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Simmel and Ethnomethodology: Foundational Sociological Issues from a Nondualist Perspective

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Abstract
Georg Simmel, despite being a founding father of sociology, is often excluded from the list of the discipline's principal founders. This neglect of Simmel's work was perpetuated in ethnomethodology even though, like ethnomethodology, Simmel's work concerns the minute organization of everyday interaction. It can, therefore, be of considerable importance for ethnomethodological inquiries. A group of ethnomethodologists devoted two years to reviewing Simmel's corpus to identify and reveal resources that are useful for contemporary sociologists at large. What we discovered exceeded our expectations, and this article discusses some of these conceptual tools and theoretical resources, including praxis as the object of sociological investigations, objectivation practices, membership as degrees of commonness-and-strangeness, and the individual-"unity" relationship. We also review connections between Simmel, Husserl, Garfinkel and other scholars. Both Simmel and Garfinkel were relentless in their refusal to replace the dynamic character of social life with static theoretical constructs. We argue that thinking through their theories together fruitfully impedes sociologists in pursuing dualistic reasoning and re-orients them towards phenomena and issues of great sociological import that have remained largely overlooked, or have receded from view, in current sociology. We conclude that Simmel's notion of "purely sociological" forms is perfectly consonant with the motivating interest of ethnomethodological researchers, who might employ his conceptual insights to address the lived objectivity of social phenomena empirically. At the same time, this also shows how ethnomethodology is concerned with foundational sociological issues. And, finally, it illuminates Simmel's textured heritage beyond set, traditional readings of sociological thought and its history.

Keywords Formal sociology · Intersubjectivity · Membership · Objectivation practices · Phenomenology · Praxis

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Well, if anything awful is happening to subjectivity, it deserves it.

– Harold Garfinkel, 1975, "The Boston Seminars"[1]

When will the genius appear who will emancipate us from the spell of the subject in the same way that Kant liberated us from the constraint of the object?

– Georg Simmel, cited by Oakes, 1988, p. 4.

Introduction

There is an ongoing debate about the inclusion and exclusion of sociologists in the canon of the so-called "classics". This debate has often been concerned with the important contribution non-white and female sociologists have made to the discipline (Deegan, 1988; Ruiz-Junco & Vidal-Ortiz, 2023; Tillman et al., 2024). Two sociologists who also have been marginalized and "not sufficiently appreciated" (Rawls, 1989: 124) are Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Harold Garfinkel (1917–2011). Both developed approaches to the study of social phenomena that mainstream sociologists consider unorthodox (Frisby, 2002; Pyyhtinen, 2010; vom Lehn, 2014), and so Simmel's and Garfinkel's approaches have been underrepresented and deemed to be of only peripheral relevance to the advancement of sociology as a discipline (cf. Backhaus, 1998). We argue, instead, that their theoretical endeavors, taken together, necessarily distance the sociologist from dualistic thinking and direct attention towards phenomena and questions that are foundational to sociology but widely overlooked, or forgotten, in contemporary sociological research. Many express support for nondualist perspectives, but few explain what they mean by nondualism. By analyzing some of the conceptual tools of Simmel and ethnomethodology, we offer our understanding in such regard. In doing so, we aim, first, to provide empirical researchers with nondualist lenses to tackle the "living objectivity" (Simmel, 2009: 189[2]) of social life and, second, to highlight Simmel's karst heritage beyond crystallized, traditional interpretations of (the history of) sociological thinking, which often positions Simmel as little more than an "eclectic essayist" (Dal Lago, 2022: 33; cf. also Parsons 1998a: 31; Shils, 2006: 23).

Whereas Garfinkel occupied himself primarily with specifying ethnomethodology's program and worked to reveal the practical accomplishment of social order (Garfinkel, 2019, 1967, 2002), "Simmel allowed his genius to range widely over

[1] Seminar#2, line 356. The seminar recordings, transcripts, and other relevant materials are available at: https://talkbank.org/ca/access/Garfinkel.html.

[2] In footnotes we provide information regarding where a term or quote from Simmel appears in the German original as published in the collected works of Georg Simmel, *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe* (GSG), giving the volume and page numbers. Here: GSG 11: 237. In some cases, we also add the original German quote. That is mostly when we disagree with the quoted English translation. In the bibliography we list the original source under Simmel, Georg.

the fields of philosophy and the human and social sciences" (Backhaus, 2003: 223). Simmel's works encompass a variety of academic disciplines, including anthropology, philosophy, psychology and sociology, offering a comprehensive analysis of the human experience. According to Simmel's *Soziologie*, the poles of human experience are the individual and humanity (2009: 674–675[3]), the former being the subject matter of psychology and the latter the concern of the "science of society" (2009: 20[4]) called sociology.

In such discussion of sociology as a new science of everything human, Simmel suggests that society results from ordinary interaction. In his view, society is "the complex of interacting individuals, the socially formed human matter, as that constitutes the entire historical reality" (2009: 26[5]). He also suggests that it is "the sum of individual forms of relationships by which individuals are able to become a society in the first sense" (ibid.). Sociologists, therefore, can discriminate different social forms with which people interact with each other. Alongside social forms, Simmel differentiates structural entities like groups (2009: Chap. 2[6]) and circles (2009: Chap. 6[7])—with their varying degrees of abstraction and super-individuality—of which individuals are members and that stand between the individual and humanity. It is the everyday life of society and groups where both the individual and humanity necessarily develop. "Humanity created social interaction[8] as its form of life" (2009: 671[9]); "the existence and activity of the individual must run its course in some such form, and it constitutes the technology or intermediary link through which individuality can *in practice* become an effective element of humanity" (2009: 674[10], emphasis added).

Simmel founded a sociology that was attuned to the complex culture-generating accomplishments that emerge from the local reciprocal interactions of cooperating persons; however, a sociology with that kind of focus is on life-support today, and ethnomethodology affords a scarce facility for continuing to investigate this stream of classical sociological interest. Ethnomethodology and Garfinkel have operated under the assumption that people naturally concert their activities with an interest in forming a local orderliness, so that there is, in Simmel's words, a "sociability instinct" (2009: 524[11]). Simmel writes that his treatise *Soziologie* seeks to describe "the processes, ultimately occurring in individuals, that give rise to their being a soci-

[3] GSG 11: 862–863.

[4] GSG 11: 14.

[5] GSG 11: 23.

[6] GSG 11: Chap. 2, 63–159.

[7] GSG 11: Chap. 6, 456–511.

[8] Wolff (1950) translated Simmel's original "Vergesellschaftung" with "sociation," a term that did not find its way into wider sociological discourse. The translators of Simmel's *Soziologie* (Blasi et al., 2009: xv) advise that with the term "Vergesellschaftung" Simmel sometimes refers to social interaction and sometimes to the creation of social entities. Consequently, they decided to translate the term as "social interaction" and "creating society" respectively.

[9] GSG 11: 858.

[10] GSG 11: 862.

[11] GSG 11: 663, "Geselligkeitstrieb".

ety" (2009: 42[12]), paying attention to "the individual as a member coordinated with all the others" (2009: 212[13]).

Simmel kept his analytic sights trained upon this phenomenon of sociability and especially "the immediate liveliness of the group" (2009: 509[14]), and he paid attention to the trend toward social solidarity that cohorts of actors display. Durkheim shared this interest in social solidarity and was not unmindful of the vital role performed by the liveliness of the group. His presentation of "collective effervescence" in his *Elementary Forms* (Durkheim, 2001: 42) gave this phenomenon the central role in religious sentiment, thereby founding the "sacred" upon social solidarity; however, Simmel's investigations into the forms that emerge from "real relationships of praxis" (Simmel 2009: 308[15]) were more sustained. Throughout his lifework, Simmel was unwilling to ignore "the for-one-another of subjects" (2009: 191[16]) or "the pleasure we derive from being in the company of others" (Edles & Appelrouth, 2005: 251). Simmel and ethnomethodology share the belief that the for-one-another of subjects is the bedrock of society and should be prioritized in sociological inquiries.

Simmel (2009: 571[17]) kept pursuing "the most vital interactivity" and above all preferred studying "individuals who are looking at each other" (ibid.), a practice that has become nearly extinct in contemporary sociology. For this reason, it is peculiar that Garfinkel never discussed Simmel in his lectures, nor cited him in his published works, and only marginally mentioned Simmel in his unpublished PhD thesis (Garfinkel, 1952: 136). That Garfinkel ignored the very founding father of sociology whose research interests and methods were most kindred to ethnomethodology begs inquiry. While we can speculate that the skepticism regarding Simmel of Garfinkel's thesis supervisor at Harvard, Talcott Parsons, may have influenced Garfinkel, all we can do now is to make an inventory of Simmel's corpus of work and locate what clues are available there for ethnomethodological studies, and possibly revive them. In what follows, we explore some of the intersections between Simmel and the programs of research in ethnomethodology and conversation analysis (EM/CA).

