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M. Seeman

Alienation, Sociology of

Rather than present an overly strict definition of this rather vague umbrella concept which many would not agree with, the italics in the following five points sum up the elements that should bring the concept in sharper focus.

(a) Alienation is an *umbrella concept* that includes, but does not necessarily or logically inter-relate, the dimensions of alienation distinguished by Seeman: *powerlessness*, *meaninglessness*, *normlessness*, *social isolation*, *cultural estrangement*, *and self-estrangement* (Seeman 1959, 1976, 1989).

(b) With the obvious exception of self-estrangement, alienation always points to a *relationship between a subject and some*—real or imaginary, concrete or abstract—*aspect of his environment*: nature, God, work, the products of work or the means of production, other people, different social structures, processes, institutions, etc. Even self-estrangement could be conceived as implying a relation between subjects and their environment: the unreachable 'real self' described by Horney (1950) and others, as the product of a society still pervaded by Cartesian dualism.

(c) Since alienation is usually employed as an *instrument of polemical criticism, rather than as a tool of analysis and description*, this relationship can be described as one of separation—a *separation that is considered undesirable from some point of view*. Literature about the possible positive functions of alienation is very sparse indeed, probably because desired separations do not form a serious problem for anyone.

(d) Alienation always refers to a *subjective state of an individual*, or rather to a momentary snapshot of what is usually viewed, both in psychoanalytic and Marxist theory, as a *self-reinforcing inner process*. Societies, institutions, large-scale societal processes, etc. can most certainly be alienating, but to describe them as alienated would endow them with an awareness they do not have.

(e) *Viewing alienation as a subjective individual state or process implies nothing yet about its causation*: It may either be largely brought about by another pre-existent subjective, 'reified' state of the same individual, as psychoanalytic theory would hold (although admittedly, such a state would ultimately be environment-induced, e.g., by neuroticizing parents, traumatic early-life experiences, etc., but not directly environment-caused in the present), or by factors having an 'objective' existence in the individual's present environment (e.g., the Marxist and non-Marxist approaches regarding alienating work situations).

1. A Short History of the Concept

Alienation is a venerable concept, with its roots going back to Roman law, where *alienatio* was a legal term used to denote the act of transferring property. St. Augustine described insanity as *abalienatio mentis*; Ludz (1975) has discussed its use among the early Gnostics.

In modern times, the concept surfaced again in the nineteenth century and owes its resurgence largely to Marx and Freud, although the latter did not deal with it explicitly. After World War II, when societal complexity started its increasingly accelerated rate of change, and the first signals of postmodernity were perceived by the intellectual elite, alienation slowly became part of the intellectual scene; Srole (1956) was one of the first in the 1950s to develop an alienation scale to measure degrees and varieties of alienation. Following the 1968 student revolutions in Europe and the USA, alienation studies proliferated, at least in the Western world.

In Eastern Europe, however, even the possibility of alienation was denied; theoretically, it could not exist, since officially the laborers owned the means of production. However, the existence of alienation in the 'decadent, bourgeois' societies of the West was gleefully confirmed, as it was supposed to herald the impending demise of late capitalism.

In the Western world, and especially the USA, empirical social psychological research on alienation rapidly developed. Several alienation scales were developed and administered to college students (even national samples) and especially to different disadvantaged minority groups which, not surprisingly, tended to score high on all these scales. On the other hand, much of the theoretical work was of a Marxist persuasion and largely consisted of an exegesis of especially the young Marx's writings and their potential applicability to all kinds of negatively evaluated situations in Western society: the alienation of labor under capitalism, political alienation and apathy, suppression of ethnic or other minority groups, and so forth.

Thus, the 1970s were characterized by a great divide with, on the one hand, the empirical researchers—often, though not exclusively, non-Marxist—administering their scales and charting the degree of alienation among several subgroups, and, on the other hand, the (generally neo-Marxist) theoreticians, rarely engaging in empirical research at all.

