
Georg Simmel

The Secret and the Secret Society

As a stimulant for discussion of the concept of the public in architecture and urban planning W|C|B would like to refer to Georg Simmel's *Sociology: Inquiries Into the Construction of Social Forms*. Here Simmel introduces the "secret" as a constituent of public and private spheres. Below we have put together a compilation of what we believe are the most important paragraphs. The complete text is available in bookstores and in all university libraries. You can also find a full English version on *archive.org*. Of course, it is up to each author to what extent and whether they want to study it. However, especially for architecture and urban planning we envisage that studying Simmel will make it possible to regard the public sphere and privacy less as characteristics of buildings and squares but instead look at them as a cognitive and social relationship of the users initiated by architecture, as a result of a "negotiation" (Lars Lerup).

„[...] Obviously, all relations which people have to one another are based on their knowing something about one another. The merchant knows that his correspondent wants to buy at the lowest possible price, and to sell at the highest possible price. The teacher knows that he can tax the student with a certain kind and amount of learning material. Within each social stratum, an individual knows how much culture, approximately, he may expect of every other individual. Without such knowledge, evidently, these and many other kinds of interaction could not take place at all. One may say (with reservations which easily suggest themselves) that in all relations of a personally differentiated sort, intensity and nuance develop in the degree in which each party, by words and by mere existence, reveals itself to the other. How much error and mere prejudice may be contained in all this knowledge, is another question. Yet, just as our apprehension of external nature, along with elusions and inadequacies, nevertheless attains the truth required for the life and progress of our species, so everybody knows, by and large correctly, the other person with whom he has to deal, so that interaction and relation become possible.

The first condition of having to deal with somebody at all is to know with whom one has to deal. The fact that people usually introduce themselves to one another whenever they engage in a conversation of any length or meet on the same social

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level, may strike one as an empty form; yet it is an adequate symbol of the mutual knowledge presupposed by every relationship. We are very often not conscious of this because, for a large number of relations, we need to know only that quite typical tendencies and qualities are present on both sides. The necessary character of these tendencies is usually noted only when, on occasion, they are absent. [...]

It is entirely legitimate that the theoretical conception we have of a particular individual should vary with the standpoint from which it is formed, a standpoint which is the result of the overall relation between knower and known. One can never know another person absolutely, which would involve knowledge of every single thought and mood. Nevertheless, one forms some personal unity out of those of his fragments in which alone he is accessible to us. This unity, therefore, depends upon the portion of him which our standpoint permits us to see. [...] (P. 308)

If A and B have different conceptions of M, this by no means necessarily implies incompleteness or deception. Rather, in view of the relation in which A stands to M, A's nature and the total circumstances being what they are, A's picture of M is true for him in the same manner in which, for B, a different picture is true. It would be quite erroneous to say that, above these two pictures, there is the objectively correct knowledge about M, and that A's and B's images are legitimated to the extent to which they coincide with this objective knowledge. Rather, the ideal truth which the picture of M in the conception of A approaches to be sure, only asymptotically is something different, even as an ideal, from that of B. It contains as an integrating, form-giving precondition the psychological peculiarity of A and the particular relation into which A and M are brought by their specific characters and destinies.

Every relationship between persons gives rise to a picture of each in the other; and this picture, obviously, interacts with the actual relation. The relation constitutes the condition under which the conception, that each has of the other, takes this or that shape and has its truth legitimated. On the other hand, the real interaction between the individuals is based upon the pictures which they acquire of one another. [...] (P. 309)

