

# Georg Simmel's Concept of Forms of Association as an Analytical Tool for Relational Sociology

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## I INTRODUCTION

Relational sociology is nowadays present in many sociological debates. Often it is presented as an interesting perspective, somewhat unknown but worth exploring, or reduced to a synonym of social network analysis. There are many ways of 'doing' relational sociology and of engaging in it as a theoretical and methodological framework. However, a point upon which scholars working on relational sociology agree is the fact that relational sociology strives to overcome the old battle between agency and structure, or between methodological individualism and holism, thus proposing a new and more fruitful object of study for sociology, which may bring us together following the steps of one of sociology's forefathers, Georg Simmel (1858–1918). At the turn of the twentieth century, Simmel already claimed that the object of sociology could not be the individual or the societal whole, but what makes society and individuals possible: social relations, and particularly social relations that crystallize into more durable 'forms of association.' Forms remain stable for a certain period of time, and yet they are deeply relational in their nature (GSG 5, 1992 [1894], GSG 11 [1908], GSG 16, 1999 [1917]).

Thus, relational sociology is as old as the discipline of sociology itself, and its grounding principles and basis have been with us for more than a century. As Emirbayer pointed out in his *Manifesto for a Relational Sociology* twenty years ago (Emirbayer 1997, p. 290), we can already find a strong relational tendency in sociology as early as Karl Marx's thought, for instance. And yet, despite the undeniable relational component of his thought, it could be argued that Marx still sought to ground his theories upon substances, as his theory of value paradigmatically shows. It was only a generation later, in the works of Georg Simmel, as suggested, that this grounding on substance was completely

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left behind. In fact, Simmel himself thematized the tendency of looking for substances, for ‘absolutes’ that hold that which has been crystallized in relations beyond these relations, and depicted this tendency as follows:

To begin with an obvious example of this tendency: light is regarded as a fine substance emanating from bodies, heat as a substance, physical life as the activity of material living spirits, psychological processes as being supported by a specific substance of the soul. The mythologies that posit a thunderer behind the thunder, a solid substructure below the earth to keep it from falling or spirits in the stars to conduct them in their celestial course—all these are searching for a substance, not only as the embodiment of the perceived qualities and motions, but as the initial active force. An absolute is sought beyond the mere relationships between objects, beyond their accidental and temporal existence. Early modes of thought are unable to reconcile themselves to change, to the coming and going of all terrestrial forms of physical and mental life. Every kind of living creature represents to them a unique act of creation; institutions, forms of living, valuations have existed eternally and absolutely as they exist today; the phenomena of the world have validity not only for man and his organized life, but are in themselves as we perceive them. In short, the first tendency of thought, by which we seek to direct the disorderly flow of impressions into a regular channel and to discover a fixed structure amidst their fluctuations, is focused upon the substance and the absolute, in contrast with which all particular happenings and relations are relegated to a preliminary stage which the understanding has to transcend. (Simmel 2004, p. 100)

In a poetic language that makes the temporal distance between us and his works palpable, Simmel presented his ‘relativist’ (relational) approach as an alternative to the search for absolutes in times in which he thought that knowledge was capable of sustaining itself relationally for the first time—without last assumptions, without eternal validity and truth beyond any scope of time, place, circumstance, and, above all, relations.

Simmel viewed sociology as the discipline that would make this turn possible for the social sciences, thus focusing on relations in general and specifically on relations that were durable enough to amount to ‘forms’ of association.

This chapter focuses upon these forms of association as Simmel’s proposed key object of sociological study, and as a central analytical tool for relational sociology. Particularly, and beyond the general concept of ‘forms of association,’ this chapter pays special attention to two particular types of forms, with which Simmel dealt separately: Simmel’s apriorities for society to be possible and his concept of the forms of the second order. This is important for these ‘forms’ have seldom been analysed within the wider context of ‘forms of association,’ and thus their ‘special’ role within the wider category is rarely made explicit.

