

Rehabilitating the Work of Georg Simmel: Philosophy, Disciplinarity, and
the Fundamental Concepts of Sociology

by

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Abstract

Anglophone scholarship has often viewed Georg Simmel as an insightful but unsystematic thinker. However, recent developments in Simmel scholarship have precipitated re-interpretations of his most fundamental concepts and their interrelatedness. In this thesis, I re-evaluate several of these concepts and argue that the 'insightful but unsystematic' lens – which I term the 'narrative of unsystematicity' – is highly uncharitable and limits contemporary understandings of Simmel's work. I consider one relatively contemporary study of Simmel's major work which embodies this historically dominant lens. That is, I critique the analysis of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* which Gianfranco Poggi presents in *Money and the Modern Mind*. Poggi's analysis, however, has its roots in earlier scholarship. Émile Durkheim and Talcott Parsons' views of Simmel's work – especially his sociology – buttress Poggi's 'thematic' approach. Predicated on these and similar views, Poggi unfairly diagnoses Simmel as an unsystematic thinker – even *pathologically* so – and then proceeds to present a discretised selection of 'Simmel's ideas'. I argue that all three thinkers misunderstand aspects of Simmel's work – particularly his ostensibly sociological concepts. I develop a response to these thinkers via a reading of *The Problem of Sociology*. Here, I show that Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons misunderstand Simmel's conception of 'form' and 'content' in various ways. At times, each is interpreted too broadly or too narrowly, resulting in misguided conceptions of Simmel's sociology as pejoratively relativist, excessively general, or ultimately unfruitful. Moreover, contra Poggi, I present Simmel's argument according to its immanent structure, thus creating a competing impression of his work and showing that – at least in *The Problem of Sociology* – Simmel is not intrinsically unsystematic. This in turn highlights the role of philosophy in structuring Simmel's thought. Despite its title, Simmel's work is situated within philosophical contours – fundamental precepts and ultimate meanings – a consideration which Poggi's approach overlooks. For Simmel, disciplines such as sociology operate between and depend on these contours; here, Simmel is explicating these contours as they apply to sociology. Together, I conclude, these rejoinders show that Simmel is neither unmethodical nor intellectually shallow. Rather, his corpus of work offers a new approach to modern phenomena and – as I sketch in the Excursus – a potential intervention into contemporary discourses on money.

Statement of Authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Jesse Brindley, 1 February 2022.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction: The State of Simmel Scholarship

Inquiry into the work of German philosopher and philosopher of sociology, Georg Simmel, has undergone many shifts in orientation over the past century or so. Simmel's introduction to the Anglosphere was under the auspices of sociology in, for example, the translations of Albion Small, editor of *The American Journal of Sociology* in the early 20th century. Since then, Simmel has largely been viewed as a thinker rich in insight but lacking cohesiveness in various senses of the term. This perspective is manifest in the reconstructions and analyses of Simmel's work by Kurt Wolff (1955), Rudolph Weingartner (1962), Lewis Coser (1965a), Donald Levine (with Ellwood Carter and Eleanor Gorman) (1976a; 1976b), David Frisby (1981), and – most notably for this thesis – Gianfranco Poggi (1993). In general terms, I call this perspective the 'narrative of unsystematicity' (NoU). The interested reader may turn to the Appendix for a historiography of the NoU.

However, from at least the 1990s, a growing body of scholarship has emerged which aims to challenge this narrative. This scholarship argues that Simmel's work exhibits more structure than is often recognised, citing historical events (most notably World War I and II) and selective appropriation (largely motivated by sociological concerns) among the key reasons for the ostensible lack of coherence in Simmel's work. Arguments to this effect and more charitable reconstructions of his ideas can be found in the work of Elizabeth Goodstein (2017), Olli Pyyhtinen (2018), Thomas Kemple (2018), and Natàlia Cantó Milà (2005). However, Simmel's work – especially *The Philosophy of Money*¹ (2011) – is still at times viewed through the NoU lens (e.g., Ingham 2004), and his work is often appropriated in a piecemeal way (e.g., Singh 2016; Chainiyom & Giordano 2019). Whilst the piecemeal 'use' of Simmelian concepts is not problematic as such, given the prevalence of the NoU – wherein they are taken as primarily discrete, unintegrated ideas – an impression of Simmel as unsystematic is created. Moreover, by failing to consider the integration of these ideas, we risk prematurely judging and misrepresenting their contemporary relevance². In short, we are still attempting to

¹ *PoM* hereafter – in the interest of clarity, I will reintroduce the acronyms when they are first used in each chapter.