This same dualism also causes sociological relationships to be determined in a twofold manner. Concord, harmony, coefficacy, which are unquestionably held to be socializing forces, must nevertheless be interspersed with distance, competition, repulsion, in order to yield the actual configuration of society. The solid, organizational forms which seem to constitute or create society, must constantly be disturbed, disbalanced, gnawed at by individualistic, irregular forces, in order to gain their vital reaction and development through submission and resistance. Intimate relations, whose formal medium is physical and psychological nearness, lose the attractiveness, even the content of their intimacy, as soon as the close relationship does not also contain, simultaneously and alternately, distances and intermissions. Finally, and this is the decisive point: although reciprocal knowledge conditions relationships positively, after all, it does not do this by itself alo-

ne. Relationships being what they are, they also presuppose a certain ignorance and a measure of mutual concealment. [...] (P. 315)

Confidence, evidently, is one of the most important synthetic forces within society. As a hypothesis regarding future behavior, a hypothesis certain enough to serve as a basis for practical conduct, confidence is intermediate between knowledge and ignorance about a man. The person who knows completely need not trust; while the person who knows nothing can, on no rational grounds, afford even confidence. [...] (P. 318)

The merchant who sells grain or oil needs to know only whether his correspondent is good for the price. But if he takes him as his associate, he must not only know his financial standing and certain of his very general qualities, but he must have thorough insight into him as a personality; he must know whether he is decent, compatible, and whether he has a daring or hesitant temperament. Upon such reciprocal knowledge rest not only the beginning of the relationship, but also its whole development, the daily common actions, and the division of functions between the partners. [...] (P. 319 f.)

Acquaintance in this social sense is, therefore, the proper seat of 'discretion.' For, discretion consists by no means only in the respect for the secret of the other, for his specific will to conceal this or that from us, but in staying away from the knowledge of all that the other does not expressly reveal to us. It does not refer to anything particular which we are not permitted to know, but to a quite general reserve in regard to the total personality. Discretion is a special form of the typical contrast between the imperatives, 'what is not prohibited is allowed,' and 'what is not allowed is prohibited.' Relations among men are thus distinguished according to the question of mutual knowledge of either 'what is not concealed may be known' or 'what is not revealed must not be known.'

To act upon the second of these decisions corresponds to the feeling (which also operates elsewhere) that an ideal sphere lies around every human being. Although differing in size in various directions and differing according to the person with whom one entertains relations, this sphere cannot be penetrated, unless the personality value of the individual is thereby destroyed. A sphere of this sort is placed around man by his 'honor.' Language very poignantly designates an insult to one's honor as 'coming too close': the radius of this sphere marks, as it were, the distance whose trespassing by another person insults one's honor.

Another sphere of the same form corresponds to what is called the 'significance' of a personality. In regard to the 'significant' ['great'] man, there is an inner compulsion which tells one to keep at a distance and which does not disappear even in intimate relations with him. The only type for whom such distance does not exist is the individual who has no organ for perceiving significance. For this reason, the 'valet' knows no such sphere of distance; for him there is no 'hero'; but this is due, not to the hero, but to the valet. For the same reason, all importunity is associated with a striking lack of feeling for differences in the significance of men. The indivi-

dual who fails to keep his distance from a great person does not esteem him highly, much less too highly (as might superficially appear to be the case) ; but, on the contrary, his importune behavior reveals lack of proper respect. The painter often emphasizes the significance of a figure in a picture that contains many figures by arranging the others in a considerable distance from it. In an analogous fashion, the sociological simile of significance is the distance which keeps the individual outside a certain sphere that is occupied by the power, will, and greatness of a person. [...] (P. 320 – 322).

The question where this boundary lies cannot be answered in terms of a simple principle; it leads into the finest ramifications of societal formation. For, in an absolute sense, the right to intellectual private-property can be affirmed as little as can the right to material property. We know that, in higher civilizations, material private-property in its essential three dimensions, acquisition, insurance, increase is never based on the individual's own forces alone. It always requires the conditions and forces of the social milieu. From the beginning, therefore, it is limited by the right of the whole, whether through taxation or through certain checks on acquisition. But this right is grounded more deeply than just in the principle of service and counterservice between society and individual: it is grounded in the much more elementary principle, that the part must sustain as great a restriction upon its autonomous existence and possessiveness as the maintenance and the purposes of the whole require.