## 2 FORMS OF ASSOCIATION AS THE OBJECT OF SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

Simmel formulated for the first time his proposal of focusing the main object of sociological analysis upon the forms of association in his 1894 article 'The Problem of Sociology' (GSG 5 1992, pp. 52–61). His monograph *Sociology* (1908; GSG 11 1992) remained faithful to this proposal of 1894. This was not a matter of coincidence, or inertia, but the result of a decision. In fact, Simmel had struggled for years to finish his 1908 monograph, and he wrote in a letter to Célestin Bouglé (1908) that he had completed it with the firm intention to prove to his readers that his approach to the emerging and (fighting to be) specific discipline of sociology through the study of the forms of association was a feasible, fruitful, and coherent proposal for the present and the future of the discipline. Hence, in his monograph, he did not only propose what objects of study sociology should concentrate upon, as he had done in the previous 'The Problem of Sociology,' but he actively engaged in applying his perspective and proposal to different thematic fields in order to empirically argue his point.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, Simmel's proposal for a 'pure' (*reine*) sociology was not meant to be the only possible approach to the discipline this author envisioned, and certainly not the only contribution that sociology could deliver to the endeavour of enlarging the knowledge we have of the world we inhabit and daily (co/re) produce. Simmel made this point clear in both 'The Problem of Sociology' and *Sociology*, and he dwelled even further upon it when he revisited it for the last time in the first chapter of his final sociological work: *The Fundamental Questions of Sociology* (1917; translated into English by Kurt Wolff 1950; GSG 16 1999). In that chapter, at the end of his life, Simmel spoke about the upper and lower boundaries ('*obere und untere Grenze*', or 'upper and lower limits' as suggested by Wolff's translation, Simmel 1950, p. 23) of formal sociology. These boundaries were concerned, on the one hand, with questions of epistemology, and, on the other, with questions of metaphysics. Both types of questions may very well be inevitable for the sociologist, but they are philosophical questions as well. And Simmel was aware that the sociologist's field of specialization needed be one that only sociology could claim as its own. Sociology as a concrete discipline had to offer something that no other already existing discipline could offer; and both epistemology and metaphysics were already taken by philosophy. History was also an already established field, and so was psychology. Sociology's new terrain, its specific field, had to be something else, something that was not already the object of study of another discipline. And Simmel identified the study of the forms of association as this specific field, which opened the possibility for sociology to become a discipline in its own right, both empirical and abstract at the same time. Simmel argued that sociology was to extract/abstract from empirical work and observation those forms that channel and shape social relations, thus presenting and analysing them, separated from the many contents to which they could be giving shape. Sociology was hence to be the discipline of the 'in between,' of the invisible

threads that bind us together, thus neither focusing on individuals nor on societal wholes, but rather upon the relations that make them both possible, stabilize them as we know them, while at the same time enabling change.

Forms allow us to understand each other socially, they are our vehicles of expression at the same time as they are the way in which we learn sociability and what it is to be social in the first place. Simmel worked with social forms in all his sociological works, including his writings on religion, and also the essays that we could now identify as closest to cultural studies (such as ‘The Tragedy of Culture’).<sup>2</sup> He saw a gradation between religion, economic systems, or legal systems as forms, and those fluctuating, minimal, and fleeting relations that do not crystallize into fixed forms, and yet without which forms such as the state (as an example) would not be possible.

In a continuum between macro and micro, as well as in a continuum between duration and ephemerality, we identify those forms that he used (and have since most often been used) as paradigmatic examples of the concept: competition, superordination and subordination, coquetry, friendship, marriage, and so forth. These forms are abstracted from all their possible contents, meanings, and motivations, and the focus is on the concrete ways in which the invisible threads of relations that bring people together are woven in these concrete cases. Naturally, the form ‘competition’ or ‘coquetry’ may change with time. What we understand today as coquetry might have caused a scandal a century ago, and certainly what is accepted as competition nowadays has not remained the same either. However, sociologists can observe and trace relationships and connections, and they can analyse what kind of relations they are, what they involve, and thus, abstracted from their contents and from the continuous flow of life and events, present them as ‘forms of association’: temporal, changeable, fragile, and local, but, at the same time, making possible society as we know it.

### 3 ‘SPECIAL’ FORMS OF ASSOCIATION

Beside the forms of association that are gained from observing and tracing social relations, as geometry may abstract the form of any object from the material in which it is embodied, Simmel also worked upon ‘special’ kinds of forms of association. These are special forms because of their relation to the contents they embody (forms of the second order), or because they are especially central for society and socialization and are furthermore embodied within the individuals and not between them, despite being deeply relational (the three apriorities that make society possible).

