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## The Intellectual Construction of "Social Distance": Toward a Recovery of Georg Simmel's Social Geometry

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## The Intellectual Construction of "Social Distance": Toward a Recovery of Georg Simmel's Social Geometry

If wandering, considered as a state of detachment from every given point in space, is the conceptual opposite of attachment to any point, then the sociological form of the 'stranger' presents the synthesis, as it were, of both these properties. (This is another indication that spatial relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men, but are also symbolic of those relationships.)

Georg Simmel, "The Stranger" (1908)

- 1 "Social distance" is one of the most successful concepts in international sociology. Extensively used today in studies of ethnic, class, gender, status, and many other kinds of relations, social distance is most often measured according to the Bogardus Social Distance Scale, or some modification of it. A search of Sociological Abstracts conducted in 1995 yielded more than 300 studies of "social distance" published since 1990 alone. Appearing regularly today are studies as diverse and interesting as "Relationships with Waitresses: Gendered Social Distance in Restaurant Hierarchies" (LaPointe 1992), and "Chinese Aloofness from Other Groups: Social Distance Data from a City in British Columbia" (Netting 1991). A representative list of titles from this search is given in the **Appendix**.
- 2 Unlike many concepts in social theory, such as "community," which are intellectual children with many parents, the concept of "social distance" has a very clear paternity. It originated in the fertile mind of Georg Simmel; Robert Park studied under Simmel in Berlin during the 1890s and absorbed it along with a great many Simmelian concepts; Park suggested it to Emory Bogardus, who in turn invented the "Bogardus Social Distance Scale" (1925). Simmel's ideas suffered mightily as they passed along this bloodline, however.
- 3 Indeed, the career of this concept is fraught with an irony of great importance for the current "spatialization" of social theory (Soja 1989, Friedland and Boden 1994)). The concept of "social distance" began in the mind of Georg Simmel as a complex interpretation of sociality as forms of "distance" in both a geometric (ie Euclidian) and a metaphoric sense. In the hands of Simmel's American student Robert Park and his "Chicago School" of sociology--most notably the work of Emory Bogardus--however, the concept was impoverished by stripping away Simmel's geometric sense of distance.
- 4 This essay interrogates Robert Park's and Emory Bogardus's reformulation of Simmelian social distance and argues that another reformulation of "social distance" is necessary: one which retains both halves of the concept Simmel originally invented. Most of the items in the Bogardus Social Distance Scale are literally a matter of geometric distance, whereas the significance of geometric distance was completely ignored by Park and Bogardus, in favor of a metaphoric sense of distance.
- 5 The relationship between geometric and metaphoric distance should be among the most urgent of research questions in late-twentieth century human sciences. This essay is an attempt to contribute to the ongoing and increasingly rich discourse on space in social theory, by tracing the life course of a critical concept as it has been constructed intellectually and deployed empirically. That social distance needs to be refashioned is a major conclusion of this essay, but precisely how it must be refashioned is a question that I think we are only beginning to see. Not only Georg Simmel among the founders of social theory will be necessary for this reconstruction. Emile Durkheim's concept of "social morphology," for example, contains important insights into the relationship between geometric and metaphoric

meanings of distance (Durkheim 1992). This essay, however, maintains a focus on Simmel, Park, and Bogardus as shapers of the contemporary notion of "social distance."

## "The Geometry of Social Life": An Appreciation of Simmel's Formal Sociology

- 6 It is best to begin with "The Stranger," an essay Simmel included in his 1908 treatise, *Soziologie*. Simmel in that famous essay adumbrated a "form" of sociality. In Simmelian terms, the Stranger is a formal structuring of personality, in which the many "contents" such as desires, instincts, and so on, gain their recognizable social shapes. (Levine 1971; Frisby 1992, 1992b) Here we must pause to clarify a few terms. In the passage from "The Stranger" quoted above, Simmel contrasts "spatial" with "symbolic." There are several ways to express this contrast: "Euclidian" versus "imagined" space is one possible way to render the contrast I will stress, as might be "physical" versus "symbolic." But I believe it is most clearly represented by contrasting "geometric" with "metaphoric" space. This pair of terms has the virtue of retaining one of Simmel's own, "geometry."
- 7 Correctly termed "formal sociology," Simmel's approach was always twofold: to represent what he called the "geometry of social life" (Ray 1991: xiii), as a formal category; and also to interpret its psychological contents. He did so with his own version of his friend Max Weber's "ideal types," such as "the stranger," "the poor," or "fashion." This duality is evident even in the title of his classic essay, "The Metropolis and Mental Life," in which he adumbrates both the geometry of sociation within the metropolitan milieu and the mental implications of this geometry. "The Metropolis and Mental Life" is written on the same scale as his major treatise, *The Philosophy of Money* in that he explores the joint operation of objective, systematic movements, of people and of money, and the conscious ideations that propel and result from those movements (or geometries).
- 8 The geometric element of the Stranger is particularly important. Simmel's philosophy laid great stress on principles of conflict, reciprocity, and interaction. In the words of Donald Levine, "no thing or event has a fixed, intrinsic meaning: its meaning only emerges through interaction with other things or events." (1971: xxxiii) This refusal to pivot sociology on the essential contents of things raised "distance" to a principle of greatest significance. In Simmel's view, forms are the stable (but not permanent) outcomes of distances interposed between subject and object (which in turn is a division of the self).
- 9 "The Stranger" belongs properly in the context of appearing alongside the chapter of Simmel's *Soziologie* (1908), entitled "The Sociology of Space" (Frisby 1992: 98-117), in which Simmel explicitly outlined the "geometry of social life." In "The Stranger," Simmel traces the geometric location of the Stranger historically:
- 10 In the whole history of economic activity the stranger makes his appearance everywhere as a trader, and the trader makes his as a stranger....A trader is required only for goods produced outside the group. Unless there are people who wander out into foreign lands to buy these necessities, in which they are themselves 'strange' merchants in this other region, the trader *must* be a stranger; there is no opportunity for anyone else to make a living at it (1971: 144).
- 11 The Stranger, both mobile and fixed, is a synthesis of two properties, then: He is geometrically in but not meaningfully of the group to which he is strange.
- 12 This theory of a social type does not derive from an inner attitude on the part of the stranger, one of "not fitting in" due to personality differences with the group. In fact, it presents a reverse view: to argue that the feelings one has, including attitudes, are generated by the geometric forms of one's life. In this sense, then, Simmel was quite clear in his assertion, quoted earlier, that "spatial [geometric] relations not only are determining conditions of relationships among men but are also symbolic of those relationships." Simmel in this proposition clearly stresses the sociologic primacy of objective geometry over subjective semiotics.