During the 1980s, as the postwar baby boomers grew older, and perhaps more disillusioned, and willy-nilly entered the rat race, interest in alienation sub-

sided. The concept definitely became less fashionable, although a small but active international core group continued to study the subject in all its ramifications, since the problems denoted by alienation were certainly far from solved.

Maturing in relative seclusion, this core group, the Research Committee on Alienation (Geyer 1996, Geyer and Heinz 1992, Geyer and Schweitzer 1976, 1981, Kalekin-Fishman 1998, Schweitzer and Geyer 1989) of the International Sociological Association (ISA), managed to narrow the hitherto existing gap between empirical and theoretical approaches and between Marxist and non-Marxist ones. The empiricists basically knew by now who were the alienated and why, and they realized the near-tautology inherent in discovering that the (objectively or subjectively) disadvantaged are alienated. Moreover, many Marxist theoreticians had exhaustively discussed what Marx had to say on alienation, commodity fetishism, and false consciousness and were ready to engage in empirical research along Marxist lines.

It is in the work going on in alienation research since the 1990s that two developments converge: While 'classical' alienation research is still continuing, the stress is now, on the one hand, on describing new forms of alienation under the 'decisional overload' conditions of postmodernity, and on the other hand on the reduction of increasingly pervasive ethnic alienation and conflict. Summarizing, one could say that attention has shifted increasingly to *theory-driven* and *hypothesis-testing* empirical research and to attempts at discovering often very pragmatic *strategies for dealienation*, as manifested by research on Yugoslav self-management and Israeli kibbutzim.

2. Changes in the Nature of Alienation During this Century

To oversimplify, one might say that a new determinant of alienation has emerged, in the course of the twentieth century, which is not the result of an insufferable lack of freedom but of an overdose of 'freedom,' or rather, unmanageable environmental complexity. Of course, the freedom-inhibiting classical forms of alienation certainly have not yet been eradicated, and they are still highly relevant for the majority of the world's population. Freud and Marx will continue to be important as long as individuals are drawn into freedom-inhibiting interaction patterns with their interpersonal micro- or their societal macro-environment. However, at least for the postmodern intellectual elite, starting perhaps with Sartre's wartime development of existentialist philosophy, it is the manifold consequences of the knowledge- and technology-driven explosion of societal complexity and worldwide interdependence that need to be explained.

Perhaps this started out as a luxury problem of a few well-paid intellectuals and is totally irrelevant even

now for the majority of the world's inhabitants, as it is, certainly, under the near-slavery conditions still existing in many parts of the Third World. Nevertheless, in much of the Western world, the average person is increasingly confronted, on a daily basis, with an often bewildering and overly complex environment, which promotes attitudes of political apathy, often politically dangerous oversimplification of complex political issues, and equally dysfunctional withdrawal from wider social involvements.

Postmodern philosophy has largely been an effort at explaining the effects of this increased complexity on the individual, but while it is largely a philosophy about the fragmentation of postmodern life, it often seems somewhat fragmented itself. What else can one expect perhaps, given Marx's insight that the economic and organizational substructure tends to influence the ideological superstructure? However, while postmodern philosophy certainly draws attention to a few important aspects of postmodern living, it will be argued elsewhere that modern second-order cybernetics can offer a much more holistic picture of societal development over the past few decades (see *Socio-cybernetics* and Geyer 1989–98), and provides a metalevel linkage between the concepts of alienation, ethnicity, and postmodernism discussed here.

3. Changing Emphasis Towards Problems of Ethnicity, Postmodernism, and Increasing Environmental Complexity

Two developments converge in the work going on in alienation research since the 1990s: while 'classical' alienation research is still continuing, the stress is now, on the one hand, on describing new forms of alienation under the 'decisional overload' conditions of postmodernity and, on the other hand, on the reduction of increasingly pervasive ethnic alienation and conflict, and on alienation as caused by high joblessness rates among uneducated and disadvantaged youth in the Western world, largely as a result of the export of cheap labor to the Third World.