These ‘special’ forms reside somewhat at the boundaries of formal sociology: coinciding with the two boundaries or limits, which Simmel identified as those of formal sociology—from beneath and from above. The three apriorities are certainly an important contribution to a relational epistemology of society, and yet they (especially regarding the third apriority) also touch upon a dimension of existential meaning, of a sense of belonging, to this society, which has become an object of our knowledge and experience. The forms of the second

order clearly incorporate into the study of forms of association the dimensions of time, of memory, of durability, belonging, and meaning; thus relating us not only with each other within the here and now but extending their validity from the past and towards the future.

It is important to emphasize that, within *Sociology*, Simmel analysed a great number of forms; but he very rarely argued that he was dealing with forms without which society as we know it would not exist (GSG 11 1992, p. 47, 652, 661, 663). In fact, this last assertion may sound strange, considering that Simmel is a founding father of a relational sociology that states that there are no changes that can be made in the highly complex web of relations that constitute society without them having consequences beyond these changes themselves. That is, any movement in the chain of relationships that constitute society as we know it, changes this society.

Therefore, when he emphasized the centrality of certain forms of association regarding the stability and continuity they imply for society, or, furthermore, how they are even the *sine qua non* for society to be possible, he underlined the central positioning of these forms within the web of reciprocal actions and effects, within the web of interrelations that constitute this very society. These forms of association particularly hold society's threads together, so to speak, allowing it to be formed as a whole (GSG 11 1992, p. 33).

These central forms are the special forms we are dealing with now: 'forms of consciousness' (the three apriorities for social life, elaborated upon in 'How is Society Possible?', GSG 11 1992, pp. 42–61), and 'the forms of forms' or the forms of the second order (above all elaborated upon in the eighth chapter of *Sociology* in its digression on 'Faithfulness and Gratitude', GSG 11 1992, pp. 652–670). These forms are not 'ordinary' forms that shape the contents that are part of our lives, hence turning them into communicable and socially apt. Rather, they are very special forms that allow all other forms to exist and endure as they do: be it because they allow us to apprehend ourselves and other members of society as such—and thus *form* a consciousness as social beings (the three apriorities), or be it because they confer durability to the otherwise rather momentary bonds that we weave (the forms of the second order).

The three apriorities of social life are forms of the mind, that is, of human consciousness, forms that are necessary for society to be possible. They allow each of us to apprehend, understand, and expect social relationships, and to partake in social life. The forms of the second order have not caught the attention of Simmel scholars as the forms of consciousness have; however, Simmel presented them as being so fundamental to society that it would not be recognizable if they stopped existing (GSG 11 1992, pp. 652–653).

These two 'central' types of forms do not share any particular qualities beyond the fact of their centrality for the very possibility of society. Thus, we could argue that without forms such as competition or coquetry, society as we know it would not exist the same way, but society would still be possible. In contrast, without the three a priori conditions for both society and

the forms of the second order to be possible, society as an objective entity (*objektives Gebilde*), as the relational web of coexistence and relative continuity within the same time line (durability), would not exist at all. It is for this reason that Simmel asserted (when dealing with the three a priori conditions) that in fact the whole book *Sociology* was an attempt to answer from different viewpoints the question of the three apriorities: ‘How is Society Possible?’ (GSG 11 1992, p. 45). How can an objective reality such as ‘society’ exist if it emerges as a product of subjective consciousnesses of socialized (*vergesellschafteten*) human beings? (Fitzi 2002, p. 101).

#### 4 ON THE THREE APRIORITIES FOR SOCIETY TO BE POSSIBLE

The relational perspective that allowed Simmel to formulate the apriorities for society as he did, also permeated each of the three concrete apriorities that he presented in his digression. Let us briefly focus on each apriority before we elaborate on them further.

**The first apriority:** The way in which we perceive and understand each other is conditioned through ‘certain shifts’ (*gewisse Verschiebungen*, GSG 11 1992, p. 47) that are not errors resulting from missing experiences; they are ‘substantial alternations in the condition of the real object’ (*‘prinzipielle Änderungen der Beschaffenheit des realen Objekts,’* GSG 11 1992, p. 47). This means that we do not apprehend ‘society’ and the people with whom we weave it as ‘they are.’ We cannot. In order to perceive and understand them as members of our society, as socialized beings, we need relationally construct them in such a way. And this is not a mistake we make when we apprehend them. It is our way to apprehend and understand them and also ourselves (GSG 11 1992, pp. 47–49). It is relational, or it is not.<sup>3</sup>