- 13 Georg Simmel deserves credit as the first of the "founders" of modern human sciences to confront directly the spatial as well as the temporal dimensions of modernity. Why he did so is hardly mysterious: he was a neo-Kantian. As is well-known, Kant situated knowledge--qua analytical and synthetic judgments--within the intuitive forms of space and time. These two forms are the necessary *a priori* intuitions, without which we cannot perceive or conceive of objects. "Space and time have empiric reality, writes Karl Jaspers of Kant, "but transcendental ideality." (Jaspers, 21). Echoes of Kant reverberate throughout the sociology of Simmel, who believed he had "secured a new concept of sociology" (a claim all too common among his generation, but more justified than usual in Simmel's case), "in which I separated the forms of sociation from their contents" (Frisby 1984: 196).
- 14 Separating "form" and "content" is a highly contentious issue in social theory, an issue Hegel raised against Kant, and one which the both the structuralists and poststructuralists after Simmel have contested in the course of the twentieth-century "linguistic turn." Reviewing that complex debate lies beyond the purposes of this essay. But I would like to suggest briefly here that the geometric-metaphoric split in the self that Simmel conceived of has not been sufficiently appreciated. Used thoughtfully, it presents a method of interrogating the relationship between form and content while at the same time recognizing the Hegelian insistence on the unity of form and content which is the modern self.
- 15 Simmel argued that the self in modern, metropolitan society, is split, between its "quantitative" and "qualitative" dimensions, which he also stated as a split between its objective and its subjective dimensions. In Simmel's view, forms are the stable (but not permanent) outcomes of distances interposed between subject and object (which in turn is a division of the self). Before turning to a consideration of the ways these ideas could be exploited today, my next task is to trace their impoverishment in the hands of Robert Park and Emory Bogardus.

### **The Estrangement of Simmelian Social Forms *en route* from Berlin to Chicago, 1890s-1920s**

- 16 Let us now compare Simmel's with Robert Park's, Ernest Burgess's and Emory Bogardus' account of "distance." Robert Park's influence in the development of United States sociology is well known, has been studied in great detail by many scholars, and bears on far too many important themes than I can touch upon in this essay. Rather, I want to emphasize Park's subtle yet profound erasure of geometry from his mentor Georg Simmel's ideas. Donald Levine and Gary Jaworski have clarified Simmel's great influence on Park. Park made a central place in his sociology for Simmel's thesis of "Wechselwirkung," which Park translated as "interaction" (Jaworski 1997:29-44) Park stressed interaction in his career-long on the fate of urban groups in urban society. To his credit, Park's emphasis on interaction undermined essentialist interpretations of groups and individuals. In this his work always retained an important dose of W.I. Thomas and Florian Znaniecki's conceptualization of social psychology (Thomas and Znaniecki 1918-1920)<sup>1</sup>. But Park never fully escaped an unwarranted (ie speculative) instinctual foundation for his theory of group interaction.
- 17 Concerning social interaction, among Park's most important contributions was his model of the "race relations cycle," and it was through that aspect of Park's intellectual agenda that the "Social Distance Scale" was devised in 1925. The pathway though his ideas I shall briefly trace here, then follows his work on race relations.
- 18 Park's first explicit exploration of the term "social distance" seems to have been in a lecture given at the University of Southern California in connection with the "Pacific Race Relations Survey," of which Emory Bogardus was the regional director. That talk was shortly thereafter published in the *Journal of Applied Sociology*, which Bogardus edited, in 1925:
- 19 The concept of 'distance' as applied to human, *as distinguished from spacial [sic] relations*, has come into use among sociologists, in an attempt to reduce to something like measurable

terms the grades and degrees of understanding and intimacy which characterize personal and social relations generally (*italics added*, Park 1924: 339).

20 As this passage illustrates, Park hastened first of all to distinguish his metaphoric sense of "distance" from its ordinary-use geometric meaning. He had done the same thing three years earlier in his and Burgess's foundational *Introduction to the Science of Society* (1921): "These distances which separate individuals are *not merely spatial*, they are psychical" (*italics added*, 164).

21 The purpose of Park's 1924 explication of the concept of social distance was an applied one: for the direct purpose of studying one kind of social distance: "race consciousness." Park's theory of the origins of race consciousness are entirely clear and also remarkably simplistic: 22 The terms 'race consciousness' and 'class consciousness,' with which most of us are familiar, describe a state of mind in which we become, often suddenly and unexpectedly conscious of the distances that separate, or seem to separate us, from classes and races whom we do not fully understand (1924: 340).