Since the start of the 1990s, there has again been an upsurge of interest in alienation research, caused by different developments: First of all, the fall of the Soviet empire gave a tremendous boost to alienation research in Eastern Europe, for two reasons: (a) the population as a whole was finally free to express its long-repressed ethnic and political alienation, which had accumulated under Soviet rule, while (b) the existence of alienation was no longer denied and instead became a respectable object of study. In the 1970s only a few researchers in relatively strong social positions, could permit themselves to point to the existence of alienation under communism (Schaff 1977).

Second, though processes of globalization and internationalization tended to monopolize people's

attention during the second half of the twentieth century, the hundred-odd local wars fought since the end of World War II, increasingly covered live on worldwide TV, claimed attention for the opposing trend of regionalization and brought ethnic conflicts to the fore, as demonstrated by the battle for Kosovo.

Third, postmodernism emerged as an important paradigm to explain the individual's reactions to the increasingly rapid complexification and growing interdependence of international society. Many of the phenomena labeled as characteristic for postmodernity squarely fall under the rubric of alienation; in particular, the world of simulacra and virtual reality tends to be an alienated world, for reasons that Marx and Freud could not possibly have foreseen.

Schacht (1989) argued that in modern, complex, and highly differentiated multigroup societies the struggle against alienation should be concentrated on evitable alienations. According to Schacht, one cannot possibly be involved with 'society' as one can with 'community,' but only with some of the social formations within it: i.e., specific processes and institutions, that definitely cannot be considered to stand as parts to a whole. Such involvement is necessarily selective and limited, and depends on individual preferences, character, and possibilities, sometimes even on a random and unique series of accidents. Schacht's recipe for unalienated living in what he calls post-Hegelian society departs from Nietzsche's idea of enhanced spirituality, but without its implication of a kind of extraordinary quasi-artistic development of which only the exceptionally gifted are capable. He wants to add the egalitarian spirit of Marx, but without his emphasis upon each person's cultivation of the totality of human powers, although a certain breadth in the range of one's involvements and pursuits is desirable to prevent stunted growth.

Schacht then maintains that modern, liberal society is still the best possible one for self-realization along these lines, owing to the proliferation of structured contexts into which selective entry is possible—in spite of the limited access to some of these contexts for often large parts of the population.

4. Methodological Issues

While agreeing with Seeman that alienation is a subjective phenomenon, one can disagree with his methodological implication, i.e., that the individual is always fully aware of his or her alienated state, and is always able to verbalize it. In that sense, both the psychoanalytic and the Marxist approach seem more realistic with their functionally roughly equivalent concepts of *repression* and *false consciousness*, but the disadvantage of these approaches is an almost inevitable authoritarianism: the external observer decides, on the basis of the subject's inputs (class position, working conditions, life history, etc.) as

compared with his or her outputs (behaviors, scores on an alienation scale) whether the subject is alienated or not. The subjects themselves unfortunately have very little say in the matter, whether lying on the analyst's couch or standing on the barricades, and may or may not be or become aware of their alienation, and may even—rightly or wrongly—deny being afflicted with it.

Of course, there are many clear-cut cases where the ascription of alienation by an external observer—even if used as a critical and normative rather than as a descriptive and merely diagnostic concept—is clearly warranted, even though the persons concerned may deny their alienation because of repression or false consciousness: childhood abuse, clearly traumatizing experiences, living under conditions of extreme economic deprivation or an abject political system, exploitative working conditions, etc. But there are many not quite so appalling, but still undesirable situations in the Western world nowadays where it seems less useful to ascribe alienation to persons or groups out of a missionary drive to cure others of something they are either blissfully unaware of, or perfectly content with.