[12] GSG 11: 45–46, "Denn es sucht die, die schließlich in Individuen sich vollziehenden, Vorgänge auf, die das Gesellschafts-Sein dieser bedingen - nicht als zeitlich vorangehende Ursachen für dieses Resultat, sondern als Teilvorgänge der Synthese, die wir zusammenfassend die Gesellschaft nennen."

[13] GSG 11: 265.

[14] GSG 11: 641, "der unmittelbaren Lebendigkeit der Gruppe".

[15] GSG 11: 384, "realen Beziehungen der Praxis". Although in the Wolff's translation read by Garfinkel the quoted passage reads "real, practical and sentimental, relations", a phrase Garfinkel has underlined in his copy of the book (see footnote 64), the underlying notion is one and the same, and "praxis" is indeed the term adopted by Garfinkel for naming his principal research center, "Institute for the Study of Social Praxis" at UCLA in the 1970s.

[16] GSG 11: 239.

[17] GSG 11: 723, "die höchst lebendige Wechselwirkung".

Uncanonical Sociologists

Simmel completed his doctorate in 1881 and his habilitation in Germany in 1885, but he only obtained a full professorship at the University of Strasbourg four years before his death in 1918. That his professorship was in philosophy rather than sociology is because much of Simmel's work was marked as philosophical investigation and in the early 20th century sociology still was an emerging discipline. Simmel's sociological studies became influential in the United States and were partly incorporated into the Chicago School's sociology. This influence arose after Albion Small, who founded the Department of Sociology at the University of Chicago in 1892 and the *American Journal of Sociology* in 1895, translated some of Simmel's essays, commenting on them in footnotes (cf. Simmel, 1904a, 1904b, 1904c, 1909). Through these translated essays Simmel became known as a sociologist who was preoccupied with the micro-phenomena of social life, with processes rather than abstract constructs, and who conceived of sociology as a science of "social forms" (Levine, 1971). Simmel's work had considerable influence on North American sociology between the 1920s and 1940s (Jaworski, 1997). Hence, it is surprising that Parsons decided to omit it from his *The Structure of Social Action* (Parsons, 1937), which had the consequence that Simmel was not always included in the discipline's canon of sociological classics (Levine, 1989).

Levine (1989) suggests that Parsons did not include Simmel alongside Marshall, Weber and Durkheim because he prioritized a utilitarian and economic perspective with which Simmel's writings did not align. Parsons (1998a: 31) recognized the sociological relevance of Simmel's essays but argued that his "contributions to general social theory … are relatively meager": "These are brilliantly illuminating essays, among the finest things to be found in sociological literature. But even taken together they clearly do not comprise a system of formal sociology" (Parsons 1998a: 47). In a similar way, Edward Shils (2006: 23) was dismissive of Simmel, describing him as "a dazzler … a bubbling fountain, not a broad powerful, irresistible river like Weber". Parsons and Shils did not consider Simmel's work to have made a noteworthy contribution to the advancing of a general social theory. Regarding Simmel's examination of "social forms" as being key to the development of sociology as a "science", Parsons argues that Simmel's formal sociology has remained underdeveloped and not reached the level of abstraction that can be found in Weber's theory of "ideal types" (Parsons 1998a, b).

Garfinkel's interest in sociology was spurred by his reading of *The Structure of Social Action*, and after World War II he was accepted to study for a PhD with Parsons at Harvard. Here he was exposed to and contributed to Parsons' general theory of society. Yet his main interest increasingly became the creation and development of a novel approach to the question of the possibility of social order. He wrote a proposal for a doctoral project that he never pursued, which was edited and published by Anne Rawls two decades ago as *Seeing Sociologically* (Garfinkel, 2006). With this Garfinkel began what has become known as "ethnomethodology's program" (Garfinkel, 1996, 2002). This program provides the basis for the development of studies of practical action and practical reasoning that are concerned with discovering the minute details in the processual design and ongoing production of social interaction.

Many textbooks in sociology conceive of Garfinkel as the anti-Parsons and in their discussion of ethnomethodology focus on the so-called "breaching experiments" and conversation analysis while ignoring the radical shift in the attitude toward sociology that Garfinkel (1967, 1991) proposes. His concern with processes rather than abstract constructs of social relationships placed him in apparent opposition to mainstream sociology, in particular to Parsonian structural functionalism and related approaches. Consequently, ethnomethodology was characterized as a marginal development of little relevance for sociology.

Simmel's and Garfinkel's programs, as well as Harvey Sacks's conversation analysis, have a niche existence, maybe due to their principal interest in "microscopic" (Sacks, 1992: 65; Simmel, 2009: 33[18]) social phenomena. Mainstream sociology sometimes considers macrosocial phenomena to be more important than investigations of mundane social interaction. The distinction and the link of micro- and macro-phenomena have been major concerns within sociology (e.g., Alexander et al., 1987). The relationship between micro- and macro- also has been problematized by others: David Maines (2001) considers whether a conversation between Reagan and Gorbachev would be a micro- or a macro-phenomenon (cf. also Coulter, 1996).

Somewhat in line with a focus on micro-phenomena, one of the more recurrent lines of tracing Simmel's influence runs through the Chicago School, and to Erving Goffman (cf. Leeds-Hurwitz, 2025; Mlynář et al., 2025). At a surface level Goffman's primary focus on the organization of social settings, of the structuring of gatherings, and of reciprocal interactions between acquainted and unacquainted others appears to add empirical detail to Simmel's writings on closeness, recognition, and the significance of the gaze and face in interpersonal relations. There are resonances between Goffman's opening remarks in *Stigma* (1963) and Simmel's "Excursus on the Sociology of Sense Impression" (2009: 570–600[19]). It is interesting to note that Goffman's dissertation begins with a lengthy quote from Simmel (with further quotes throughout his text):

> There exists an immeasurable number of less conspicuous forms of relationship and kinds of interaction. Taken singly, they may appear negligible. But since in actuality they are inserted into the comprehensive and, as it were, official social formations, they alone produce society as we know it. To confine ourselves to the large social formations …—the traditional subject matter of social science—it would be … impossible to piece together the real life of society as we encounter it in our experience. Without the interspersed effects of countless minor syntheses, society would break up into a multitude of discontinuous systems. (Simmel, cited in Goffman, 2022: 3)

There are, however, conflicting assessments of the extent to which this resemblance runs. Becker (2003: 659) distances Goffman from the "pure Hughes lineage", which runs from Simmel to Robert E. Park, through Everett C. Hughes, to Becker and others. Becker suggests that Goffman's lineage begins not with Simmel, but with Durkheim

[18] GSG 11: 33.

[19] GSG 11: 722–742.

and can be traced to Radcliffe-Brown and to Lloyd Warner, with whom Goffman worked closely. The anthropological influence in Goffman's work produces a different sense of "structure" than Simmel's notion of form, although both can be said to be pursuing a formalist sociology (Smith, 1989). There is also debate and divergence in discussions of the relation of Goffman's work to that of Garfinkel and Sacks, both of whom Goffman respected despite difficulties in working together directly (cf. Rawls, 2023). Some see Goffman as a "fellow traveler" (Rawls, 2022) and others position his approach to be markedly distinct from ethnomethodology—indeed, as "irreconcilable" (Watson, 1992: 2)—in treatments of constitutive rules and normative order. A key distinction is Goffman's use of conceptual description and metaphor in lieu of the lived and circumstantial detail pursued in different ways by Garfinkel and Sacks (cf. Button, 2025; Watson, 1992). There is insufficient space in this paper to include a four-point comparison among the sociologies of Simmel, Goffman, Garfinkel and Sacks, and we attend solely to the neglected relationship between Simmel's formal sociology and Garfinkel's ethnomethodology.