23 Distance is a function of a "state of mind" in which differences are encountered. This consciousness is, in Park's account, the reverse of Franklin Giddings' "consciousness of kind" on which the latter founded his sociological system (Giddings 1895). We could call Park's model an instinctual consciousness of difference: "What we ordinarily call prejudice seems to be more or less instinctive and spontaneous disposition to maintain social distances" (Park 1924: 343).

24 Park and Burgess' facile reliance on instincts of difference, and simultaneous lack of attention to the geometry of social life basically erased Simmel's important contribution of having suggested that geometric distance may produce metaphoric distance. In the Park-Burgess model, precisely the reverse happens: people begin with an instinctual drive to "maintain social distance," and therefore chose different residential and productive space to occupy.

25 To further understand Park's position, it is helpful to see that, although he was a racial liberal, he was nevertheless to the right, ideologically, of such rivals as W.E.B. DuBois. Park had been Booker T. Washington's speechwriter at Tuskegee before coming to Chicago and always retained something of Washington's accommodationism with white racism, as well as Washington's gradualism.

26 To Park--always a functionalist--society was held together by "consensus," which requires such instinctual reactions as prejudice for its very health, and which is expressed in social distance:

27 Prejudice is on the whole not an aggressive but a conservative force; a sort of spontaneous conservation which tends to preserve the social order and the social distances upon which that order rests (1924: 344).

28 This model of instinctual consensus producing social distance outcomes was famously mapped by Park, Burgess and his colleagues in the Chicago School. Their "urban ecology" approach was arguably the most influential paradigm in twentieth-century urban studies.<sup>2</sup> It held that the competition and equilibrium observed between plants provided a sufficient model for the interaction of social groups in the city. As Castells (1976) and others (Ethington 1995) have observed, this model was a disastrous case of "naturalizing" social conflict.

29 In their conflation of human and plant ecology, Park and Burgess never tired of naturalizing social distance. This passage from *Introduction to the Science of Society* ("The Green Bible") is quite typical of the highly speculative grounding of their system:

30 A society in which all distances, physical and psychical, had been abolished, in which there were neither taboo, prejudice, nor reserve of any sort; a society in which the intimacies were absolute, would be a society in which there were neither persons nor freedom. The processes of competition, segregation, and accommodation brought out in the description of the plant community are quite comparable with the same processes in animal and human communities. A village, town, city, or nation may be studied from the standpoint of the adaptation, struggle

for existence, and survival of its individual members in the environment created by the community as a whole (1921: 166).

31 The reasoning here begins with a gratuitous nightmare of a society without difference. It then leaps to an unprovable equation of vegetable and mammalian modes of occupying space. The third sentence in this appallingly weak syllogism concludes that the complex environments of urban settlements can be understood as the simple aggregation of individual struggles for existence. Sadly, given its influence well into the 1960s, the well-known ethnic conflict "cycle" put forth in the 1921 textbook: Competition (chapter 8); Conflict (chapter 9); Accommodation (Chapter 10); Assimilation (chapter 11) is at bottom an a priori system grounded in fictional comparisons between humans and plants.

32 Rather than starting with humans on the ground, who occupy and shape space *qua* geometric distance, Park and Burgess started with vegetables on the ground, and with "psychical," "instinctual" attitudes, and constructed a dependent role for geometric distance. Geometric distance in the Park-Burgess model is an outcome of intersubjective processes, and thus merely represents; it does not have a shaping, constitutive role on its own. A careful reading of Park, Burgess and McKenzie's *The City* (1925) will show that the spatial distribution of persons in cities is understood as a dependent variable in an equation in which the determining independent variable is the "psychical" attitude of consciousness of difference.<sup>3</sup>

33 A completely different model has evolved in an interdisciplinary fashion during the past several decades of evolving international social theory, based to some extent on Simmel's own work. That alternative will be taken up in the final section. Before that, we need to see how Emory Bogardus converted Park and Burgess's understanding of social distance into a "Social Distance Scale."

## Emory Bogardus and The Bogardus Social Distance Scale

34 Emory Bogardus (1882-1973) was one of many prolific American sociologists of the first half of the 20th century. Known best for his development of the concept of "social distance," Bogardus founded and was Chair of the University of Southern California (USC) Sociology Department for thirty-one years (1915-1946). He also founded and was the first Dean of the USC School of Social Work. He trained more than one hundred PhD and MA students and conducted or directed a remarkable output of research into ethnic communities in Los Angeles from 1911 through the 1960s. He was also the founder and editor of *Sociology and Social Research*, a journal featuring the work of nearly all the leading American sociologists of the twentieth century. <sup>4</sup>The author of *Sociology* (sixth edition 1937); *Fundamentals of Social Psychology* (4th edition 1950); *History of Social Thought* (fourth edition 1960); *Contemporary Sociology* (1931); *Leaders and Leadership* (1934); *Essentials of Americanization* (third edition 1923); *Immigration and Race Attitudes* (1928); *The Mexican in the United States* (1934); *Introduction to Social Research* (1936), *Social Distance* (1959), and literally hundreds of articles, Bogardus was a prolific but not a deep thinker. A 1937 celebration in his honor brought messages of respect from around the world, but these were decidedly reserved. Burgess praised him primarily for editing *Sociology and Social Research*; E.A. Ross said that Bogardus's work "is never 'fuzzy' or 'fogged'"; and Florian Znaniecki, writing from the University of Poznan, Poland, pledged that despite the "physical distance" which kept him from attending the dinner in Los Angeles, he felt no "social distance" from Dr. Bogardus. None of these authors suggested that Bogardus had contributed anything to sociology except the social distance scale<sup>5</sup>

35 The most significant of Bogardus' research was that on race relations, proceeding from his role as the regional director of the Pacific Coast Race Relations Survey, directed by Robert Park in the early 1920s. As we have seen, Park clearly suggested the idea of actually measuring social distance to Bogardus, a debt which Bogardus was always careful to acknowledge (Bogardus

1959, 1967). Bogardus devised a set of seven questions intended to "reduce rationalizing...as much as possible" (1959: 30). The Bogardus Social Distance Scale in its original and 1933 revision are displayed in Table 1.