Some elements of this first apriority have already been introduced: the immediacy, unconditionality, and certitude of the experiential quality and intensity of the ‘you’. In fact, Simmel asserted that this experience, this ‘you,’ was the deepest psychological-epistemological problem and scheme of socialization (GSG 11 1992, p. 45).<sup>4</sup> The first apriority is concerned with the very possibility of apprehending each other as other members of the same relational web we call society; as people with which we can empathize, who we can understand, but who are not us—and despite all the forms and relational threads that unite us and make us to a certain extent predictable to each other, are radically not us. Thus, the ‘you’ is that entity we can only experience yet never fully apprehend but which strikes us as just as real and immediate as ourselves. There are dimensions of the ‘you’ we will never grasp, and we know it: dimensions of unknowability that we nevertheless overcome by building coherent wholes out of fragments.<sup>5</sup> And Simmel went a step further: even the pictures we gather and construct of ourselves are also compositions made out of fragments of all those ‘I’s we could be and never fully are. Without this capacity to build wholes out of fragments—wholes that never include the myriad of fragments of ourselves and others, wholes that complete and finalize

what we would be if each of our fragments were a whole—society would not be possible.

**The Second Apriority:** In our social apprehension and understanding of each other and of ourselves, there are dimensions that we cannot reach and make sense of, dimensions that we cannot apprehend and include in the pictures we make of ourselves and of others. Furthermore, we cannot grasp all the different facets of a human being, not even all his or her social facets. There are limitations to what we can apprehend: regarding context, time, and also regarding some completely individual traits (to express it somehow, yet aware of the impossibility of expressing what I am trying to say, as for that which is purely individual, there are no forms of expression that can be used) and a materiality that cannot be fully grasped within our forms of consciousness that nevertheless 'make society possible.'

Simmel addressed this issue by arguing that human beings are social, and yet they are also something that is not social, and therefore not socially communicable. This not-social part of us is not like the other side of the moon, which we cannot see or feel. It is not the flip side of the coin, either. No, all that which resides beyond the social in us is nevertheless in relation with the rest, relationally bound up with it, and therefore colours our way of being social, our way of relating and interacting and being ourselves. These asocial dimensions of ourselves are necessary for our social being to be able to exist as it does, and they make a difference in the way we 'perform' socially.

**The Third Apriority:** Society, if we imagine a way to map it or take a panoramic picture, is a complex web of relational positions crossed by structuring and structural lines that form axes of superordinations and subordinations, of oppositions and complementarities, of power and meaning, of distances and proximities, of openings and closures. At the same time, this society is built of relating and related individuals, who we now know to be socialized and yet also know to be something else beyond this sociality; of individuals who are members or part of this society but simultaneously also wholes in themselves. How can these two planes be viewed together? How is society possible as the objective entity we mentioned earlier, Simmel wondered, when it is composed of these universes in themselves, who are individuals? This is the question the third apriority aimed to answer.

Simmel argued that each socialized individual had to believe that there was a place in society for her, a place she (and only she) could fill and fulfil. In modern society, Simmel argued that the idea of '*Beruf*' (profession/vocation) was a key mechanism for this (cor)relation: on the one hand, of the structural positions, on the other, of the meanings and meaning enhancing and creating situations for individuals.<sup>6</sup> There are indeed many ways of matching these two different planes of social reality, however, and here resides the apriority sine qua non: their matching is essential for society to be possible. One can project the apriority towards the future and thus this place gains meaning and continuity within one's life as something we are working for, or aiming to; this apriority can also reside, or can come to us from the past, as a way of life we have been born into by being the

children of parents who did the same thing we shall do—due to law, due to belief, due to tradition. There are different ways of realising the third apriority, but its fulfillment is by all means necessary.<sup>7</sup>

There are different ways of reading the three apriorities proposed by Simmel, beyond the common and accepted basis that they are fundamental forms for society to be possible as an object of human understanding, communication and experience. Simmel did not view them as the only and eternal a priori conditions for society to be possible, or as the only possible forms of consciousness. In fact, he argued that they were conditions that had to be fulfilled to a greater or lesser extent in the actual socialization of society's members. Moreover, he argued that their total accomplishment would represent a complete socialization. They are the ideal, logical conditions for a complete socialization and socialization, for the perfect (in the sense of most complete) society—a society that does not actually exist (GSG 11, p. 46).