In Simmel's *Soziologie* there is a sustained interest in topics that proceed from local social interaction. Both he and Garfinkel focus on processes rather than idealized constructs of social relationships, both explore everyday social events, and they pursue these studies in order to discover "social forms" or "ethnomethods" through which social relationships and social events are accomplished. Yet, neither Garfinkel nor Sacks nor recent scholars in EM/CA have shown much interest in Simmel's program. Garfinkel read and made annotations to Wolff's (1950) translations of some of Simmel's writings, and Sacks refers to Simmel on two occasions in his lectures, describing him as a "classical sociologist" (1992: 78) and as "one of the greatest of all sociologists" (1992: 132). Otherwise, we are only aware of occasional references by ethnomethodologists to Simmel's work. Garfinkel himself mentions Simmel in passing when suggesting in his PhD dissertation (1952) that sociologists like Simmel, Cooley and Mead try to solve the problem raised by Durkheim's concept of "collective consciousness" and how the individual relates to it. Other ethnomethodologists refer more specifically to Simmel's essays published in his *Soziologie*, such as Bassetti (2017) on the quantitative dimensions of the group, Rossano (2012) and others on the sociology of the senses (Heath, 1982; Rossano et al., 2009), Heritage, (1984) on life's transcendent character, and Bassetti and Liberman (2021) on sociability.[20]

Also, it should be noted that Garfinkel and Simmel shared an interest in phenomenology. Garfinkel enthusiastically read Farber's (1943) introduction to phenomenology before many English translations were available (Rawls, 2002), and Simmel corresponded with Husserl (2014). One effect of their correspondence was that Husserl, after reading Simmel's *Soziologie*, started to employ the term *soziale Ontologie* in 1910 (Husserl, 1973a: 98, cited in Zahavi, 2025: 1) to refer to how our everyday practices come into being and develop into dependable processes. Farber argues that a key point in phenomenology is that "the final measure of all theorizing is that which

[20] Additionally, an unpublished student paper written by Stacy Lee Burns in 1979 for a course at UCLA with Jeffrey C. Alexander is at the Garfinkel Archive (Newburyport, MA). The manuscript is titled "A Study of Three Methods for the Analysis of the Work of Reading and Writing Simmelian Formal Sociology". Garfinkel seems to have read it carefully, highlighting certain passages and providing suggestions for improvement and clarification.

is 'originally' given in simple seeing" (1943: 203). This kind of fidelity that Simmel, Husserl, and Garfinkel strived for led them to ground descriptions in immanent seeing, hearing, and feeling during that very moment when social phenomena come into being. They kept their focus on the ongoing production of recognizable social order. Their discipline rested on the fidelity with which one addresses how phenomena are showing themselves in just the way they actually proceed.

Praxis as the Object of Sociological Inquiry

Simmel conceived of praxis as the object of sociology. Meyer (2018) suggests that what holds Simmel and EM/CA together is a focus on situational praxis, yet EM/CA studies it more empirically. The study of pure forms is necessarily connected with a description of local praxis. Even though interaction creates a reality that can be experienced *sui generis*, Meyer asks to what degree one needs to know the methods of its achievement to be capable of participating. While such a discussion sometimes turns on notions of "universal properties" rather than culturally specific practices, Simmel strikes a balance: there are social forms, making events recognizable across occasions, but because these forms emerge from reciprocal, embodied situated interactions, they are collaboratively produced and reproduced on an ongoing basis. Perhaps, Simmel's thinking on this matter provided an impetus for Husserl's more rigorous investigation of intersubjectivity. This appreciation of what takes place in emerging situations derives from the extensive philosophical inquiries made by Husserl, Schütz, Gurwitsch and Merleau-Ponty, which were respecified by Garfinkel in a praxeological way (Lynch & Eisenmann, 2022; Hutchinson, 2022). In the early days of ethnomethodology, Garfinkel leaned heavily upon Husserl's *The Crisis of the European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (1970) and its account of intersubjectivity, which became "congregational practices" for developing local orderlinesses.

Simmel uses the metaphor of the microscope to describe the scientific character of his inquiries regarding the reciprocal production of social formations:

> Society appears to be in a state, as it were, of being born—of course not actually in its primal historically inscrutable beginning but in everything that takes place every day every hour; social interaction among people continuously making connections and breaking them off and making them again, a perpetual flowing and pulsing that unites individuals, even when it does not amount to actual organization. Here it is, so to speak, a matter of the microscopic-molecular processes inside human material that are, however, the actual activity that links together or hypostasizes those macroscopic fixed entities and systems. (Simmel, 2009: 33[21])

Simmel (2009: 34[22]) explains,

[21] GSG 11: 33.

[22] GSG 11: 34.

> The immeasurably small steps produce the coherence of historical unity; likewise the not-so-apparent person-to-person interactions produce the coherence of historical unity. What goes on perpetually in physical and mental contact, in reciprocal excitation of desire and suffering, in conversations and silences, in common and antagonistic interests—that is really what determines the wonderful untearableness of society.

Simmel (ibid.[23]) sees sociology as devoted to "the exposure of the delicate threads, the irreducible relations among human beings, by whose continual performance all these large structures, now objective and possessing an actual history, are founded and borne". His method shares common ground with ethnomethodology in that they both persist with microscopic analyses of these minor forms that bring about society. The image of a microscope refers to the zooming in and enlarging of seemingly insignificant details of its object. Meyer (2018: 37) updates the metaphor by adding the concept of "slow motion", which characterizes methodological attempts to examine the ephemerality of social interaction (cf. Bergmann, 1985, 2011). Such attempts are motivated by the fact that "the empirical object of formal sociology remains … all what is 'real and explorable' (Simmel, 1950: 11), namely physical realizations of reciprocal orientations" (Meyer, 2018: 37). Social phenomena already have an order, an autochthonous order that is mundanely recognizable, intelligible, and accountable. In Schützian terms (1953)[24], these phenomena are always already organized as meaningful through "first-order constructs" that are inherent to everyday life, while "second-order constructs" are derived from them in sociological theorizing.

Social Formations and the "Problem" of the Individual–Society Relation

Simmel did not envision society only as a macro-phenomenon but investigated how the macrosocial is grounded in social interaction. Simmel's attention was always drawn to the immanent properties of social interaction, where he was more concerned with the forms of interaction than with the contents. Herein lies the very birth of sociology. His tenet was that "the interaction between individuals is the starting point for all social formations" (2005: 245[25]), and his concern, like Garfinkel's, was directed to how the forms generated by intersubjective relations inevitably gain a life of their own. The sociological interest in forms or formations does not necessarily have to be ideological, and Simmel's investigations of alienation in modern life—for which he was best known—are a case in point. Simmel understood alienation to be more than just the lack of control over one's own activities and was attentive to the deterioration of what he called "sociability," which includes personal and emotional content.

According to Simmel (2009: 43[26]), social formations do not even necessarily have to be about anyone's concepts or "knowledge but practical processes and states of being". Language, law, and other general cultural structures similarly proceed from

[23] GSG 11: 34–35.

[24] The author's name is spelled Schuetz in the quoted publication.

[25] GSG 6: 208.

[26] GSG 11: 47.

formations and not cognitions and "are perhaps not products of the subject" (2009: 498–499[27]). This striking insight presages Garfinkel's often repeated aphorism, "There is nothing in the head but brains." According to Simmel, social formations can direct local events regardless of the particular individuals who staff the occasion. For him social formations are "maintained throughout all the turnover of individuals" (2009: 452[28]). This is an early recognition of the cohort independence of any local orderliness (Garfinkel, 2022).

Social orderlinesses are more-than-conceptual, and they can even *precede* what is conceptual. In Garfinkel's wording, the forms that compose local social structures are "autochthonous." That is, forms are not necessarily conscious achievements that are always designed in deliberate ways. It is no wonder that Parsons attempted to write Simmel out of modern sociology, since Parsons was so invested in a social will that was more deliberate, more rational and frequently dependent upon a conscious decision-maker who was in control. The processes that are set into play by the reciprocal recognition of individuals can proceed completely outside of abstract consciousness and are observable in the "reality of praxis" (Simmel, 2009: 51[29]), and that is just what ethnomethodology studies. Simmel recognized the limited scope of strictly rational analytic comprehension, arguing that "the calculations of understanding lack a schema" that is adequate to the multiplicity and complexity of our experience. Simmel is always respectful of the complexities and contradictions that staff our everyday lives.

Take the example that Simmel offers of the social phenomenon of forgiveness, an event common enough in our everyday lives; he observes that forgiveness is "something rationally not quite comprehensible" (2009: 301[30]), at least "if one seeks to feel it thoroughly down to its ultimate foundation" (ibid.). Despite there being a growing social science of emotions and, indeed, a sociology of forgiveness (e.g. Abbott, 2025), sociologists continue to mistake people living their everyday lives for being rational analysts just like the former are. Sociologists are among those who give the most credence to rules. In the real world, rules are not diktats that invariably control events; rather, they are available to local parties for use in organizing a local orderliness on a practical basis. It is what people do with rules that matters. Further, rules are best addressed while appreciating that they are always in an emergent state. By contrast, constructive sociological analysts find it necessary to over-rationalize social activity and—preferably—arithmetize or, at least, "code" it before it can become worthy of sociological attention. Perhaps their attention is more directed to their narrative than it is to describing the actual details of the contingent activities that compose reciprocal interaction.

[27] GSG 11: 627.

[28] GSG 11: 567.

[29] GSG 11: 60.

[30] In the 2009 edition, the original German "etwas rational nicht recht begreifliches" (GSG 11: 377) is translated as "something rationally not exactly conceptual".

Many rationalized accounts of society lean heavily upon causal schema; however, Simmel is skeptical of simplistic causal accounts. No doubt this too contributed to the reduction of Simmel's position in the discipline. Elizabeth Goodstein (2017: 269) recounts the context in which Simmel abandons simple causal structures:

> Human being and doing in all its expression is shaped and "defined by living in reciprocal interaction with other human beings"—beings, that is, who could not be understood in the reductive terms of the dominant natural scientific model of causal explanation, but only through the mutually determining interaction with others and with the "superindividual" sphere of culture that *Wechselwirkung* generates and sustains.