Bogardus 1925 <sup>6</sup>	Bogardus 1933-66 <sup>7</sup>
"Would willingly admit members of each race..."	
1 To close kinship by marriage	Would marry
2 To my club as personal chums	Would have as regular friends
3 To my street as neighbors	Would work beside in an office
4 To employment in my occupation in my country	Would have several families in my neighborhood
5 To citizenship in my country	Would have merely as speaking acquaintances
6 As visitors only in my country	Would have live outside my neighborhood
7 Would exclude from my country	Would have live outside my country

**Table 1**

- 36 The survey itself is elegantly simple. Each of the "distance" variables is arrayed as column headings, while ethnic group names are arrayed as row headings. The respondent was instructed to check "as many of the seven columns in each case [ethnic group] as your feelings dictate." In other words, a respondent might indicate she would have a member of a given group as neighbors and work with them in her office, and speak to them, but would not marry into that group, nor have a close friends, nor, on the other end, would she limit them only to "visitors" to her nation, nor debar them from her nation. On the other hand, it seems obvious that if a respondent would marry into a group, she would also have them as close friends, next door neighbors, etc.
- 37 In all of its versions, the scale is scored so that the responses for each ethnic/racial group are averaged across all respondents, which yields a "Racial Distance Quotient" (RDQ), with a minimum of 1.00 and maximum of 7.00. The purpose of the 1933 modification was to bring the scale more into line with the science of sociometry that had developed by that time (Campbell 1952).
- 38 Bogardus first used the scale in 1926 on 1,725 respondents who were primarily Euro-American students in 24 colleges and universities. Bogardus followed this original study with three more, similarly administered, surveys, in 1946, 1956, and 1966. Several serious methodological problems with Bogardus's application of his own scale make it difficult to evaluate the results.<sup>8</sup> The questionnaire itself is shown in Illustration 1, and the overall score results of the 1926-1966 studies are shown in Illustration 2.

**RACIAL DISTANCE**

**CHART B—Social Distance Scale**

1. In order to keep Scale anonymous, do not sign name, but give yourself as much freedom as possible; use only check marks.
2. Please give your first feeling reactions in every case.
3. Give your feeling reactions to each ethnic group in terms of the chief picture or stereotype you have of entire group. Mark each group even if you do not know it.
4. Check as many of seven columns in each case as your feelings dictate.
5. Work as rapidly as possible.

	1 Would marry into group	2 Would have as close friends	3 Would have as next door neighbors	4 Would work in same office	5 Have as speaking acquaintances only	6 Have as visitors only to my nation	7 Would debar from my nation
Armenians							
Americans (U.S. white)							
Canadians							
Chinese							
Czechs							
English							
Filipinos							
Finn							
French							
German							
Greeks							
Hollanders							
Indians (American)							
Indians (of India)							
Irish							

1. Please remember to give your first feeling reactions for every group.
2. Remember to give feeling reactions to your chief picture of each group as a whole.
3. Also, to check as many columns for each group as you can, and to work rapidly.

Italians							
Japanese							
Japanese Americans							
Jews							
Koreans							
Mexicans							
Mexican Americans							
Negroes							
Norwegians							
Poles							
Swedes							
Scots							
Finnish							
Swedish							
Turks							

- Please check. (1) Your ethnic background: Caucasian\_\_\_, Mongoloid\_\_\_, Negro\_\_\_.
- (2) Your religious background: R. Catholic\_\_\_, Jewish\_\_\_, Protestant\_\_\_, Other\_\_\_.
- (3) Rural background\_\_\_, urban background\_\_\_.
- (4) Sex: male\_\_\_, female\_\_\_.
- (5) Education: 8th grade\_\_\_, high school grad\_\_\_, 2 yrs. coll.\_\_\_, coll. grad\_\_\_, postgrad. work\_\_\_.
- (6) Age: under 15\_\_\_, 15 to 30\_\_\_, 31 to 50\_\_\_, 50 or over\_\_\_.
- (7) Occupation: none\_\_\_, student\_\_\_, housewife\_\_\_, unskilled worker\_\_\_, skilled\_\_\_, clerical or secretarial\_\_\_, managerial\_\_\_, executive\_\_\_, professional\_\_\_.
- (8) Annual income: none\_\_\_, under \$2500\_\_\_, \$2500 to \$5000\_\_\_, over \$5000\_\_\_.

Source: Bogardus (1959): 31.

Figure 1



Figure 2

In any case, however, this is not the place to review the concrete results of Bogardus's empirical research. Rather, what interests us is the tracking of Simmel's dual sense of "social distance." To keep an eye on that, I want to turn rapidly to the most ironic aspect of the Bogardus Scale: its suppression of geometric distance in the very face of geometric social facts.

### "I don't think I'd want anyone to use my towel!": The Return of the Repressed, or The Role of Geometric Distance in the Social Distance Scales.