5. Probable Future Directions of Alienation Theory and Research

While Marxist and Freudian situations of powerlessness and other forms of alienation still abound, and the struggle against these should certainly continue, it has become evident that one is inevitably alienated from lots of things—alienation here being defined as a subjectively undesirable separation from something outside oneself (the means of production, God, money, status, power, the majority group to which one does not belong, etc.) or even inside oneself (one's 'real' inner feelings, drives or desires, as in the concept of self-alienation).

Schacht considers this indeed inevitable, and his sober appraisal contrasts with the often highly normative and evaluative character of earlier alienation studies, the Marxist ones castigating the evil effects of late capitalism on the individual, and the psychoanalytic ones deploring the effects of early-life neuroticizing influences. While admittedly Marxist and Freudian types of alienation are still prevalent in much of the world, and should certainly be combated, new types of alienation have entered the scene that are caused by the increasingly accelerating complexification of modern societies. They can only be hinted at below, and have to do with phenomena like selection and scanning mechanisms, problems of information overload as well as decisional overload, and the need to engage often in counterintuitive rather than spontaneous behavior.

These modern forms of alienation have the 'disadvantage' that they are nobody's fault. No one, not even late capitalism or insensitive parents, can be

blamed for the fact that the world is becoming more complex and interdependent, that consequently causal chains stretch further geographically and timewise, and that—if one wants to reckon with their effects—one has more than ever to 'think before one acts,' and even to engage in spontaneity-reducing and therefore alienating forms of 'internal simulation.' The process of complexification is not only nobody's fault, but it is also irreversible, and cannot be turned back in spite of proclamations that 'small is beautiful.' One tends to lose a sense of mastery over one's increasingly complex environment, but it is different from the sense of mastery the alienated laborers of Marxist studies are supposed to gain if only they owned the means of production, or the psychoanalysts's clients if their neurotic tendencies would evaporate after looking at their analyst's diploma on the ceiling for half a decade while reliving early or not so early traumas.

The result of the emergence of these modern forms of alienation is that alienation studies, at least to the extent they deal with these modern forms, are becoming more value-neutral (a dirty word since the 1970s), less normative, moralistic, and value-laden. Once more: it is not implied that moral indignation and corrective action based on that indignation are not called for as long as millions of people are exploited and subjugated, or even tortured and killed, in the countless small wars that have replaced the relatively benign Cold War.

What is clear is that modern forms of alienation are emerging and will affect increasing numbers of people in the developed world, and soon also in the developing world. Several authors have hinted at this development. Lachs (1976) spoke of a *mediated world*, where the natural cycle of planning an action, executing it, and being confronted with its positive or negative consequences is broken, and where one is less and less in command of more and more of the things that impinge on one's life, without being able to impute blame on anyone or anything. Etzioni (1968) likewise saw alienation as resulting from nonresponsive social systems that do not cater to basic human needs. Toffler (1970, 1990) vividly described how change is happening not only faster around us, but even through us.

The alienated used to blame their woes on the wicked capitalist or their unsatisfactory parents, even though that was an obvious oversimplification. The common point in all these modern alienation forms is that they result from the increasing complexification of modern world society that we have brought about, reinforced by the aggregated individual and group reactions to this very complexification. One has to find ways of adapting to this irreversible process, since one cannot 'undo' the products, processes, and institutions that have emerged since the middle of the twentieth century. One cannot function adequately or participate fully in a world characterized by information overload without developing efficient selection mech-

anisms to select quickly what may be useful from the often unwanted information deposited at one's doorstep, and without developing effective mechanisms to scan the environment for information one needs to further one's goals. Moreover, if one tries to keep an open mind, the chance that one changes one's goals before having had the time to realize them is greater than ever before in history. Our civilization stresses the importance of learning; but has not yet sufficiently stressed the importance of *unlearning*, as Toffler (1970) has stressed; the 'halving time' of knowledge is far shorter than that of uranium.