Formations (*Formen*) for Simmel are always processes, not static objects. Social forms direct local events, and people follow them even if they have lost sight of their origins. Sacks (1992: 538) offers a perspicuous example of how conformity with a locally contingent orderliness of an occasion can override substantive or personal interests. He says that "the specifics of the thing may be quite irrelevant" to one's conformity with the topical placement in talk (ibid.). Sacks observes that the topical organization and progressivity of a conversation (which is one of the naturally occurring *Formen*) can be given priority over personal interests, the preservation of one's good name, one's values, etc. (1992: 542). The priority that local parties may give to speaking on topic, i.e., ensuring that their remarks remain pertinent to what previous utterances have been addressing, is an organizational structure that gets objectivated in a form that calls for compliance.

Of the three central powers that Simmel says bring about social life—the society, the individual, and objectivity (2009: 188[31])—the latter is the basic mechanism through which individuals produce society. For Simmel objectivity means "the living objectivity of society" (2009: 189[32]). Parties are concerned to objectivate (i.e., make publicly available) a formation, often by formulating a verbal account of the local orderliness and having it heard and ratified reciprocally by one's associates. Simmel is always concerned to describe how these social objectivities facilitate face-to-face interaction. Further, he is fond of attaching the word "pure" to formations, as in "the purely form-sociological structure" (2009: 196[33]) and the "purely sociological nature" of forms (2009: 193[34]). The "pure" here connotes that the mechanics of a course of social interaction run autonomously, following the vicissitudes of their own logic, despite (and even in spite of) more local personal interests.

[31] GSG 11: 235.

[32] GSG 11: 237.

[33] GSG 11: 245. The original German–"die rein formale, soziologische Lage"–may perhaps be better rendered as "purely formal, sociological structure".

[34] GSG 11: 242.

Patterned Features Emerging in the Flow of Action

Simmel's notion of interaction as the organizing principle of social orders directs sociologists to how social forms become independent from their production and come to exist for their own sake as reliable patterns in and as the flow of action. Social forms like "sociability" are not necessarily idealized constructs but are emerging organizational features of a situation—as "the impulse to sociability distils … out of the realities of social life" (Simmel, 1949: 255[35])—and they are used by people for orienting themselves during some interaction.

Objectivation and Unity

Throughout his life, Simmel came to argue that in each of its aspects, the "flow" of social life requires mediations, *forms* that mediate our relations with the flow. Forms are not only practical objectivations accomplished by interactive cultural work, and they bear the relational moves and reciprocal interactions and so become autonomous, self-organizing, and self-referential; in this way they are prescriptive in that they orient people to what is available for social participation on any specific occasion. That is, they become "norm-giving" (Simmel, 2009: 188[36]). The core of Simmel's attention to social forms was that they were understood to be grounded in social interaction and that, therefore, forms become perceived as objective in relation to people's orientations to them as they use them to harmonize their participation. In Simmel's thinking, "objectivation"[37] was approached as an emergent property of interaction, an achievement whereby parties establish objects for which they offer local, practical, and contingently operating definitions. The processes of "reciprocal action" (*soziale Wechselwirkung*), Simmel's central theme, focus on the dynamic aspects of social life.

Both "the individual" and the "unity" are rendered objective in relation to the use of interactional social forms which are emergent and come to have a fixity and stability in social interaction *as it proceeds*. The reflexive relation of form and content displayed and oriented to in interaction ongoingly produces society as an objective realm: a "universal which, at the same time, is concretely *alive*" (Simmel, 2005: 99[38], emphasis added). Simmel argues that society and its functional social orders exceed the sum of its parts. For him, the specific task of sociology is to consider the abstracted forms that do not generate or "shape" social interaction—in a functional/"structural" sense—but rather *are* social interaction. Simmel is proposing sociology as the study of societal forms as found in interaction: "If society is conceived as interaction among individuals, the description of the forms of this interaction is the task of the science of society in its strictest and most essential sense" (Simmel, 1950: 21–22[39]).

[35] GSG 12: 178.

[36] GSG 11: 235.

[37] In the 2009 translation this is "objectification" (p. 619) where in the original German Simmel uses "Objektivation" (GSG 11: 789).

[38] GSG 6: 92 (orig. "Gesellschaft ist das Allgemeine, das zugleich konkrete Lebendigkeit hat.").

[39] GSG 16: 82.

Another way of putting this is, as Fitzi (2021: 2) writes, that Simmel conceived sociology as a "science of the logos". Logos can mean both the arrangement of elements that are organized into a whole and the principle or source of this organization. If social order is analyzed as an arrangement of elements in relation to one another, organized into a whole, for Simmel the sources of organizing social order reside inside their dynamic interchange. This interchange occurs between different elements or members within a local society and composes social interaction. Form emerges from the mutual determination and interaction of the elements of some sociation, and provides for the means through which they create a unit (Simmel, 1949[40]). This principle of *Wechselwirkung*, reciprocal effects, was at first mainly used in Simmel's sociological works and later became central to his worldview. It became a metaphysical principle through which he sought to understand the world from a relational perspective (Goodstein. 2017: 61–90, cf. Cantó-Milà, 2021: 64).

The concepts of unity and differentiation, which reflect the organized relationships of wholes and parts, are central to Simmel's sociology: his first book was called *On Social Differentiation: Sociological and Psychological Investigations* (1890[41]), and one of his last published texts was "The Fragmentary Character of Life" (2012[42]). As Scaff (2011: 209) suggests, Simmel's earliest writings introduce a fundamental principle that is present throughout the rest of his *oeuvre*. This principle is that the unity of society arises from reciprocal interactions of its parts. "Unity in an empirical sense is nothing other than the interaction of elements" (Simmel, 2009: 22[43]), a "living functional interaction of elements" (2009: 69[44]).[45] At the same time, "society is a construct of unlike parts" (2009: 49[46]), and the interacting elements are significantly and recognizably distinct from each other. The concrete varieties and implications of this "unlikeness", and processes of its maintenance or overcoming, are central themes in Simmel's work (cf., e.g., Coser, 1964). However, one must avoid a simplistic and static image of a societal "whole" being constructed from different individual "parts". More precisely, social phenomena are the products of the ongoing "reciprocal determination between each element and every other" (2009: 406[47]). Simmel also points out that there is a dual meaning of "unity":

[40] GSG 12.

[41] GSG 2.

[42] GSG 16.

[43] GSG 11: 17.

[44] GSG 11: 84.

[45] The unity of parts and wholes is a key theme in gestalt phenomenology, which was an important constant among Garfinkel's inspirations. We can also only note that it might be relevant that Gurwitsch had a deep interest in Spinoza and Leibniz, who also developed a mode of thought alternative to Descartes'. In an unpublished paper, Gurwitsch looks for the central idea or principle that unifies all of Leibniz's work, and he proposes that it is "the idea of context and contexture; it is the idea that all things hang together intrinsically and that means that in every particular substance and in every particular event the whole universe is already contained" (Gurwitsch, 1962: 3). Viewed from this angle, the notion of unity and differentiation has a deep philosophical history in which Simmel was very well versed.

[46] GSG 11: 57.

[47] GSG 11: 509.

> We designate as unity the consensus and the combination of social elements, in contrast to their divisions, dissociations, disharmonies; a unity, however, also means to us the complete synthesis of persons, energies, and forms into a group, the final totality of it, in which the integrative, in the stricter sense, as well as the dualistic relationships are included. (2009: 229[48])

While the former sense might correspond to unity as a "qualitative harmony", the latter sense of unity is closer to an "aggregated totality". Simmel offers an empirical example:

> The great importance of the nobility in Austria … goes back to the fact that, in the extraordinarily heterogeneous and divergent components of the Austrian monarchy, the nobility was still a continually uniform and qualitatively common element, and thus greatly served the unity of the whole… The unity that it had by virtue of its very similar social position enabled it to serve as the glue for uniting the whole. (2009: 646[49])

It is beyond the scope of this text to provide an exhaustive analysis of the concept of unity in Simmel, but for exploring its relationship to EM/CA, one can broadly distinguish two ways in which the notion guides Simmel's work and his approach to the study of social events. Firstly, unity is employed as a methodological principle of sociological studies, highlighting the dialectical character of Simmel's thought. The Cartesian analytic practice of differentiating unified totalities into their constitutive elements divides into parts what for members themselves exists only as an experienced whole (i.e., a *Gestalt*). Proceeding this way, Simmel develops a "method of generalization through particularization" (Davis, 1973: 320), with which he examines how particular details come to compose social entities. In this respect, Simmel's sociology has affinities with EM/CA's notions of *Lebenswelt* pairs and the praxeological coupling of instructions and instructed actions (Garfinkel, 2002: 105–108). Secondly, when Simmel discusses unity as a societal phenomenon, for him the unity of society arises from the interactions of its parts. Importantly, these parts are individuals as distinguishable persons: "a society exists where several individuals enter into interaction" (2009: 22[50]). In this regard, it is significant that Simmel's sociology may be incongruent with EM/CA. For ethnomethodology, the analytic interest is not individuals but impersonal, anonymous common practices, shared methods, and shared ways of doing. Taking both points together, from an ethnomethodological perspective, Simmel is perhaps right in general but wrong in detail. To explore the congruence of Simmel and EM/CA we may need to rescue Simmel's sociological thought from its deep-rooted individualism that examines social interaction as a matter of investigating "the individual as a member coordinated with all the others" (2009: 212[51]). What we need are more "non-egological investigations" (Backhaus,

[48] GSG 11: 285.