This also applies to the inner sphere of man. In the interest of interaction and social cohesion, the individual must know certain things about the other person. Nor does the other have the right to oppose this knowledge from a moral standpoint, by demanding the discretion of the first: he cannot claim the entirely undisturbed possession of his own being and consciousness, since this discretion might harm the interests of his society. [...] (P. 322 – 324)

The intention of hiding, however, takes on a much greater intensity when it clashes with the intention of revealing. In this situation emerges that purposive hiding and masking, that aggressive defensive, so to speak, against the third person, which alone is usually designated as secret. The secret in this sense, the hiding of realities by negative or positive means, is one of man's greatest achievements. In comparison with the childish stage in which every conception is expressed at once, and every undertaking is accessible to the eyes of all, the secret produces an immense enlargement of life: numerous contents of life cannot even emerge in the presence of full publicity. The secret offers, so to speak, the possibility of a second world alongside the manifest world; and the latter is decisively influenced by the former.

Whether there is secrecy between two individuals or groups, and if so how much, is a question that characterizes every relation between them. For even where one of the two does not notice the existence of a secret, the behavior of the concealer, and hence the whole relationship, is certainly modified by it. [...] (P. 329)

Among children, pride and bragging are often based on a child's being able to say to the other: 'I know something that you don't know' and to such a degree, that this sentence is uttered as a formal means of boasting and of subordinating the others, even where it is made up and actually refers to no secret. This jealousy of the knowledge about facts hidden to others, is shown in all contexts, from the smallest to the largest. British parliamentary discussions were secret for a long time; and, as late as under George III, press communications about them were prosecuted as criminal offenses explicitly, as violations of parliamentary privileges. The secret gives one a position of exception; it operates as a purely socially determined attraction. It is basically independent of the content it guards but, of course, is increasingly effective in the measure in which the exclusive possession is vast and significant. (P. 332 f.)

The secret puts a barrier between men but, at the same time, it creates the tempting challenge to break through it, by gossip or confession and this challenge accompanies its psychology like a constant overtone. The sociological significance of the secret, therefore, has its practical extent, its mode of realization, only in the individual's capacity or inclination to keep it to himself, in his resistance or weakness in the face of tempting betrayal. [...] All these elements which determine the sociological role of the secret are of an individual nature; but the measure in which the dispositions and complications of personalities form secrets depends, at the same time, on the social structure in which their lives are placed. The decisive point in this respect is that the secret is a first-rate element of individualization. It is this in a typical dual role: social conditions of strong personal differentiation permit and require secrecy in a high degree; and, conversely, the secret embodies and intensifies such differentiation. (P. 334 f.)

Every democracy holds publicity to be an intrinsically desirable situation, on the fundamental premise that everybody should know the events and circumstances that concern him, since this is the condition without which he cannot contribute to decisions about them; and every shared knowledge itself contains the psychological challenge to shared action. It is a moot question whether this conclusion is quite valid. If, above all individualistic interests, there has grown an objective governing structure which embodies certain aspects of these interests, the formal autonomy of this structure may very well entitle it to function secretly, without thereby belying its 'publicity' in the sense of a material consideration of the interests of all. Thus, there is no logical connection which would entail the greater value of publicity. On the other hand, the general scheme of cultural differentiation is again shown here: what is public becomes ever more public, and what is private becomes ever more private. And this historical? development is the expression of a deeper, objective significance: what is essentially public and what, in its content, concerns all, also becomes ever more public externally, in its sociological form; and what, in its inner meaning, is autonomous the centripetal affairs of the individual gains an ever more private character even in its sociological position, an ever more distinct possibility of remaining secret. (P. 337)