In spite of the Park's, Burgess', and Bogardus's indifference to geometric distance *qua* geometric distance: that kind of distance is abundantly present in the Bogardus Social Distance Scale. Referring again to the Scale, in Table 1, we see that each of the seven response items describe an explicitly geometric distance. Marriage, involving sexual intercourse, constitutes the most complete collapse of geometric distance between individuals short of cannibalism. "Would exclude from my country" involves perhaps thousands of miles of geometric distance. The respondent was not asked about the effects of these distances, but rather, in perfect accord with the Park-Burgess paradigm outlined above, to use them as a proxy, or representation of the feelings of closeness or farness to a person of a given group. Thus, the role of these actual, geometric distances in the constitution of feelings was never examined.

Most fascinating in this regard is the attempt by Stuart C. Dodd and Jiri Nehnevasja (1954) to introduce precise metric distances into the Bogardus Scale (see Table 2).

#### Dodd and Nehnevasja 1954

Response item	Meters/Km	Yards/Miles
Would marry		10 <sup>0</sup> 0 m 0 yd
Would have as guest in household		10 <sup>1</sup> 10 m 9 yd
Would have as next door neighbor		10 <sup>2</sup> 100 m 90 yd
Would have in neighborhood		10 <sup>3</sup> 1 Km .62 mi

Would keep in same town	$10^4$ 10 Km 6.25 mi
Would keep out of my town	$10^5$ 100 Km 62.50 mi
Would exile	$10^6$ 1000 Km 625.00 mi
Would kill	$10^7$ 10,000 Km 6,250.00 mi

**Table 2**

- 43 Revising some of the Bogardus response items and converting each to a power of 10 meters, they captured an almost convincing, common-sense physical distance for each item. Table 2 below converts the distances into simple numerical figures for simplicity, in meters and miles.
- 44 Ten meters is in fact about the diameter of a (generous, perhaps) apartment or home, and 100 meters does about cover several American suburban parcels. Most "towns" would probably fit inside a 10 km (6.25 mile) circle. Exile from the United States would take more than 100 km (625 miles), but that distance would certainly work for most of Europe and Latin America. Killing should probably be set to  $10^8$ , or 62,500 miles, because it is tantamount to expelling from the planet. Otherwise, the Dodd and Nehnevasja scale works remarkably well and elegantly.<sup>9</sup> Actually, it was quite timid and unscientific of Bogardus not to include "would kill" in his original scale, given the amount of ethnically-motivated killing that had already taken place by the date of the inception of his scale, and through the course of his career.
- 45 But alas, Dodd and Nehnevasja had no intention of restoring geometric distance to any kind of constitutive role in the social process. Their sole objective, in fact, was to find an even more objective, trans-spatial metric:
- 46 "We hypothesize that such a social distance scale, based on geographic distances, would tend to vary less from culture to culture than the present scales (some of which include such specific culture traits as 'dating with...')" (1954: 289).
- 47 Dodd and Nehnevasja's point was not that space itself was a factor in generating feelings of distance, but that the spatial metaphor originating in the Bogardus Scale should simply be more carefully specified and scaled--i.e. more objective. That the authors could go so far toward a spatial understanding, and still avoid the point, presents such a monumental case of obtuseness, that we are confronted with the extreme to which the modernist discourse of social science had abolished geometric distance from their conceptions of social being (see Soja 1989). The authors even begin their article by stating, correctly: "To geographic [read geometric] distance, the behavioral scientists have paid very little attention thus far. In 1940 Samuel Stouffer pointed out that 'distance is such an important factor that it needs more explicit study than it has received.'" (287). They then ignore their own advice.
- 48 It is important to stress that very much valuable "social distance" research has been done with sound methodology, in spite of Bogardus's own methodological shortcomings. By the mid-1950s, Frank R. Westie and Margaret L. Westie had subjected the Bogardus Scale to rigorous sociometric revision. Their revised instrument was a 500-plus item questionnaire that actually contained four separate social distance scales<sup>10</sup>, for which they reported a test-retest reliability coefficient of .96. Westie and Westie used their scale to study the relationship between racial and occupational "distance," carefully controlling for the characteristics of the respondents. Among other very interesting results, they found that "caste" and "class" worked together to form a "social distance pyramid," in which upper-status blacks and upper-status whites reported a shorter degree of social distance between one another than did lower-status blacks and lower-status whites did of one another. In other words, race prejudice was greatly modified (by a factor of up to 2 times) by socioeconomic status. In his methodological writings on social distance (1953, 1956, 1959), Frank R. Westie identified some extremely interesting implications involved in broadening the application of social distance beyond the race/ethnic intergroup attitudes that Bogardus initially devised the scale to investigate. For example, while devising indicators of aversion to social closeness, Westie and coworkers tested the following

question: "I believe I would be willing to have (person in a particular occupation) use the same towel that I use." The response to this question revealed a near-universal attitude. "I don't think I'd want anyone to use my towel" replied one respondent! (1959: 257). Westie's careful probing of the Bogardus method revealed a bedrock aspect of the metaphor of distance: it always seems to have a repressed a geometric correlate.

49 Indeed, as sympathetic as I am to Bogardus's lifelong project of improving race relations, I think it justified to charge him with a significant degree of "bad faith" in Jean-Paul Sartre's sense of that term. Most of the geometric distances in the Bogardus Scale were not in fact matters of choice. Regarding Bogardus Score item #1, marriage between whites and nonwhites was in fact illegal in most states of the U.S. when Bogardus first devised his scale in 1926. Anti-miscegenation laws, in fact, were not invalidated by the U.S. Supreme Court until 1967 in the well-named case *Loving v. Virginia*: one year after Bogardus's last administration of the "Race Relations Study" survey.