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Simmel focused on the three apriorities for society to be possible, paralleling Kant's apriorities for nature to be possible. They are thus a key part of the dialogue that Simmel sustained with Kant's oeuvre throughout his life, and which was so fruitful for his philosophical and sociological thought (and so much against the mainstream interpretation of Kant during his lifetime, Köhnke 1986; Cantó-Milà 2005, pp. 113–115).

Simmel presented nature in Kant's eyes as a particular manner of apprehension, as a picture that has been made and has grown with and through our categories of understanding (*Erkenntniskategorien*). If we ask: how is nature possible? we are asking about a relation between our categories of understanding and that world outside of us, which we can only apprehend and make sense of through these categories. It is *in the relation* that nature becomes possible, and never in an arbitrary manner. There are conditions that have to be fulfilled for nature to be possible (GSG 11 1992, p. 43). Simmel was firmly convinced of the relationality of the apriorities, and this relationality is what he emphasised the most within Kant's proposal. Thus, as Kant was asking for the necessary conditions for nature to be possible, he proposed to ask the same question regarding society; because society, as nature for Kant, implied the weaving of a 'relation' (*Verbindung*, GSG 11 1992, p. 42) among a myriad of incoherent and unconnected impressions into coherent wholes. Furthermore, he sought to develop the relationism contained within his apriorities further than Kant had done in the case of nature, as society certainly has a crucial historical dimension, and change plays a key role in its continuous (re)configuration.

When we apprehend and understand each other, we also do it according to certain forms and patterns: 'For here too there are individual elements that continue to exist apart from one another in certain sense, operate as sensations and undergo a synthesis into the unity of society only through a process of consciousness that places the individual being of the one element in relation to that of the other in definite forms according to definite rules' (Simmel 2009, p. 40).



According to Kant, nature only becomes possible in our minds. According to Simmel, society as an 'objective unit' (*objective Einheit*, GSG 11 1992, p. 44) only does too. This does not mean that nature and society only exist in our minds in the sense that they are imaginary, arbitrary, daydreams of isolated consciousnesses. Not at all: the very possibility of the emergence of society as an object of our knowledge and experience resides in its relationality. Only through the establishment of relations, in certain forms and according to certain patterns, individuals can apprehend and understand each other as such, and as constituting members of the same relational web, named society. Relations are necessary for the apprehension of nature as well as for the apprehension of society (and thus for nature and society to be possible).

These relations are woven in our minds. The impressions, the elements out of which we can trace these relations, the 'you'(s) who are opposite us, with us, building society with us, are not in our minds, and our relation to them is not solely in our heads. However, the society we build together becomes possible as a result of the forms of consciousness in our minds; the relations that are established among all these impressions, and their relation to us, are woven in our minds, and in these relations resides the possibility of the creation of coherent wholes such as society or nature.

Simmel argued that the apriorities are forms of consciousness, and he presented the objective of his digression as an attempt to answer the question regarding what these forms were, or which categories needed be in the mind of individuals so that a consciousness may emerge. Thus, the question regarding which forms have to be present in human consciousness is a question that belongs to the theory of knowledge (epistemology) of society:

Which forms must remain as the basis, or which specific categories a person must, as it were, bring along while this consciousness develops, and which are thus the forms that must carry the resulting consciousness society as a reality of knowledge, this we can undoubtedly call the epistemology of society. I try in the following to sketch several of these a priori conditions or forms of social interaction—for sure not identifiable as, in a word, the Kantian categories—as an example of such research. (Simmel 2009, p. 43)<sup>8</sup>

There are many elements that are of great importance for us here. They have already been introduced in this text, but the time has come to concentrate our attention on them:

1. Simmel clearly viewed his 'How is Society Possible?' as a contribution to the 'epistemology of the social,' hence searching for those conditions of possibility for society to become an object of understanding, of knowledge, of apprehension, and of experience. What has to happen in our minds, how is our consciousness shaped, so that we can actually weave society, apprehend others (and ourselves) as members of this always evolving society, to weave relationships and understand them?
2. Simmel highlighted as strongly as he could the crucial differences between his apriorities and Kant's: he did not mean the proposed apriorities to be

exhaustive or everlasting, and highlighted that their a priori character lay in their effects—they were ‘as if’ apriorities.