² For an example of this regarding contemporary discourses on money, see Appendix (Excursus).

diagnose and articulate the coherence of Simmel's work, clarify his fundamental concepts and their interrelations, and dispel the NoU³.

These aims are interconnected. By clarifying Simmel's fundamental concepts, it is possible to show both *that* a structure is present and begin elucidating this structure as such, which will in turn disarm the NoU. The aim of this thesis, then, is to begin realising these possibilities.

To that end, I focus on Poggi's analysis of Simmel's magnum opus – *Money and the Modern Mind* and *PoM*, respectively – which is relevant for several reasons. Although analyses of *PoM* which present it as a unified text are emerging (e.g., Goodstein 2017, pp. 137-245; Milà 2005), Simmel's work is still viewed as “fragmented” and “confused” (Ingham 2004, pp. 63 & 65), especially when invoked in contemporary discourses on money. Hence, it remains necessary to explicate why NoU-type analyses are deficient, for which Poggi's analysis can serve as a case study of sorts. The focus on Poggi's analysis will have the added benefit of addressing Simmel's most famous work, perhaps excluding *Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben* [The Metropolis and Mental/Spiritual Life] (1995). If the NoU can be addressed as it applies to *PoM*, it will have the widest reach and is therefore most likely to gain purchase. Moreover, a critique of Poggi's analytic frame will provide an opportunity to engage with several thinkers who have presented similar but contemporaneous perspectives on Simmel's work, namely Émile Durkheim – Simmel's “contemporary and occasional rival” (Kemple 2018, p. xiii) – and Talcott Parsons. Poggi relies on both thinkers to make his case, though particularly on Parsons whom he uses to ‘clarify’ Simmel's ideas (1993, pp. 70-103). Coupling Poggi's relatively contemporary view with these historical perspectives will allow for a more general critique of the NoU, thereby broadening its implications. That is, if I can show that not one but three thinkers – including Simmel's contemporaries – who present this perspective misunderstand Simmel's work, a clearer and deeper insight into the general issues with the NoU becomes possible.

In the following chapters I derive my response to Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim in large part from Simmel's ostensibly sociological text, *The Problem of Sociology*⁴ (1909b). This raises the question, why not respond with an alternative reading of *PoM*?

³ For the interested reader, I direct them to the Appendix which charts this progression in Simmel scholarship in greater detail. I also note that the three ‘stages’ I set up here are not rigid – they bleed into one another, which is more obvious in the Appendix.

⁴ *TPoS* hereafter.

There are several reasons for this. First, it is extremely difficult if not impossible to present a reading of *PoM* within the scope of a Master's thesis without replicating the deficiencies of Poggi's approach. That is, no sufficient explication of *PoM* and response to Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons would be possible within strict space constraints without excessively simplifying it into themes or concepts. This is not to say that a 'thematic' or conceptual approach is problematic per se. Such approaches are only problematic if they are predicated on the ostensible lack of systematicity in a body of work – as is Poggi's approach. Moreover, in the context of relatively few existing holistic analyses explicating the general structure of Simmel's thought, thematic approaches risk perpetuating the NoU. A thematic approach may be justified, however, based on the length and complexity of a work; *PoM* would satisfy both criteria. Despite its relative brevity, *TPoS* also captures the general structure of Simmel's thought, more than the subsequent chapters of *Soziologie* or excurses taken individually⁵. As a relatively contained articulation of Simmel's thought, then, *TPoS*, is a better fit than *PoM* for the purposes of this thesis.

Second, *TPoS* has received less attention than *PoM*, particularly in considerations of whether and how Simmel is a systematic thinker. Among the few uses of *TPoS* to that end are Fredrich Tenbruck's critique of the formalistic Simmel (1965), Kemple's⁶ use of Simmel's apriorities to structure his introductory analysis, and Goodstein's critique of Tenbruck's case (2017, pp. 66-70). My use of *TPoS*, however, is distinct and complementary. Though I respond to the same general concerns of these thinkers – i.e., the NoU – I primarily focus on Poggi's articulation of this argument. Thus, I aim to complement these analyses by revealing further flaws with the NoU perspective. Moreover, engaging with *TPoS* contra Poggi also provides an opportunity to investigate the intricacies of Simmel's so-called sociological concepts and disciplinary affiliations in this new context, i.e., as a response to Poggi's view. 'Wechselwirkung' – reciprocal causation or *inter*-action – is one such concept, first expressed at length in *TPoS* and central to comprehending the unity of Simmel's thought (Goodstein 2017, pp. 83-89). The conceptions of and relation between disciplinary knowledges and philosophy is

⁵ And especially more than the excurses alone, as in Levine (1971a).