[49] GSG 11: 823.

[50] GSG 11: 17.

[51] GSG 11: 265.

2003: 207), and to "see the worldly horizon as co-constituting" (2003: 206); this would require a perspective that has moved beyond the supervision of a rationally controlled world-constitution. In other words, there remains the question of which is more originary, the ongoing sociality or the individual?

Simmel (2009: 176[52]) summarizes his methodological individualism by stating:

> The essence of the construction of society, from which the incomparability of its results as well as the insolubility of its internal problems consistently emerge, is this: that from self-contained unities—as human personalities more or less are—would come a new unity. One cannot, for sure, produce a painting out of paintings, no tree is made up of trees; the whole and the independent do not grow out of totalities, but out of dependent parts. But society turns whole and fully self-centered parts into an overarching whole. All the restless evolution of societal forms, large as well as small, is in the last analysis only the ever-renewed attempt to reconcile the inner-oriented unity and totality of the individual with its social role as a part and contribution toward saving the unity and totality of society from dissolution by the independence of its parts.

Simmel presents a conception in which individuals, themselves conceived as "self-contained unities", contribute to the construction of society as a larger unity. Simmel's formulation of social interaction (unlike EM/CA analysis) retains individuals as psychological entities, and his interactionism may therefore be cognitivist/mentalist. He writes that "there is for sure no doubt that all social processes and instincts have their seat in psyches, that social interaction is a psychological phenomenon, and it is fundamental to its reality that a majority of elements becomes a unity" (Simmel, 2009: 35[53]).[54] The social production and constitution of "individuals" thus becomes a central contentious point between Simmel's sociology and EM/CA. Although Simmel writes, "Society arises from individuals; the individual arises from society" (2009: 387[55]), his sociological interests seem to be more focused upon the first direction, that "society arises from individuals", and on specifying the processes of production of "the supra-individual structure that the individuals [see] around and above them" (2009: 423[56]). However, Simmel deserves credit for recognizing that individuals and selves arise from society. It is precisely how this happens that is the primary interest of EM/CA.

For EM/CA social action comes first, not individual persons. At the influential Purdue Symposium in 1967, Garfinkel provided this explanation of the notion of

[52] GSG 11: 218.

[53] GSG 11: 35.

[54] The centrality of consciousness, psyche, and mental processes in Simmel's conception of social interaction is also reflected in the translator's introduction: "Society … consists of conscious individuals, and their intellectual constructs create a unity (in circumstances that are the very object of investigation) not only within the individual but also as an immediate reality of society" (Helle, 2009: 6). The lived social world appears to be presented here as a mere "circumstance" of the production of an individual's "intellectual constructs".

[55] GSG 11: 485.

[56] GSG 11: 530.

member that is central to ethnomethodology: "Do not think a member is a person. Think of 'member' as an ongoing course of activity locatable as a feature of an organized course of activities in its course" (Garfinkel, in Hill and Crittenden, 1968: 121). Similarly, around the same time, Garfinkel and Sacks (1970: 163–165) stressed that the term "member" is not used "to refer to a person", and they identify it as "mastery of natural language" and "glossing practices". Here, importantly, a member is not a person who uses glossing practices or displays mastery of natural language. A member *is* mastery of natural language, *is* glossing practices, in the same sense that a member *is* a recognizable course of activity and organizationally situated actions. That the "ongoing course of activity" is "locatable" means that it is "recognizable for its directionality, its origins, its motivated character" (Garfinkel, in Hill and Crittenden, 1968: 119)—i.e., for all practical purposes, an activity is tied to a source. However, this origin is not necessarily an individual person. For ethnomethodology, persons and individuals are social and organizational objects that are ongoingly produced.

Yet, as noted, an appeal and a challenge of Simmel's writing is its thoroughly dialectical and dynamic character, and in the consequential appreciation of the duality of emergence and stability. Like ethnomethodology, Simmel never allows the lived phenomena to be reified in static words. It is therefore not surprising that sometimes his formulations of social interaction as a sum of individual actions might be too simplistic: he himself said "The meaning and instinct of individuality never stops at the boundary of the individual person, it is something more general, more a matter of form, that can apply to a group as a whole and to individuals precisely as members of it" (Simmel, 2009: 633[57]). Rather than viewing Simmel's sociology as a proto-structuralist approach to the analysis of how macrosocial phenomena emerge from microsocial affairs, concerned primarily with "the production of a social unity out of individuals, to say it abstractly" (Simmel, 2009: 43[58]), we need a more nuanced understanding. As Simmel's later writings show, what preoccupies him—like EM/CA, though distinctly—is the "life's flow", and how the practical stability of social worlds is endogenously produced in situ and in real time, despite their continuous change. In a remarkably astute phrase, he writes,

> From the viewpoint of life as a sum of ordered and valorized contents, then, life is composed of fragments; whereas *from the viewpoint of life as life*, *and of contents merely as expressions and products of life's flow*, *life is not at all fragmentary*. It is almost incorrect to say that life "produces" such contents, as if life somehow stood behind them like a formal productive process that secretes and separates products from itself. This is in fact something that conceptual analysis performs afterwards, over and above psychical life as a primordially continuous stream of contents that are nothing more than articulations of the

[57] GSG 11: 806.

[58] GSG 11: 46.

> life underpinning them … Insofar as our contents of life exist more or less in between life per se, on the one hand, and life's ideal totality of worlds, on the other hand, they become fragments. Though they are not fragments when seen from life's own standpoint but are instead more like wave-forms of life's inherent unity and continuity, they nevertheless are fragments as soon as we think of contents as having a unity and continuity of their own within particular categorial worlds. (Simmel, 2012: 247[59]; emphasis added)

Simmel was well aware that social phenomena are *always simultaneously both* stable and dynamic, "elements" and "practices", "particles" and "waves" at the same time. When he identifies "the living functional interaction of elements often as their unity" (2009: 69[60]), for him the *living* interaction is as important as the *unity*.

If, as mentioned, society is a universal that is also "concretely alive" (Simmel 2005: 99[61]), that is so because reciprocal action between the elements is a process that tends to become autonomous from the incessant flow of social and personal life; objects circulate according to norms and measures that at any one moment are fixed, and confront the individual as an objective realm (Simmel, 2005: 77[62]). The forms of social structure and the typologies of individuality are variations of an interplay between constitutive elements in more or less differentiated social environments—that is, *environments of intelligibility*, as we discuss below—handled via processes of reciprocal action. This formulation is Simmel's central theme: the dynamic and relational aspects of social reality. The forms emerge from cultural work and have a social origin that would include domination, subordination, concurrence, imitation, etc., but at the same time Simmel sees them, at least in their "pure" version, as preceding social intercourse, and these forms facilitate social experience.

Commonness and Membership: the Social "Glue"

The tension between individuality and humanity—a tension felt and practiced every day in manifold and differentiated "forms" by persons as "self-contained unities" in interaction with one another—bears the question of what exactly we share and with whom, and what glue holds social unities together. As Simmel notices: "It would merit a specialized investigation, which type and degree of mutual knowledge is required for the various relationships among people" (2009: 307#[63]). This means discussing types and degrees of commonness, which is a cognate of the ethnomethodological notion of "membership" (cf. Garfinkel & Sacks, 1970: 339–342).

[59] GSG 16: 244.

[60] GSG 11: 84.

[61] GSG 6: 92.

[62] GSG 6: 56.

[63] GSG 11: 384.

In his analysis of the stranger as a social figure, which includes some of the passages of Simmel's work that most interested Garfinkel (when that is the case, we add a hashtag)[64], Simmel notices that

> not being radically committed to individual components or one-sided tendencies of the group, the stranger faces all of them with the special attitude of the "objective" person, which does not mean, perhaps, a mere aloofness or disengagement but a particular form of the far and near, indifference and engagement (2009: 602#[65]).

The "proportion of proximity and distance" (2009: 603[66]) that characterizes the relationship with the stranger is grounded in a given type and degree of commonness, and finds its

> practical expressions in the *more abstract nature of the relationship* to the person, i.e. one has only certain more *general qualities in common* with the stranger, while a relationship with those organically bound together is based on the similarity of specific differences from the merely general (ibid., emphasis added).

