burden which arose from that inconsistency.

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