50 Regarding 1925 Bogardus Score item #2, formal by-laws of white-raced voluntary clubs barred members from admitting persons of color through the 1960s, and the practice of both formal and informal race exclusion is still quite common in the 1990s. Considering the Bogardus Score pertaining to residential proximity (#3 in 1925; #4 and #6 in 1933), racially restrictive covenants in residential property deeds were the norm in the United States until the U.S. Supreme Court ruled them unconstitutional in *Shelley v. Kramer* (1947).

51 Employment discrimination (Bogardus Score item #4 in 1925; #3 in 1933) was a fact of life but generally not positively mandated by laws in the United States. Given the hostility of powerful institutions, such as white leadership of the American Federation of Labor, to non-white hiring, however, the matter of "choice" here was lacking until the Civil Rights Act of 1964 forced employers re-arrange their priorities.

52 Citizenship exclusion (1925 Bogardus Score item #5, not included in the 1933 revision), was, on the other hand, a matter enshrined in U.S. law. The Naturalization Law of 1790, which remained in effect until rescinded by the McCarran-Walter Act of 1954, limited U.S. citizenship to "free white persons." The United States was officially a white nation until that date.

53 "Exclusion from my country," regardless of citizenship eligibility, (Bogardus Score #7) was a matter of positive law in the United States beginning in 1882 with the Chinese Exclusion Act (which remained in effect until 1943).

54 In other words, what we need to consider is the extent to which Park, Burgess, and Bogardus put the cart of racism before the horse of geometric distance. Apartheid laws force all members of a nation-state to observe the social taboos on which those laws were originally based. In the American South, C. Vann Woodward (1956) demonstrated long ago, racial mixing (geometric proximity) in public places such as parks was quite common until the introduction of Jim Crow laws in the 1890s. Outside of the South, the introduction of racially restrictive covenants did not begin until the 1920s, during a period of massive mobilization of racial hatred, which included the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan and the enactment of the restrictive immigration laws of 1921 and 1924. We must ask how these cases of the production of racialized space might have generated attitudes of metaphoric "distance" among members of the various groups proscribed by the geometric boundaries created by the law and the institutions of the capitalist marketplace. That research agenda lies outside this brief paper. I want to conclude, however, with some brief comment on the status of social distance measures in contemporary sociology.

## **The Return of the Stranger: Suggestions for the Recovery of Simmelian Social Geometry.**

55 Thanks to a rich interdisciplinary effort across the human sciences, researchers have produced a remarkable set of new insights into the space-time dimensions of human being. As Roger

Friedland and Deirdre Boden put it, "Space and time have...become a medium through which to rethink the organization and meaning of modernity" (Friedland and Boden 1994). The theoretical collaboration of sociologists and geographers--as in the work of Anthony Giddens (1986) and Alan Pred (1983, 1984), Anssi Paasi (1986, 1991), Yi-Fu Tuan (1977), has been especially productive. Critical, feminist, and neo-marxist urbanists, including Roselyn Deutsch(1991), Edward Soja (1989), Manuel Castells (1983), David Harvey (1973, 1985, 1989), Mike Davis (1990), and especially Henri Lefebvre (1991, 1996), have contributed to this growing international research agenda into the reciprocal reproduction of social and spatial relationships.

56 As part of this overall paradigm development, we should attempt to clarify the human scientific sense of "social distance" in ways that do justice to the potential importance of that intuitively attractive term. Simmel had the brilliance to capture in a single social type, "the stranger" the basic elements of social distance. Metaphoric distance is strangeness: the "unfamiliar" (and we must take note of the etymologies here: familiar and unfamiliar are metaphoric of blood kinship). But geometric distance is the structure of everyday life in space-time that permits or promotes the formation of familiarity: ie, the stranger literally was not here when we developed our familiarity. Reciprocally, "structures of feeling" (Williams 1973) produce "structures of practice" (Bourdieu 1980), and vice-versa. A powerful exploitation of recent sociospatial theory needs to accommodate directly both of these senses of distance.

57 There seems to be a serious gap between the recent "spatial turn" in the social sciences, briefly sketched above, and the continued implementation of the social distance concept in empirical sociology studies. I have reviewed some of the applied social distance research from the 1920s through the 1950s. We would not have a complete picture unless I bring into consideration some representative examples of social distance research conducted in the 1990s. Let us briefly glance at a few recent "social distance" studies to see how they perform.<sup>11</sup>

58 One recent study (Jacobs 1994) "explores how undercover narcotics officers in high schools maintain social distance (ie affective detachment) from students, a practice necessary to prevent students from later claiming in court they were entrapped." In this particular study, "affective detachment" is the sense of "social distance." The author identified four "social-distancing techniques," (feigned excuses for not becoming more involved), such as "existing interpersonal attachment" and "fears of parental recrimination." In ordinary language, the author was studying the way undercover agents lie in order to maintain the balance between trust and strangeness necessary to obtain evidence for a conviction while at the same time escaping accusations of complicity. Clearly, "social distance" in this study has a highly intersubjective meaning. No attention, however, was given to the geometric sense of distance.

59 Bakker (1993) presents a striking contrast in the use of the same term, "social distance." Conducted entirely without surveys or interviews, this study "presents a social status classification in which the jobless are categorized according to their labor market position and the employed according to their occupation. These categories are then scaled on a social distance scale (SDS)" In this case the metaphoric sense of "distance" is still paramount, but it applies to mathematical representation: in the sense that the integers 1 and 9 are more "distant" from one another than 1 and 2, in a scale of mathematical value. Whether the author believes that this kind of labor-market position "distance" has any psychological correlates is not stated.