The secret is a sociological determination characteristic of the reciprocal relations between group elements; or, rather, together with other relational forms, it constitutes their relationship as a whole. But it may also characterize a group in its totality: this applies to the case of 'secret societies'. As long as the existence, the activities, and the possessions of an individual are secret, the general sociological significance of the secret is isolation, contrast, and egoistic individualization. The sociological significance of the secret is external, namely, the relationship between the one who has the secret and another who does not. But, as soon as a whole group uses secrecy as its form of existence, the significance becomes internal: the secret determines the reciprocal relations among those who share it in common. Yet, since even here there is the exclusion (with its specific nuances) of the non initiates, the sociology of the secret society is confronted with the complicated problem of ascertaining how intra-group life is determined by the group's secretive behavior toward the outside. I do not preface this discussion by a systematic classification of secret societies, which would have only an external, historical interest; even without it, essential categories will emerge by themselves. The first internal relation typical of the secret society is the reciprocal confidence among its members. (P. 345)

This is quite possible, however, for a societal unit. Its elements may live in the most frequent interactions; but the fact that they form a society a conspiracy or a gang of swindlers, a religious conventicle or an association for engaging in sexual orgies can essentially, as well as permanently, be a secret.

In this type, then, it is not the individuals, but the group they form, which is concealed. It must be distinguished from another type, where the formation of the group is completely known, while the membership, the purpose, or the specific rules of the association remain secret. Examples are many secret orders among nature peoples; also the Freemasons. Secrecy protects this type less than it does the former, since what is known always offers points of attack for further penetration. On the other hand, such relatively secret societies often have the advantage of a certain elasticity. Since their existence is manifest to a certain extent from the beginning, they can bear further revelations more easily than can those societies whose very life is secret, and whose mere discovery frequently spells destruction their secret usually rests on the radical alternatives of All or Nothing. (P. 346)

Corresponding to this protective character as an external quality, there is in the secret society, as already noted, the internal quality of reciprocal confidence among its members the very specific trust that they are capable of keeping silent. According to their content, associations rest upon premises of various kinds of confidence: confidence in business ability, in religious conviction, in courage, love, decency, or in the case of criminal groups in the radical break with moral concerns. But as soon as the society becomes secret, it adds to the trust determined by its particular purpose, the formal trust in secrecy. This, evidently, is faith-in-the-person of a sociologically more abstract character than any other, since every possible common content may be subject to it. [...]

For this reason, secret societies offer a very impressive schooling in the moral solidarity among men. Their rudimentary forms begin with any two persons who share a secret; their diffusion in all places and at all times is immense and has hardly ever been appreciated even quantitatively. For, in the confidence of one man in another lies as high a moral value as in the fact that the trusted person shows himself worthy of it. Perhaps it is even more free and meritorious, since the trust we receive contains an almost compulsory power, and to betray it requires thoroughly positive meanness. By contrast, confidence is 'given'; it cannot be requested in the same manner in which we are requested to honor it, once we are its recipients. (P. 347f.)

Another means for placing discretion upon an objective basis was applied by the secret order of the Gallic Druids. The content of their secrets lay, particularly, in spiritual songs which every Druid had to memorize. But this was so arranged above all, probably, because of the prohibition to write the songs down that it required an extraordinary long time, even up to twenty years. By means of this long period of learning before there was anything essential that could have been betrayed, a gradual habituation to silence was developed. The fascination of disclosure did not assail the undisciplined mind all at once, as it were; the young mind was allowed to adapt itself slowly to resisting this fascination. The rule according to which the songs could not be written down, however, was more than a mere protective measure against the revelation of the secrets it is part of much more comprehensive sociological phenomena. The individual's dependence upon personal instruction, and the fact that the exclusive source of the teaching was within the secret order not deposited in any objective piece of writing these facts tied every single member with incomparable closeness to the group, and made him constantly feel that, if he were severed from this substance, he would lose his own and could never find it again anywhere.