> The stranger is near us insofar as we feel similarities of a national or social, occupational or of generally human kind between the stranger and us; the stranger is far from us insofar as these similarities reach over both of us and bind us together only because they bind very many people generally. In this sense, a strain of strangeness enters into even the closest relationships (ibid.[67]).

Commonness can be more or less general *versus* specific, and it can develop into higher or lesser degrees of abstractness of the relationship. Commonness with a stranger is based up on expectations that emerge out of their shared humanity, or of their belonging to the same society or a large social formation: "the stranger is near and far *at the same time*, as is the grounding of the relationship on only a general human similarity" (2009: 604#[68]). On the other hand, "strangers are also not really considered as individuals but as strangers of a particular type in general [e.g., migrants used as a category]; the moment of distance is no less general for them than that of nearness" (ibid.#), they differ from other, non-stranger members in ways that

[64] Garfinkel's copy of Wolff's edition of Simmel's essays, which bears marks and annotations in the margins, was consulted by one of the authors during a visit at the Garfinkel Archive in Newburyport (MA). A scanned version was made available to the co-authors. We extend our gratitude to Anne Rawls for her permission to do so. In this paper, we use the 2009 English translation, but the hashtags mark the passages that Garfinkel highlighted in his copy of Wolff's edited translation.

[65] GSG 11: 766.

[66] GSG 11: 768.

[67] GSG 11: 769.

[68] GSG 11: 770.

"can be common to many strangers" (ibid.#). Simmel highlights here the contours of connection and difference that shape relationships.

Accordingly, Simmel discusses how trust—"one of the most important synthetic strengths inside society" (2009: 315[69])—works differently in different kinds of groups (2009: 307–331#[70]). Varying proportions of proximity and distance, sitting along a generality-specificity continuum, characterize different relationships. In anonymous forms of social life, such as with strangers, unacquainted and barely acquainted people, trust is based on general commonness. Although "mutual knowledge… is an a priori of any relationship", "for an extraordinarily large number of relationships we need only know the rather typical tendencies and qualities [that are] mutually available, which, in their necessity, are usually only noticed when they are lacking at some point" (2009: 307#[71]).[72] This is a principle behind breaching procedures (Garfinkel, 1964), which are empirical tools for revealing the stable patterns of social interaction that foreground trust and comprise the orderliness and intelligibility of "reciprocal action", yet ordinarily remain unnoticed. Those "*typical* tendencies and qualities *mutually available*" can be understood as the "routine grounds" (ibid.) of social interaction—which is why they are necessary.

Simmel describes the relationships of broader social formations, such as "purpose groups", as similar to completely anonymous ones:

> the reality of interaction, the cohesiveness, the common specific aim is not at all based on one knowing the other psychologically. *The individual*, *as a member of the group*, *is exclusively the bearer of a definite activity*, and generally which individual motives drive one to it or which corporate personality supports one's activity is completely irrelevant here (Simmel, 2009: 314[73]).

Here trust is sustained by a series of objectifications, so abstractness remains high when compared to intimate groups such as friends or spouses (cf. Simmel, 2009: 320–325[74]). Simmel also argues that the larger the social formation (e.g., nation states), the more abstract is what glues together the social unity[75] and the more substitutable are its members (2009: 53–128#[76]). Commonness here operates at a very general level:

[69] GSG 11: 393.

[70] The hashtag refers to pp. 307–314 only, Garfinkel heavily marked Simmel's writing in the equivalent pages of Wolff's edition (1950).

[71] GSG 11: 383.

[72] See also: "the 'acquaintance.' That one 'knows' mutually does not at all mean in this sense that one knows mutually, i.e. that one had an insight into the actual individuality of the personality, but only that each, as it were, had taken notice of the existence of the other" (2009: 316; GSG 11: 395).

[73] GSG 11: 392.

[74] GSG 11: 400–405.

[75] Simmel discusses the historical progressive "dilution" (see below) and reification of sovereignty as a "glue" (2009: 646).

[76] Another chapter heavily read by Garfinkel, with marks corresponding to pp. 53–62, 65–81, 86, 101–117, 120−21 in the 2009 edition.

> a dilution of the effectiveness of the general [commonness] occurs in proportion to the size of the group bearing the same characteristic; admittedly it functions as a unifying basis for the members, but it does [not][77] point *these* members directly to one another; also, this similarity could even associate each member with all possible others … Now in relation to the stranger, this configuration appears to mean extraordinary principled preponderance over the individuals, only to possess the commonalities of the elements proper to the relationship in question. (2009: 603#[78])

Developing this aspect from an ethnomethodological approach, we can see how categorization practices handle, in a foundational sense, matters of "who we are, what we are doing, and where we are right now" (cf. Schegloff, 2000). Here, then, we find that relations between individuals are managed in connection with *categories* that provide for a generality (distance) as well as knowing (nearness). These relations are not necessarily mappable onto the forms of the relationships themselves, but onto the forms of the interactions between the parties and the relevancies of the categories to which the individual can relevantly be said to belong. We might inquire further just when and just how such relationships of commonness and difference occur, how they are oriented to and how they are sustained. This is something that Sacks (1992: 40–48) discusses in a well-known but possibly underutilized lecture about the "membership inference-rich representative" device, through which people assign co-participants in interaction to some membership category—of which they are considered exemplaries—and interact with them based up on commonsense knowledge concerning that category (including the kinds of activities, language usage and overall conduct deemed *typical* of its members). That is where inference-richness resides, providing a blueprint for relating to others within an intelligible environment of actions (cf. Lynch & Bogen, 1997; Stokoe, 2010).

The ethnomethodological notion of membership can be related to Simmel's concept of commonness. If we look at commonness not as sets of individual features but as grounded in practices, or ethnomethods, then we can reconsider this Simmelian notion through the ethnomethodological concept of membership. For EM/CA, membership is always something produced and reproduced in situated practices; while Simmel does not take such a perspective in his "Stranger" essay, i.e., he does not examine commonness as something that people *do* in interaction, this interactional *versus* individual interest does appear throughout his writings.

Membership takes variable configurations in each interaction. On the one hand, the concept of "intersecting social circles" suggests a study of the multiple memberships people are able to practice and enact. This can change with fluctuating situations, and membership can be multiple even in the same interaction. On the other hand, membership comes in degrees: there are gradients of expertise and gradients of specificity. Simmel suggests that the larger the group, the smaller is the number of common practices and the more general, i.e., the more similar to those of other

[77] The 2009 English translation bears an error (we checked the German original) that is not to be found in Wolff's edition.

[78] GSG 11: 768.

groups, are the practices and ethnomethods we share (e.g., greetings or queuing, compared to forensic academic debating or tango dancing).

Membership is being able to do a practice and recognizing which practice is being done at any moment. One can recognize that others are queuing but not understand exactly how they are doing it and so be unable to participate properly in the queuing. That is, in Simmelian terms, one can recognize the "pure form" but not just how it is to be enacted in that specific group. Hence the intelligibility and accountability of others' action come in degrees. A continuum can be identified running from the absence of recognition ("What are they doing?", "How can I stay out of trouble here?"), to recognition of just the pure form, to recognition of the form as well as the related performative capability. Viewed through this lens, the Simmelian conception of commonness enriches our understanding of the practices of doing membership. For Simmel sociality resides in how pure forms are enacted, which is relevant for the ethnomethodological concept of membership. In this, commonness is a more fruitful theoretical tool when understood as a practice-based, rather than trait-based, phenomenon. The Simmelian analysis of "fashion" (2009: 332–342[79]) also points to the aesthetic practices of membership, and fashion can be understood as a membership technology.

Simmel uncovered this remarkable fact about mundane social lives: the forms of sociality structure members' participation, and this even includes the individualism that is sometimes considered to be originary and that has become so highly valued in Western European and North American societies: "It is a prejudice to assume that every socially regulated relationship has developed historically out of a similar form which is individually and not socially regulated" (Simmel 2005: 170[80]). Individualism itself is a *social practice*, not a matter of personal choice but the result of the social formations in which individualist behavior is embedded. Individualism too is reciprocally determined; that is, people are members *before* they are individuals, and if individualist behavior holds sway, it is only because the structures of the ordinary orderly local activities have made provision for it. Simmel's use of the term "members" is consonant with the role that the term has played in ethnomethodological research. Simmel argues that in a group we are not exclusively ourselves since we are also "an element in a formally constituted gathering" (1949: 256[81]). Individualism is only one among many possible outcomes of social formations that one can find in human societies[82]. In every case, our individual character traits emerge from a local sociality and are not exclusively a matter of personal disposition. Simmel perceptively observes that modern "individualism is thoroughly correlated to a 'cosmopolitan' attitude," and he considers individualism to be "bound to a relatively con-

[79] GSG 11: 414–421.