60 Between these two extremes, one can easily find a steady stream of social distance studies in the tradition that Bogardus himself founded. For example, Brinkerhoff and Jacob (1994) sought "to measure the degree of reciprocal tolerance expressed toward Surinam's prominent ethnoreligious groups," and administered to 376 secondary-school students "a modified Bogardus social distance scale." The results showed that "the degree of preferential closeness Hindus and Muslims would tolerate for each other fell approximately midway between the social distance they would allow between themselves and Creoles and the distance they

preferred for members of other sects within their own religion.” In this study, the same assumptions that Bogardus originally made are carried along: the geometric segregation of Hindus and Muslims in Surinam is not a significant part of the analysis.

61 Next, however, let us consider two studies in which geometric distance is considered along with metaphoric distance. “In an Urban Taxicab,” by Kalle Toiskallio is explicitly Simmelian. The author “contends that the urban taxicab is a site of conflict between physical proximity and psychological distance.” The method involved investigating “various perceptions of atmosphere, physical space, and territory within the cab itself” including sitting arrangements. Quite obviously, the researcher was required to deploy a good many research methods that could not be included in a simple “social distance scale.” But the important feature is that the author addresses directly the relationship between metaphoric and geometric distance, rather than leaving that relationship unexamined, as in the majority of social distance studies discussed so far.

62 Finally, I want to point out a study that was done outside the “social distance” tradition, yet which merits inclusion nonetheless. Jeffrey Henig sought to investigate the sources of neighborhood opposition to such public facilities as homeless shelters. The principal research question was whether “proximity to existing community-based facilities makes residents more or less likely to resist additional facilities.” The author analyzed “precinct-level votes for and against a 1990 initiative in Washington DC, that would have guaranteed every homeless person a bed for the night...in relation to the existing distribution of emergency shelters, shelter beds, and other community-based residential facilities.” The findings “indicated that precincts with more exposure to existing shelters were somewhat more supportive of the initiative.” Of course, we cannot assess the validity of these findings without careful scrutiny of possible confounding predictor variables. But the attempt at least is made, again, to include both geometric and metaphoric distance in a single line of analysis.

## Conclusion

63 I have been very critical of the uses to which Park, Burgess, and Bogardus put the ideas of Georg Simmel, but only in the way they left us with a lopsided understanding of “distance.” While I have said that too much of the social distance studies tradition has been concerned with metaphoric distance, I do not at all wish to suggest that metaphoric distance is somehow less important than geometric distance, or that it should be de-emphasized. Rather, I hope that we can recover Simmel's original intent that the two meanings of distance can be understood as operating simultaneously.

64 A very important line of theory and research with great potential for implementing what I am calling Simmel's original intent, is that of “network analysis.” In the United States, Barry Wellman has been leading a network of researchers to overcome some of the most persistent problems of sociological method, by prioritizing social networks over group categories (Wellman and Leighton 1979; Emirbayer and Goodwin 1994). “Most broadly,” write Wetherell, Plakans, and Wellman (1994):

65 Social network analysis (1) conceptualizes social structure as a network with ties connecting members and channelling resources, (2) focuses on the characteristics of ties rather than on the characteristics of the individual members, and (3) views communities as personal communities, that is, as networks of individual relations that people foster, maintain, and use in the course of their daily lives” (645).

66 Deceptively simple, the social network-analytic approach profoundly challenges a huge body of social theory that has come to treat group membership as an assumption, easily derived from demographic categories. As Wetherell et al. clearly claim, however: “questions about social relationships come first; questions about whether those relationships are with kin, neighbors, friends, or coworkers of the same race, class, age, or gender come later” (645). Considering the bad or questionable methods reviewed in the applied social distance studies from Bogardus

to more recent work, it seems clear that a network-analytic approach would help us to close the gap between metaphoric and geometric distance. Those studies, I tried to show, put group membership first, and then attempt to measure the feelings of distance between such groups. My point throughout this essay has been that geometric distance is most probably highly constitutive of feelings, and therefore cannot be employed merely as a metaphor. But when we try to follow-up and say, "what exactly is the daily geometric relationship between Person A, with attitudes, and Person B, with characteristics," we must begin some kind of network analysis: we must "map," as it were, the concrete geospatial connections between Person A and Person B.

67 It must be noted, however, that Wellman and other network-analytic researchers have been highly critical of spatial approaches to such basic phenomena as "community": "The essence of community is its social structure, not its spatial structure. Space remains important, but social relationships define community" (645). Although much in this position is justified, these assertions go too far. The proponents of this network-analytic approach should pay close attention to the theories and methods of geographic path analysis pioneered by Hagerstrand, as promoted widely by Allan Pred (1983, 1984), and Anssi Paasi (1986, 1991). The most concrete method of tracking any kind of social network is to specify the daily points of contact between persons in the network. Wetherell et al. are right to claim that close physical proximity is not a prerequisite for community and meaningful networks (they point of course to long-distance communication). But even "cyberspace" entails specific technological and physical geometries that can be specified.