It has perhaps not been sufficiently noted how much, in more mature cultures, the objectification of the spirit promotes the growing independence of the individual. So long as immediate tradition, individual teaching, and, above all, establishment of norms through persons in authority, determine the individual's intellectual life, he is wholly integrated with his surrounding, living group. It alone gives him the possibility of a fulfilled and spiritual existence; the direction of all channels, through which his life-contents flow to him, runs only between his social milieu and himself; and he feels this at every moment. But, once the labor of the species capitalizes its results in the form of writing, in visible works, in enduring examples, this immediate, organic flow between the actual group and its individual member is interrupted. The life process of the individual no longer continuously binds him to the group without competition from any other quarter: it can now feed on objective sources which need not be personally present. The fact that this supply actually originates in, processes of the social mind, is relatively irrelevant. These processes are not only quite remote, having occurred in generations which are no longer connected with the present feeling of the individual, although his supply is the crystallization of actions by these past generations. Above all, however, it is the objective form of this supply, its separateness from subjective per-

sonality, that opens a super-social source of food to the individual. His spiritual content, both in degree and kind, thus comes to depend much more markedly upon his capacity to absorb, than upon any allotted offering. The particularly close association within the secret society (to be discussed later in greater detail), which has its affective category, so to speak, in specific 'trust thus suggests that, where the secret society has as its core the transmission of intellectual contents, it is fit for it to avoid the written fixation of these matters. (P. 350 f.)

In these questions concerning techniques of keeping secrets, it must not be forgotten that the secret is not only a means under whose protection the material purposes of a group may be furthered: often, conversely, the very formation of a group is designed to guarantee the secrecy of certain contents. This occurs in the special type of secret societies whose substance is a secret doctrine, some theoretical, mystical, or religious knowledge. Here, secrecy is its own sociological purpose: certain insights must not penetrate into the masses; those who know form a community in order to guarantee mutual secrecy to one another. If they were a mere sum of unconnected individuals, the secret would soon be lost; but sociation offers each of them psychological support against the temptation of disclosure. Sociation counterbalances the isolating and individualizing effect of the secret which I have emphasized. All sorts of sociation shift the needs for individualization and socialization back and forth within their forms, even within their contents as if the requirement of an enduring mixture were met by the employment of elements constantly changing in quality. The secret society compensates for the separating factor inherent in every secret by the simple fact that it is a society.

Secrecy and individualization are so closely associated that sociation may play two wholly different roles in regard to secrecy. Sociation may be directly sought, as has just been emphasized, in order to compensate, in part, for the isolating consequences of continuing secrecy in order to satisfy within secrecy the impulse toward communion which the secret destroys in regard to the outside. On the other hand, secrecy greatly loses in significance whenever, for reasons of content, individualization is fundamentally excluded. The Freemasons stress their wish of being the most general society, the union of unions/ 1 the only group which rejects all particularistic elements and wants to appropriate only what is common to all good men. Hand in hand with this ever more decisive tendency, there has developed among them the growing indifference toward the secret character of the lodges, which have come to be limited to mere external formalities. It is thus not contradictory for secrecy to be sometimes favored, sometimes dissolved, by sociation. (P. 355 f.)

[...] it quite characteristically claims to a greater extent the whole individual, connects its members in more of their totality, and mutually obligates them more closely, than does an open society of identical content. Through the symbolism of the ritual, which excites a whole range of vaguely delimited feelings beyond all particular, rational interests, the secret society synthesizes those interests into a total claim upon the individual. By means of the ritual form, the particular purpose of the secret society is enlarged to the point of being a closed unit, a whole, both

sociological and subjective. [...]