⁶ Strictly speaking, Kemple uses the excursus to *TPoS* – among other primary sources – which together form the first chapter in *Soziologie* (Simmel 1992). The excursus was first published in English as *How is Society Possible?* (Simmel 1910a).

another key site of tension with Poggi's analysis. Exploration of this tension, too, may yield new insights into the structural unity of Simmel's work.

Third, *TPoS* constitutes Simmel's first relatively in-depth articulation of 'form' and 'content' – the fundamental concepts of sociology. Both Parsons and Durkheim conclude from their analyses of these concepts that Simmel's sociology both is and is necessarily unsystematic, implying Simmel's thought in general lacks structure. Poggi broadens this implication, arguing that the lack of structure – predicated on Parsons' and Durkheim's analyses of form and content – ought to guide contemporary readings of Simmel's work. Hence, a reading of *TPoS* seems the natural place to investigate these foundations of Poggi's view. Moreover, Poggi also grounds his view on a sketch of Simmel's sociology seemingly independent from Parsons and Durkheim's interpretation. Though formulated slightly differently – which is unsurprising given the intervening decades – Poggi arrives at similar claims predicated on an analysis of Simmel's sociology. Namely, Simmel is an unsystematic thinker – as evidenced by an inconsistent sociological methodology – which is in turn informed by a relativistic philosophy. In short, Poggi both relies on the conclusions of Durkheim and Parsons *and* attempts to independently draw similar conclusions. Given that *TPoS* is an overview of Simmel's sociology, then, it is the best single text to investigate both sets of conclusions. I undertake this investigation in the following manner.

Chapter 2 is a sketch and a provisional critique of the NoU as articulated by Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons. For Poggi, this narrative is grounded in three reasons. The first arises from Simmel's position as an academic outsider due to his conversion to Protestantism from Judaism, his unorthodox academic style, and his association with the then dubious discipline, sociology. Of these, for Poggi, only Simmel's unorthodoxy points to a valid criticism of Simmel's work, though all help explain the relative lack of Simmel scholarship. The second and third reasons to consider Simmel an unsystematic thinker arise from his sociology and philosophy. Both involve a pernicious relativism, for Poggi, which emerges from Simmel's disdain for system-building, especially philosophically. Hence, Poggi opts for a 'thematic' approach to *PoM* and invokes other scholars to 'clarify' its ideas. Here, I note that Poggi failing to consider a dialectical structure to Simmel's work is striking, given his analysis of dialectical concepts within *PoM* (Poggi 1993, pp. 104-131). However, I reserve my argument proper for the following chapters.

The remainder of Chapter 2 presents Durkheim and Parsons' articulation of the NoU. Durkheim's rendition is more complete than Parsons', so I begin there. For Durkheim, the fundamental distinction of Simmel's sociology – form-content – is unscientific, i.e., too philosophical. Hence, Simmel's relativistic philosophical predilections taint his sociology with an irredeemable subjectivism. Provisionally, I argue that these claims are predicated on both a misunderstanding of 'form' as an empty concept and a failure to understand the dialectical nature of Simmel's project. Parsons' posthumously published critique of Simmel's work also takes aim at the form-content distinction, arriving at similar conclusions of his unsystematic style. For Parsons, Simmel's conception of 'content' as 'interest' is often insufficient to explain the structure of social action – i.e., 'form' – and is sufficient only in relatively stable circumstances. Again, provisionally, I argue that Parsons' understanding of 'content' is insufficient, though the crux of my case lies in the following chapters. Here, I primarily aim to show both that the NoU is applied to *PoM* – à la Poggi – and how it is justified – a critique of form-content and Simmel's overly 'philosophical' and 'relativist' predilections. The proceeding three chapters represent a more thorough response to this version of the NoU.

Before continuing, I note that I had some difficulty obtaining a contemporary, translated copy of *Soziologie* (i.e., Simmel 2009a; 2009b) due to COVID-related restrictions enforced in Australia. Given ongoing uncertainty surrounding library access, I opted for Small's translations (Simmel 1909b; 1910a), which were digitally available. However, I encountered a few passages which were unclear or imprecise in their translation. Where this occurs, I have included an original translation of my own, the German text, along with reasoning for my translation in the footnotes.

I develop my response to Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim by recreating Simmel's argument for and sketch of the form-content distinction. Chapters 3 through 5 divide *TPoS* into three central claims: the need for sociology and its fundamental concepts, the method of sociology and its relation to other sciences, and the relation between science and philosophy. I punctuate these claims with demonstrations of how Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim misunderstand Simmel's concepts, which I reiterate as intermediary conclusions at the end of each chapter. At the end of Chapter 5 I also present three general conclusions that follow from these intermediary ones.