68 The recent spatialization of social theory deserves to take advantage of the concept of social distance, and the practitioners of social distance studies need to take advantage of the recent scholarship on society and space. It also needs to make better use of other "classic" sociologists' ideas. Durkheim (1982), for example, argued that social life rests on a "substratum," which he defined in explicitly spatial terms:

69 "It is made up of the mass of individuals who constitute the society, the manner in which they have settled upon the earth, the nature and configuration of those things of all kinds which affect collective relationships." He added that studying this substratum would require a "science which we propose to call social morphology," and he named geography first among the disciplines that would be needed for this interdisciplinary science (1982: 241).<sup>12</sup>

70 But the great challenge facing those who would close this gap will be to deal with the crisis of representation itself. Social distance studies tend to begin with social categories that form the units of analysis: race, class, ethnicity, gender, religion, and so on. A Simmelian approach should show how these constructed identities emerge from geometric-metaphoric practices of distance. Clearly, we are only at the beginning of a very large research agenda if we hope to realize the implications of Simmel's "geometry of social life."

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### ***Annexe***

#### A Selection of Recent "Social Distance" Study Titles

(From a search of Sociological Abstracts, 1995: in alphabetical order by title)

- "A New Measure of Social Status for Men and Women: The Social Distance Scale" (Bakker 1993).
- "Analyses of Projected Social Distances toward Family Members: Comparisons of Single and Married Subjects from Taiwan" (Miao, Adler, and Takooshian 1993)
- "Chinese Aloofness from Other Groups: Social Distance Data from a City in British Columbia" (Netting 1991).
- "Cross-Cultural Variations in Intergenerational Social Distance: The United States and Malawi" (Miller, Doddler and Nickols 1993).
- "Exploring Social Distance in Race and Ethnic Relations Courses" (Morrissey 1992).
- "Figures of Otherness: The Lunatic and the Immigrant" (Pfefferkorn 1994).
- "In an Urban Taxicab; Taksin kaupunkilaisuus ja tilan hallinta" (Toiskallio 1994)
- "Racial, Ethnic and Religious Social Distance in Surinam: An Exploration of the 'Strategic Alliance Hypothesis' in a Caribbean Community" (Brinkerhoff and Jacob 1994).
- "Relationships with Waitresses: Gendered Social Distance in Restaurant Hierarchies" (LaPointe 1992).
- "Religious Divide in the Cape Peninsula: A Study of Socio-Religious Distance between the Muslim Community and Other Religious Communities" (Da Costa 1994)
- "Social Distance Among Australian Ethnic Groups" (McAllister and Moore 1991)
- "Social Distance and Speech Behavior: The Case of Indirect Complaints" (Boxer 1993)
- "The Problem of the Right Conjugal 'Distance' Once Retired" (Caradec 1994)
- "The Social Distance Perceptions of Racial and Ethnic Groups by College Students: A Research Note" (Sparrow and Cretien 1993).
- "To Know them is to...? Proximity to Shelters and Support for the Homeless" (Henig 1994).
- "Undercover Social-Distancing Techniques" (Jacobs 1994).
- "What's in a Word: The Distancing Function of Language in Medicine" (Mintz 1992).

## Notes

- 1 W.I. Thomas, who recruited Park to the faculty of the University of Chicago, was an important mentor to Park, even though Park did not always do justice to his ideas.
- 2 This is a difficult claim to prove, but see for instance how much of the U.S. intellectual genealogy in Flanagan (1993) intersects with the Park circle in a major way
- 3 I make this case at some length in my forthcoming *The Metropolitan Crisis of Modernity in the United States: 1890s-1920s* (North Carolina Press).
- 4 This journal began as *Journal of Applied Sociology* in 1916 and retained a strong empirical-methodological focus during its long lifetime, until 1978, when the last issue appeared. The height of its career was reached perhaps in the 1950s, when its editorial board included Herbert Blumer, Ernest W. Burgess, F. Stuart Chapin, George Lundberg, Howard Odum, Pitrim A. Sorokin, and Florian Znaniecki. Notably absent from this journal were the circles of Talcott Parsons (Harvard) and Paul Lazarsfeld (Columbia)
- 5 "Emory Stephen Bogardus Honored for Twenty-Five Years of Leadership," *Sociology and Social Research* 21 (March-April 1937): 299-309. Quotations at 305, 307
- 6 Emory S. Bogardus, "Measuring Social Distances," *Journal of Applied Sociology* 9 (1925): 299-308.
- 7 Emory S. Bogardus, "A Social Distance Scale," *Sociology and Social Research* 17 (1933): 265-71. Following advances in "sociometry," Bogardus tried in this revision to establish "equal" steps between the levels of social distance, though processing some sixty social-distance statements. See Donald T. Campbell, "The Bogardus Social Distance Scale," *Sociology and Social Research* 36 (1951-2): 322-26. I give the date range for this scale as 1925 to 1966 because Bogardus last used it in the fourth of his "racial distance studies" in that year. Emory S. Bogardus, *A Forty Year Racial Distance Study* (Los Angeles: University of Southern California, 1967)
- 8 For example, Bogardus did not control for race in his overall results, even though many of the respondents were of African descent. In addition, his sampling technique was not scientific: he merely asked his sociology colleagues at other universities to administer his questionnaire to their students.
- 9 Inserting a new response item, "Would exclude from my country's regional alliance," or "Would exclude from my hemisphere," between "would exile" and "would kill," and setting it to 10 meters would remove the problem.
- 10 Westie and Westie sought "to measure social distance in four areas of interaction: (I) residential, (II) position (extent to which the subject would be willing to have attitude-object occupy positions of power and prestige), (III) interpersonal (distance preferred in acquaintance, friendship, etc.), and (IV) physical (degree of 'physical aversion')." (1956: 190).
- 11 I have made no attempt at a systematic review of the literature on social distance, although it seems that such a project would be a very useful one. Here I wish to take a few examples to represent a range of possibilities.
- 12 This short essay was originally published as "Morphologie sociale," *Année sociologique* 2 (1899), pp 520-1

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