*The same conditions, finally, involve still another motive in the sociology of the ritual in secret societies. Every secret society contains a measure of freedom, which the structure of the society at large does not have. Whether the secret society, like the *fehme*, supplements the inadequate judicature of the political community; or like the conspiratory or criminal band, rebels against its law; or like the *Mysteries*, stands beyond the commands and prohibitions of the general society the singling-out, so characteristic of the secret society, always has a note of freedom: the society lives in an area to which the norms of the environment do not extend. (P. 360)*

The secret element in societies is a primary sociological fact, a particular kind and shading of togetherness, a formal quality of relationship. In direct or indirect interaction with other such qualities, it determines the shape of the group member or of the group itself. Yet, from a historical standpoint, the secret society is a secondary phenomenon; that is, it always develops only within a society already complete in itself. To put it differently: the secret society is characterized by its secrecy in the same way in which other societies (or even secret societies themselves) are characterized by their superordination and subordination, or by their aggressive purposes, or by their imitative character; but, that it can develop with these characteristics is possible only on the condition that a society already exists. Within this larger circle, it opposes it as a narrower one; whatever the purpose of the society, this opposition has, at any rate, the sense of exclusion. Even the altruistic secret society, which merely wants to render a certain service to the total group and intends to disband after achieving it, evidently considers temporary separation from this total group a technique unavoidable in view of its purpose.

Among the many smaller groups which are included in larger ones, there is none whose sociological constellation forces it to emphasize its formal self-sufficiency to the same extent as it does the secret society. Its secret surrounds it like a boundary outside of which there is nothing but materially, or at least formally, opposite matter, a boundary which therefore fuses, within itself, the secret society into a perfect unity. (P. 362)

The separateness of the secret society expresses a value: people separate from others because they do not want to make common cause with them, because they wish to let them feel their superiority. This motive leads everywhere to group formations, which evidently are very different from those undertaken for objective purposes. By joining one another, those who want to distinguish themselves give rise to the development of an aristocracy, which strengthens and (so to speak) enlarges their position and self-consciousness by the weight of their own sum. Separation and group formation are thus connected through the aristocratizing motive. In many cases, this connection gives separation itself the stamp of something 'special' in an honorific sense. Even in school classes, it can be observed how small, closely integrated cliques of classmates think of themselves as the elite over against the others who are not organized merely because of the formal fact

of constituting a special group; and the others, through their hostility and envy, involuntarily acknowledge this higher value. In these cases, secrecy and mystification amount to heightening the wall toward the outside, and hence to strengthening the aristocratic character of the group. This significance of the secret society as the intensification of sociological exclusiveness in general, is strikingly shown in political aristocracies. Secrecy has always been among the requisites of their regime. In the first place, by trying to conceal the numerical insignificance of the ruling class, aristocracies exploit the psychological fact that the unknown itself appears to be fearsome, mighty, threatening. (P. 364 f.)

This exclusion of everything outside the group is a general formal-sociological fact, which merely uses secrecy as a more pointed technique. It attains a particular nuance in the plurality of degrees in which it is customary for initiation into the secret society, down to its last mysteries, to take place. The existence of such degrees threw light earlier upon another sociological feature of the secret society. As a rule, before he is even accepted into the first degree, the novice must give a solemn promise of secrecy concerning everything he may experience, whereby the absolute, formal separation, achievable by secrecy, is effected. Yet, inasmuch as the actual content or purpose of the society becomes accessible to the neophyte only gradually whether this purpose is the perfect purification and sanctification of the soul through the consecration of the mysteries, or the absolute suspension of every moral barrier, as among the Assassins and other criminal societies the material separation is achieved differently, in a more continuous, relative manner. In this material respect, the neophyte is still closer to the status of non-participant, from which testing and education eventually lead him to grasp the totality or core of the association. This core, evidently, thus gains a protection and isolation from the outside far beyond those by means of the oath upon entrance. It is seen to (as has already been shown in the example of the Druids) that the still untried neophyte does not have much he could betray: within the general secrecy that encompasses the group as a whole, the graduated secrecy produces an elastic sphere of protection (as it were) around its innermost essence. (P. 366 f.)