The individual living in a world saturated with communication media is offered the possibility of thoroughly identifying with different alternative life scenarios, and at least in much of the Western world many of these scenarios can be realized if one is willing to pay the inevitable price. But a lifetime is limited, and so are the scenarios one can choose and try to realize. One of the consequences of this media-driven conscious awareness of alternative life scenarios—coupled with the freedom but also the lack of time to realize them all—is that the percentage of unrealized individual possibilities is greater than ever before, which certainly contributes to a diffuse sense of alienation: 'I'm living this life, but could have lived so many other ones.' Unlike Abraham, one cannot anymore die 'one's days fulfilled.'

Naturally, it can be maintained this is a spoilt-child syndrome, induced by the infantilizing influence of the media: fantasies are stimulated without parents telling the ever more insecure child 'this is impossible.' This accords with Schacht, who favors limited and selective involvement with the world; one cannot be involved with society as one could with community, let alone with primary group contacts.

As the development of the information society further continues, alienation towards the interpersonal environment and alienation towards the societal environment may well turn out to be inversely related. Many of those who have a high capacity for dealing with societal complexity (the educated and the academics among others), especially when they make much use of this capacity in their daily lives (the 'organization men and women,' the managers and planners), tend to generalize their 'planning attitudes,' probably due to the visible success of the associated operating procedures in the societal sphere, to encompass their interpersonal contacts. Consequently, they may become interpersonally alienated, and often see simple interpersonal relations as more complex than they actually are. They are insufficiently involved in the present, being used to internally simulate every move, to constantly think and plan ahead.

Conversely, those who have a low capacity for dealing with environmental complexity (the uneducated, especially those living in still relatively simple societies, amongst others), especially when their lowly position in complex hierarchical structures does not

require much planning regarding their wider societal environment (e.g., the unskilled), on the contrary tend to generalize their 'involvement attitudes' to include whatever societal interaction loops they are engaged in. The societally alienated tend to see complex societal relations as less complex than they actually are. They are, in direct opposition to the first group, insufficiently involved in the future, not because they cannot kick the habit of being involved in the here-and-now, but because they never developed the 'broadsight' and 'long-sight' (Elias 1939) that often characterizes the interpersonally alienated.

If it is indeed true that the interpersonally nonalienated tend to be the societally alienated, who clamor for a larger share of the societal pie, while the societally nonalienated tend to be in the power positions because they are best able to reduce societal complexity, and consequently have a fair chance of being interpersonally alienated, then the question becomes: Can a complex society ever be a nonalienating society, if it is led by those who score highest on interpersonal alienation? Or, as Mannheim asked: 'who plans the planners?' Alienation will certainly never disappear, whether in politics or in work situations, whether in interpersonal or societal interactions, but it may be considerably reduced by de-alienating strategies based on social science research.

See also: Alienation: Psychosociological Tradition; Anomie; Critical Theory: Contemporary; Critical Theory: Frankfurt School; Freud, Sigmund (1856–1939); Industrial Sociology; Marx, Karl (1818–89); Marxist Social Thought, History of; Work and Labor: History of the Concept; Work, History of; Work, Sociology of

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F. Geyer

Alliances and Joint Ventures: Organizational

1. Introduction

Cooperative arrangements between organizations date back to those between merchants in ancient Babylonia, Egypt, Phoenicia, and Syria who used such arrangements to conduct overseas commercial transactions. Since the 1980s, there has been a dramatic growth in the use of various forms of cooperative arrangements such as joint ventures between organizations. Several reasons have been offered for this unprecedented growth in alliances: greater internationalization of technology and of product markets, turbulence in world markets and higher economic uncertainty, more pronounced cost advantages, and shorter product life cycles. A noteworthy feature accompanying this growth in alliances has been the tremendous diversity of national origins of partners, their goals and motives for entering alliances, as well as the formal legal and governance structures utilized. The increase in cooperative arrangements has generated a renaissance in the scholarly study of alliances