[80] GSG 6: 89.

[81] GSG 12: 182.

[82] Two ethnomethodologists have written ethnographies that document non-individualist social forms: Meyer (2018) narrates non-individualist social interaction among Senegalese, and Liberman (1985) describes the non-individualist, consensual interaction that is customary among Australian Aboriginal people.

siderable size of the group in which it can arise and exist" (2009: 638[83]). Everywhere there is "the unrestricted surrender of the individual to the current of the group" (2009: 59[84]).

Finally, close relationships are indeed not immune from strangeness, for part of what is shared there, despite their idiosyncrasy, is shared with everyone else: we can never claim that the totality of any "we" (couple, family, tribe…) is accessible to us only, or that we are *completely* different from anybody else; strangers already inhabit each "we" that we have. On the other hand, a degree of strangeness is intrinsic to all social interactions, as individuals offer the other.

> a teleologically directed, excluding, and recomposing conversion of the inner reality … stylized by selection and arrangement; and there is no other interaction and no other society at all thinkable than that resting on this teleologically determined ignorance of one for the other (2009: 311#[85]).

We stylize ourselves depending on the characteristics of each situated context; we "highlight" (Goodwin, 2018) part of ourselves to allow for mutual knowledge, and this "selection and arrangement" is not only for defending our "face", in a Goffmanian fashion, but also, ethnomethodologically, for maintaining the situation as a set of stable organizational features in the everchanging concrete circumstances of daily life. That is, we enact "the member" in and of each situation, and this reflexively contributes to its orderliness; hence, commonness or membership is to be located in social praxis.

This general *versus* specific nature of perceived commonness appears as a basic force at work in social life. We distinguish all kinds of groups, formations and associations on such a basis, i.e., we identify kinds of social unities based on the abstractness of their membership, and we do social interaction differently based on the same criterion. This is observable not only in categorization practices and in how we selectively present ourselves, but also in what Sacks (1992) defined as the "recipient designs" we routinely employ, which are grounded on the knowledge we deem to be mutual with other interactants. Properly expressing who we are, that is, selecting which aspects of our memberships are pertinent in interaction, has thus considerable organizational determinants (in addition to whatever reputational import it may have—an aspect better acknowledged by social analysts).

Living Objectivity

For Simmel, social forms emerge from cultural practices and become situationally autonomous. As forms become objectivated, structures are made available for social intercourse and the intelligibility of the social actions begins to develop. Forms thus

[83] GSG 11: 811.

[84] GSG 11: 71.

[85] GSG 11: 387–388.

provide for a "living objectivity" (Simmel, 2009: 188[86]). Objectivity, then, emerges through reciprocal interactions in which elements of a society become available to individual participants as a unity of a perceivably concrete reality. The autonomous and objective character of objectivated phenomena such as norms, rules, groups, and social circles is thereby produced in situations where a unity is achieved. These unities are experienced as concrete rather than abstract formations. This sense of unity or whole is impossible without "the always actively mediating reciprocity of interworkings" of the parts (2009: 20[87]), and so in a strict sense it can be nothing static, but is always a flow. Indeed, for Simmel a unity can be nothing other than the ongoing interaction of elements that compose a given organizational form. The intelligibility of the whole, of the unity, is thus a *living* phenomenon that offers the possibility of the apparent universality of society, which resides in its concrete moments of interaction. This recognition of the "interworkings" of members/elements of any given setting is foundational for advancing the notion of intersubjective understandings as praxis.

This situation motivates Garfinkel's praxeologization of Durkheim's notion of "the immortal society". For Garfinkel society is achieved not by some presumed collectivism of individuals within amalgamated social structures but by the local production and displays of social order across society's venues. The autochthonous coherence of any given occasion is, first, a precipitate of membership practices and, second, an orderliness (of a queue, merging into traffic, or turn-taking in a conversation) that is a local achievement, which is *independent* of particular individuals; hence it is "immortal".

This is the sense of Garfinkel's (2002) term "staff": members' collaborative *methods* are uniquely adequate for the staffing of the orderliness of a local setting's affairs and are not reducible to a scene's participants. As such, the produced/displayed/recognized character of an autochthonous social order is available for any nth member arriving on the scene; a scene that is encountered as orderly, whole, and as a contexture (Gurwitsch, 1964: 138). These reciprocal relations—between cohorts and order, between parts and wholes—are our topic. Simmel's treatment of the foundational character of reciprocal interaction, finds its echoes in Husserl's lectures and texts on passive and active synthesis and transcendental logic. Further, Merleau-Ponty interprets Husserl faithfully with his notion of the intertwining of the chiasm, a tracking back and forth between the object and its meaning within unfolding courses of action (cf. Liberman, 2013: 45–81 on the accomplishment of occasioned "sketch maps").

For Simmel (2009: 23[88]), content and form are mutually elaborative of a "united reality". Indeed, content and form are "in reality inseparable elements of each social being and process: an interest, goal, motive, and a form or kind of interaction among individuals, through which or in which a Gestalt of the content attains social reality" (ibid.). Simmel argued that neither subject nor object can be separated from the other since originally a "thing" is a perception of content which does not distinguish between subject and object and is not yet divided between them (Simmel, 2005[89]).

[86] GSG 11: 235.

[87] GSG 11: 18.

[88] GSG 11: 19.

[89] GSG 6.

While we are critical of this retention of an egocentric individual, we applaud Simmel for forging a path for an overlooked sociology. That Simmel's sociology did not fit readily into sociology's dualist ontology may further account for his work being dismissed by Parsons (1998a: 46) as "a pernicious methodological doctrine" resulting in the "fixation of generalized knowledge of social processes on the present elementary levels". Regardless of such dominant disciplinary orientations, Simmel's observations offer an opening for a phenomenal ontology and a properly relational sociology focused on the "interworkings" that provide for society coming into being.

While objectivity is often seen to be determinative, it is society that is "often the third party that solves conflicts between the individual and objectivity or fosters links between their discontinuities" (Simmel, 2009: 188[90]). Simmel's insights are found in his focus on this in-between, and he introduces an analytical third component, which is more than a I and a You, that mediates how institutions and norms come to have a real presence. Society accomplishes this mediation via objective forms. Significantly, Simmel notes that "in practice it is through the workings of social interaction that one can satisfy one's demands on the objective order" (ibid.). Simmel thus proposed sociology as a morphology of interaction that investigates how forms make reciprocal actions structural.

The *practices* of objectivation provide for emerging forms' objectivity, to which local parties orient themselves. Forms and rules are the bases for communicative exchanges, and here there are echoes of Simmel's thinking in Garfinkel's "trust" paper (Garfinkel, 1963; Watson, 2009: 482). Simmel's original discussion provides a recognition of how forms, in and through their cultural availability, repetition, or local imitation, can organize the interaction autonomously and autochthonously. Interactional forms, including structures such as turn-taking (Sacks et al., 1974) and categorization practices (Sacks, 1972), can operate outside of any notions of an individual rational actor's self or decisions or central command, often running ahead of individual participant's actions who find themselves caught up in the flow of a setting (perhaps wondering "Why the hell *did* I say *that*?").

Objectifications and Objectivation

Objectification is a Hegelian term, made important through Hegelian and Marxian commentators such as Alexandre Kojeve and Jean Hyppolite. Associated notions include reification, mediation, representation, and typification. Simmel discusses the objectification of cultural forms and objectivation in our everyday lives. The objective character of the latter is cast in terms of reciprocal expectations about how to perform in social settings and how to express ourselves. "Objectivation" is a live intersubjective *activity*, an achievement of reciprocal interaction whereby parties establish objects that they offer for use in practical and locally contingent tasks.

Importantly, the abstracted, objectivated, interactionally-achieved forms do not so much govern social interaction in an a priori structural sense but, as mentioned, *are* the structures of social interaction. The objective availability of forms and the organization of reciprocal actions via sociability is not, then, the property of individual

[90] GSG 11: 235.

"doers" but is assembled autochthonously in and as the course of sociation (Simmel, 1949[91]).

Studies of using and accomplishing sketched maps, the playing of board games and their adaptations, and of traffic order at an intersection where the traffic lights have gone down, speak of the dynamic ordering of the scene and its activities through the lived objectivity of the rules in play and offer insights into Simmel's triadic relation of *norm-giving*. In a foundational sense, the lived work of objectivation is to provide for the recurrent availability of the world in which members find themselves. Traffic intersections and games with rules provide perspicuous settings for observing the ubiquitous practices of pursuing the intelligibility of a scene and displaying that intelligibility to others; local parties' *discovery of forms* can run (sometimes wildly so) ahead of the best plans of its participants (Liberman, 2018). Herein lies ethnomethodology's interest in structures of production, and the occasioned work with practical objects and practices that ensure those objects' "practical observability" (Garfinkel, 1975[92]).