In practice, sociological autonomy presents itself as group egoism: the group pursues its own purposes with the same inconsiderateness for all purposes outside itself which, in the case of the individual, is precisely called egoism. Usually, to be sure, this inconsiderateness is morally justified in the consciousness of the individual members by the fact that the group purposes themselves have a super-individual, objective character; that it is often impossible to name any particular individual who profits from the group's egoistic behavior; and that, as a matter of fact, this behavior often requires the group members' selflessness and sacrifice. But the point here is not to make any ethical valuation, but only to stress the group's separation from its environment, which is brought about or characterized by the egoism of the group. However, in the case of a small circle, which intends to preserve and develop itself within a larger one, this egoism has certain limits as long as it exists publicly. (P. 367 f.)

*Within certain political, religious, and status limits, everybody is considered immediately as 'belonging' so long as he satisfies certain external conditions, which are usually not a matter of his will, but are given with his existence itself. All people, for instance, who are born within the territory of a given state, are members, unless particular circumstances make exceptions of them, of the (often very complex) civic society. The member of a given social class is included, as a matter of course, in the social conventions and forms of connection of this class, unless he becomes a voluntary or involuntary outsider. The extreme case is the claim of a church that it includes all mankind; and that, if any individuals are excluded from the religious association, which, ideally, is valid also for them, it is only through historical accident, sinful stubbornness, or God*s special intention. (P. 368)*

Here, as everywhere else, the intensified seclusion against the outside is associated with the intensification of cohesion internally: we give here two sides, or external forms, of the same sociological attitude. A purpose which occasions an individual to enter into secret association with others, excludes almost always such an overwhelming part of his general social circle from participation, that the potential and real participants gain rarity value. He must keep on good terms with them because it is much more difficult to replace them here than (other things being equal) in a legitimate association. Furthermore, every discord inside the secret society brings danger of betrayal, which usually both the self-preservation of the individual and that of the group are interested in avoiding.

Finally, the isolation of the secret society from the surrounding social syntheses removes a number of occasions for conflict. Among all the bonds of the individual, the bond of secret sociation always has an exceptional position. In comparison with it, the official bonds familial, civic, religious, economic, through rank and friendship no matter how varied their contents, touch contact surfaces of a very different kind and measure. Only the contrast with the secret societies makes it clear that their claims criss-cross one another, because they lie (so to speak) in the same plane. Since these claims openly compete for the individual's strength and interests, individuals collide within any one of these circles: each individual is simultaneously claimed by the interests of other groups. (P. 369 f.)

A certain English politician found the basis for the strength of the English cabinet in the secrecy which surrounds it: everybody who has ever been active in public life, he suggested, knows that a small number of people can be brought to agree the more easily, the more secret are its negotiations.

Corresponding to the outstanding degree of cohesion within the secret society is the thoroughness of its centralization. The secret society offers examples of unconditional and blind obedience to leaders who although, naturally, they may also be found elsewhere are yet particularly remarkable in view of the frequent anarchic character of the secret society that negates all other law. The more criminal its purposes, the more unlimited, usually, is the power of the leaders and the cruelty of its exercise. (P. 370)

In the North American House of Representatives, actual decisions are made in the standing committees, with which the House is almost always in agreement. But the transactions of these committees are secret; thus, the most important part of legislative activity is hidden from the public. In large measure, this seems to extinguish the political responsibility of the delegates, since nobody can be held responsible for uncontrollable procedures. Inasmuch as individual contributions toward a particular decision remain hidden, the decision appears to be made by some super-individual authority. Here, too, irresponsibility is the consequence or the symbol of the intensified sociological deindividualization, which corresponds to the secrecy of group action. This also holds for all directorates, faculties, committees, administrations, etc., whose transactions are secret: the individual, as a person, disappears as the quasi-nameless group member, and with his disappearance as a person disappears the responsibility that cannot be imagined to inhere in a being whose concrete activities are intangible. This one-sided intensification of general sociological features is confirmed, finally, by the danger with which society at large believes, rightly or wrongly, secret societies threaten it. (P. 374.f.)”