There are further differences between Simmel and Kant’s apriorities: for Simmel, the apriorities for society to be possible are valid within a (social) context in which subjects are, at the same time, object and subject of understanding. They are the apprehending and understanding subjects, but simultaneously, they are part of the whole that is being apprehended. Thus, society needs no external observer in order to be possible, as it becomes possible relationally in the minds of human beings. This very possibility of the existence of society emerges in and through relations between our forms of consciousness and the world that surrounds us. We are at the same time both consciousness and objects of apprehension and understanding: system and life world. At the same time, we experience our fellow human beings as a ‘you’ who, despite being different from us, and certainly not an ‘alter ego’ of ourselves, are, however, experientially different from other ‘objects’ of our apprehension; we acknowledge and experience them with the same unconditionality and certitude as we experience ourselves (GSG 11 1992, p. 45).

All in all, as we have seen, the apriorities for society to be possible aim at answering the question regarding how society becomes possible as an objective entity when it is fulfilled and woven within the minds of individuals as an object of knowledge and experience. The apriorities make this match possible through operating from the perspective of simultaneity, of being together in space and time (the ‘*nebeneinander*’ Simmel so often mentions), focusing on how the relations between us and the world that surrounds us are woven in a context of simultaneity.

At the same time, the forms of the second order make society possible by dealing with the relations that we establish from the perspective of asynchronicity (the ‘*nacheinander*’); thus, through the bestowal of the continuity in the timeline.

Of course, we may argue that there are dimensions within the three apriorities that touch upon the dimension of the ‘*nacheinander*’, and indeed there are—especially regarding the third apriority, as we will discuss shortly. However, from the distance that allows us to build ideal types, the three apriorities are mainly concerned with the ‘*nebeneinander*’ (synchronous, simultaneous, next to each other) and the forms of the second order with the ‘*nacheinander*’ (one after another, in succession, asynchronous).

## 5 ON THE FORMS OF THE SECOND ORDER

Simmel developed the concept of forms of the second order in his digression on ‘Gratitude and Faithfulness’ in the eighth chapter of *Sociology*. Indeed, he had already worked on both forms of association separately in two essays published respectively in 1907 (‘Gratitude’, GSG 8 1997, pp. 308–316) and 1908

(‘Faithfulness’, GSG 8 1997, pp. 398–403). Yet, despite the fact that he had already argued in both texts that society would cease to exist as we know it without these two forms,<sup>9</sup> he did not use the concept of ‘forms of the second order’ until he combined both essays into one single text in his monograph.

The linking of these two forms in one single text and the proposal of viewing them both as forms of the second order is of great importance for our contemporary reworking of Simmel’s forms of association in particular, and relational sociology in general. Simmel highlighted emphatically the crucial importance of these forms for the existence of society, and he argued his case by asserting that the forms of the second order had to be understood as ‘forms of forms,’ which he defined as ‘instruments of relations which already exist and *endure*,’ thus relating them to ‘first-order’ forms as the latter relate to the ‘material contents and motives of social life’ (Simmel 1950, p. 379, my emphasis).

The special nature of these forms of the second order resides in the way in which they help to link first-order forms of sociation to the duration/durability of society. Forms of the second order extend in time the momentary social bonds and formed constellations of association, allowing society to have a memory that exists beyond the immediate moment: ‘Without this inertia of existing sociations, society as a whole would constantly collapse, or change in an unimaginable fashion. The preservation of social units is psychologically sustained by many factors, intellectual and practical, positive and negative’ (Simmel 1950, p. 381).

Faithfulness and gratitude manage to bestow durability upon a momentary *Wechselwirkung* by linking the emotional (and experienced as individual and unique) to social relations and bonds. The emotions that faithfulness and gratitude engender in people assure that they will endure in their attachment to (the memory of) their emotional experience and momentary social relation by creating a durable tie—one that will exist beyond the moment that made its emergence possible. Thus, gratitude or faithfulness are at the same time emotions that are experienced by individuals, and relations that weave two social actants together beyond their actual interaction. Through forms of the second order, fleeting connections become relationships.