Simmel recognized the *orienting* and *relational* character of reciprocal moves, which operates in two ways. The first is where situated forms render an interaction social in the first place, or in ethnomethodological terms provide for its observable-reportable availability, which is to say its accountability (Garfinkel, 1967: 1). The second is where an emergent object detaches itself from the congregational practices through which the object has found its "way to center stage"; objects find their way, tendentiously, "on their own" in "a ubiquitous temporal sequence" that works from account to confirmation, to objectivation, and to disengagement (Liberman, 2018).

This "work" is then *not* the property of individual participants, and certainly not of its planned production. Objects that emerge in the course of drivers edging carefully and in coordination with others through an intersection with broken lights find the "rules" for doing so emerging moment-by-moment in their doing. Coffee tasters discover the taste of the cup in rounds of descriptions with others, congregationally. Parties to such scenes can often find themselves surprised at the objects that appear in front of them, in "their" courses of action. Indeed, we might observe that "it is more common that they do not know what they are doing until a routine is put into play as a collaborative and autochthonous *event*" (Liberman, 2018). In Simmel's (2009: 189[93]) words, "Here the concrete generality enters, the living objectivity of society, often inept, limiting, schematic, but always a transubjective power that provides the individual with a norm".

The progressivity of an activity demands that accounts, once confirmed in practice, are treated as good enough for the activity to proceed. Frequently, individuals first orient to *being together*, i.e., producing and maintaining some intelligibility, before they attend to content. In that way they sustain sociality by continually employing the emergent, objectivated forms. Reciprocal actions include maintaining and making intelligible the situated, always emerging practical structures through which an orderliness is achieved. As Liberman (2019: 104) observes, "The practices of objectivation

[91] GSG 12.

[92] "The Boston Seminars", Seminar #1, line 90.

[93] GSG 11: 237.

clearly reveal an abiding collective orientation to orderliness, help to clarify what that orderliness is, and are an essential aspect of the 'sociation' (Simmel, 1959[1908]: 324) of a scene". Each social form appears as part of an always still developing social praxis. We might as well call an endless practice like this "structure", since it is the only structure there is.

Through such reciprocal actions, objects as social facts "consist in situ of their own produced identifying features in and as the course of their production" (Garfinkel, 1975[94]). The forms are visible in the organization of the game's moves, the waiting, or the conversing, and the living objectivity they bear are the proper subject of sociological analysis, rather than the behavior of individual actors. The intelligibility of social life and interaction thus lives concretely as the achieved congregational orderliness that "belongs, if it belongs to anybody or anything, to the setting" (Smith, 2020: 56). It is in this sense that we can speak of environments of intelligibility and their orderliness, and reading Simmel can help us to appreciate this more clearly.

Conclusion

Simmel discussed "the purely form-sociological structure" (2009: 196[95]), or "purely sociological nature" (2009: 193[96]) of forms. Here, "pure" is related to the ways in which a local system's orderliness runs independently, autochthonously from people's intentions, desires, and rational will. As noted, Simmel's concept of purity resembles Durkheim's notion of "immortal society": society as a cohort independent way of organizing action. This theme was also developed by Garfinkel, who further elucidates it as the "immortal ordinary society". It is through these lenses that the epigraph's quotes (by Garfinkel and Simmel) should be read.

Despite this, Simmel sought to remain attentive to the dynamic nature of the social phenomena he examined and was concerned to preserve the ongoing character of every occasioned event. He maintained "a continuous readiness for experiencing and acting combined with a constant respect for the autonomous life of things in order to do justice to their representations and requests as they arise" (Simmel, 2005: 577[97]). This way of working aligns well with Aaron Cicourel's (1987) policy of respecting the always emergent character of every social occasion. Garfinkel sometimes described mundane interaction as resembling a "floating crap game," which meant that its rules and standards are subject to continual fluctuations. Clearly, Simmel and Garfinkel were equally determined to avoid reducing what is dynamic to something that is static. Garfinkel and Sacks (1970) criticized the "constructive analysis" of sociologists who limit themselves to taxidermic accounts of society. Simmel tried to avoid reifying these "processes" and "flux", and he shares with Garfinkel the orientation to taking this problem seriously and engaging in diligent efforts to avoid this

[94] "The Boston Seminars", Seminar #1, line 97.

[95] GSG 11: 245.

[96] GSG 11: 242.

[97] GSG 6: 689–690.

risk. But in some sense Garfinkel went further by focusing more radically on the endogenous local temporalities of lived situations.

Simmel's method was "to argue by example" (Turner & Beaghley, 1981: 299). David Frisby (2005: xxvi) observed that Simmel was "the first to accomplish the return of philosophy to concrete subjects". Garfinkel similarly relied upon what he called "real world" cases. His "studies," some brief and others extensive, were the concrete basis for his accounts of ethnomethods. Although Garfinkel read theory almost as much as Simmel did (neither Simmel nor Garfinkel do much citing of the theorists they read), in his own lectures Garfinkel shunned theoretical discussion, even cutting off students who wished to proceed in that manner. Livingston has criticized Garfinkel for not doing empirical research, but Garfinkel always took his direction from concrete situations, not unlike the way that the later Wittgenstein preferred to work from mundane illustrations. While perhaps Simmel worked in a more top-down way than Garfinkel did, from the general to the illustration, Simmel's aim (as Parsons noted) was usually not to erect a general theoretical account; and perhaps his reluctance to theorize was another motive for the resolve of constructive sociologists to ignore him.

In his avoidance of rationalist reductions of social affairs, Simmel left much scope for serendipity in how social forms get produced. He accepted the efficacy of formations just as they arrived without attempting to subsume them into preexisting theoretical categories. This orientation is what allows escaping dualisms, and that might be the very reason why Simmel's legacy within sociology is scattered, underrepresented but also resurfacing in unexpected ways. Without theoretical prejudice, Simmel examined how

> the objective laws of custom, law and morality developed from the necessities and practices, which originate incidentally in the relations between group members and eventually become fixed. They are ideal products of human conceptions and valuation, which in our mind now stand beyond the will and action of the individual as "pure forms" (Simmel, 2005: 245[98]).

The "incidentally" that the translator inserted here gives more latitude to the role of serendipity than most sociologists are willing to tolerate. Instead, contemporary constructive sociologists usually labor to keep local events confined within the reductions they have developed for describing them. Worse still, graduate students are taught to proceed in these reductionist ways. Respecting the multiplicities and complexities in the way that was Simmel's practice might delay the completion of doctoral research. Garfinkel called sociology "a talking science" because its practitioners can become lost in their categorial reductions and sometimes talk their way to coherent accounts—in Garfinkel's words, "offer a story for the telling"—without making any discoveries that lay outside their purview. In an interview Randall Col-

[98] GSG 6: 209: "So bildeten sich aus den Erforderlichkeiten und Usancen, die sich im Verkehr der Gruppengenossen zunächst von Fall zu Fall entwicklen und sich schließlich fixieren, die objektiven Gesetze der Sitte, des Rechts, der Moral - ideale Erzeugnisse des menschlichen Vorstellens und Wertens, die nun für unser Denken ganz jenseits des einzelnen Wollens und Handelns stehen, gleichsam als dessen losgelöste 'reine Formen'."

lins (in Bassetti & Citroni, 2018) emphasizes the dynamic nature of categories and is skeptical of static theoretical representations: "If you are a philosophical idealist there is nothing behind the representations, nothing but the categories of perception. But that is not true: there is a more complicated universe in which categories exist" (2018: 487). We have seen for instance how "strangeness" works dynamically within everyday social phenomena, and the same applies to any "unity". And yet, in the interview where he also focuses on how "American sociology over the years was taking most of its theory from Europe" (2018: 486), Collins mentions Durkheim, Marx and Weber, not Simmel.

For Garfinkel, social interaction is self-organizing, and the orderliness of any local scene is autochthonous. That is, many of the ways that people organize themselves are spontaneous and unpredictable. For this reason, he advised researchers not to routinely apply a standard method to every social setting (a practice that only guarantees they will find little beyond what they already know). Instead, researchers need to seek to *discover* the methods that the people who staff each local setting develop for organizing their activities. These methods are the ethnomethods that EM/CA targets, and each ethnomethod is "uniquely adequate" to the occasion. This unique adequacy principle can aid researchers in discovering what about a setting they do not know and is a methodological practice that can help them to remain attuned to "the for-one-another" that was Simmel's loadstone. Overall, thinking through Simmel's and Garfinkel's work together assists a return to foundational sociological issues such as membership, belonging, intersubjectivity and the living objectivity of social action, while avoiding reductionist or dualist interpretations of the individual-society relation and opening to a deeper understanding of the "complicated universe" we continuously develop together in and through the local praxis. In short, we hope that this article may occasion sociologists to re-examine the work of Simmel and Garfinkel as well as the praxeological grounds upon which society is built and which is foundational for sociology.

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