## 6 CONCLUSIONS

If we take a last step and link the three apriorities and the forms of the second order to each other, we could thus interpret Simmel as arguing that a socialized person (that is, having incorporated the three apriorities within one’s own consciousness) who is completely unfaithful and ungrateful is not possible. Being able to develop emotional bonds (which are also social bonds that are kept alive over time through forms of second order such as gratitude and faithfulness) belongs to the most crucial and basic processes of association, and these bonds permeate the knowledge and experience we have of the ‘other’ (and the same time as they are constituted by them)—first apriority— they show the intrinsic and deepest connection that takes place within individuals of psychical and

social systems (of us as individual beings and as members of our society)—second apriority—and argue the case for the need of a certain lastingness of the social experiences and bonds in which individuals engage and partake.

Simmel argued that gratitude is the moral memory of society (GSG 11 1992, p. 662) precisely in these terms, and society needs this memory in order to exist, as all forms of association require from us a certain capacity to expect, to take future things, relations, and events for granted, for likely, for possible, for hardly possible, or even for impossible. In fact, the third apriority relies heavily on this possibility of continuity, memory, and projection towards the future that the forms of the second order make possible (Cantó-Milà and Seebach 2015, pp. 198–215). Indeed, the very possibility of having ‘a place’ in society requires that this ‘place’ is not an experience of an instant but rather a durable and meaning-creating experience and relation. Hence, I would venture to say that the forms of the second order and the three apriorities need each other in their role as fundamental forms of association without which society as we know it could not be possible, as they rely on the forms of the first order, without which they would make no sense whatsoever.

Simmel’s relational contributions to the knowledge of the very foundations of our being social has received relatively little attention. It is not that they have not been reviewed and commented upon, but not many authors have emphasized their great value for our understanding of what it means to be human and to be social, and what the necessary conditions of this otherwise so taken-for-granted sociability are. This is especially so in moments like ours, when inequalities are growing to alarming dimensions, tensing our relational bonds to the point of breaking, while the future becomes a hard place to imagine for many people who see their possibilities of sociation, and of being full members of our world society, as seriously endangered.

## NOTES

1. In order to do so, Simmel reworked (and brought together) different essays that he had written in the years between ‘The Problem of Sociology’ and the publication of *Sociology*. This monograph was thus less a monograph than a collection of essays. See Rammstedt, 1992 in GSG 11, pp. 877–905.
2. See David Frisby and Mike Featherstone’s edition of *Simmel on Culture* (Simmel, 1997) for an excellent overview of Simmel’s essays on culture translated into English.
3. Here we could search for parallels with the works of George Herbert Mead. We could also see this first apriority in dialogue with Pierre Bourdieu’s (highly relational) concept of habitus. They are not the same, yet they point at common ‘problems’ and complement each other remarkably well.
4. For scholars who do not read German, you shall find this in Simmel (2009, p. 42). The translation is, however, misleading, as *Vergesellschaftung* has been translated as ‘social interaction’ instead of sociation (or association).
5. It is fundamental to notice here that Simmel discarded the ‘alter ego’ and opted for a ‘you’—with entirely different implications. Years later, Martin Buber would elaborate further on this topic (Buber [1923 1971]).

6. And as we know from Durkheim and Weber, he was not alone there.
7. Here the parallels with Bourdieu's work are remarkable. Especially if we concentrate on the concept of habitus, and particularly if we take Bourdieu's *Pascalian Meditations* (2000) into account.
8. Please compare with the German original: '(W)elches deshalb die Formen sind, die das entstandene Bewusstsein—die Gesellschaft als eine Wissenstatsache—tragen muss, dies kann man wohl die Erkenntnistheorie der Gesellschaft nennen' (GSG 11, p. 47, my emphasis). And he added immediately: 'Ich versuche im folgenden, einige dieser, als apriorisch wirkenden Bedingungen oder Formen der **Vergesellschaftung**—die freilich nicht wie die Kantischen Kategorien mit *einem* Worte benennbar sind—als Beispiel solcher Untersuchung zu skizzieren' (GSG 11 1992, p. 47, my emphasis). As you shall see, here again, the concept of *Vergesellschaftung* has been changed in the English translation to 'social interaction.' The original term, however, is *Vergesellschaftung*; i.e. association.
9. Thus, he argued: 'If every grateful action, which lingers on from good turns received in the past, were suddenly eliminated, society (at least as we know it) would break apart' (Simmel 1950, p. 389). Or: 'Without the phenomenon we call faithfulness, society could simply not exist, as it does, for any length of time' (Simmel 1950, p. 379).

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