Beginning with the first central claim of *TPoS*, Simmel does not start with form-content but with the need for a fundamentally new science. As outlined by Poggi, Berlin was a centre of political, economic, and intellectual modernisation in Prussia (1993, pp. 1-37), which, for Simmel, necessitated a new mode of inquiry. This new science must consider society and its institutions in a new light, i.e., as immanently produced through relations between people. 'Form' and 'content' are the concepts which make this process visible. Form is Simmel's name for these interactions considered separately from the individuals from which it emerges, and which is possible only in abstraction, strictly speaking. Content refers to the mental component of the individual that precipitates an interaction and is a function of socio-historical circumstance, which I argue is much more complex than Parsons' account of 'content'. Despite being distinguishable only in abstract, form and content at least point to something 'objective' in the standard sense, i.e., something existing outside the subject. Thus, the term 'society' is often imprecisely used, according to Simmel. That is, common uses often consider a collection of individuals related to formal institutions, such as the nation or a state, without considering what, for Simmel, constitutes their sociality. Namely, the many interactions that must be *constantly* enacted for these institutions to exist; for Simmel, such analyses omit the majority of what is 'social' in these institutions by focusing on its 'external' determinants. Simmel's conception of sociology aims to remedy this gap by elucidating their 'internal' dimensions. This is not to supplant other disciplines which focus exclusively on the 'external' institutions – the readily visible products of social interaction – but to show their immanent structures.

This chapter shows that Parsons and Durkheim's conceptions of content and form are too narrow and too broad. Respectively, Parsons over-psychologises content, while Durkheim reads form as too abstract when contrasted with Simmel's presentation of these concepts. Moreover, both overestimate and underestimate Simmel's intentions for sociology. In contrast to Parsons' project, Simmel's sociology offers one of several possible syntheses of broader society, whereas Parsons' sociology attempts to explain the broader coherence of society as the synthesis of value systems which emerge from economics and politics. However, Simmel's sociology goes beyond that of Durkheim and Parsons by not taking society as *sui generis*, aiming instead to show how we produce it through interactions. Finally, this chapter shows that Poggi's threefold division of

Simmel's sociology overlooks their unifying methodological foundation – the division of form-content – thereby presenting it as 'relativist'.

In Chapter 4 I continue with the second claim of *TPoS* concerning the method of sociology and its relation to other disciplines. Given the novelty of Simmel's mode of analysis, he sketches the twofold aim of sociology's method, which is both ideographic and nomothetic. That is, sociology analyses both the forms present in specific cases and the general structure of forms, respectively. Both are achieved by analysing: first, the situated interactions and 'interests' of a given case; second, the abstracted 'interests' of a given case; third, the historical-material conditions influencing the formation of institutions, interactions, and 'interests'. Here, Simmel is at pains to distinguish his conception of sociology from psychology on two grounds. Namely, all sciences are psychological to the extent that their data is co-constituted by the mind – or 'Geist' – whereas the discipline of psychology nomothetically concerns psychological processes as such. Sociology, then, is entitled to the same necessary distinction from psychology as other sciences and is further distinguished from psychology by its ideographic component. This is also why sociology must develop its own terminology, for which Simmel proposes form-content, at least provisionally.

Here, I draw three further conclusions. Parsons over-psychologises content, which Simmel stresses is always influenced – but not determined – by external conditions. This excerpt also shows that Simmel's method is empirically grounded, and therefore that Durkheim's concerns of subjective conjecture are unwarranted. Moreover, throughout *TPoS* – though particularly in this section – Simmel stresses the provisionality of his sociology, recognising that it does not constitute a system per se, nor is it intended to⁷. Rather, *Soziologie* might be more charitably read as a demonstration of methodology, and in this sense – contra Poggi's view – shows a willingness to pursue a single, nonrelativistic (meta-)perspective within sociology which may realise ostensibly differing types of analysis.

The penultimate chapter exegetes the last of the three claims of *TPoS* concerning the relations between philosophy and science. Simmel further situates sociology, along with all science, between 'lower' and 'upper' philosophical bounds. *TPoS* is largely an exercise in the former, providing the grounds from which sociology as science may be

⁷ Although a nascent reconceptualisation of systematicity can be read here in the development of reciprocal causations (see Appendix, §3).

developed. However, Simmel also touches on the latter, which concerns questions of meaning and value, and for which disciplinary knowledge provides content. Here, I include the opening of the excursus to this chapter as it elaborates on the significance of sociology and of the 'social'. That is, for example, the social may represent a site where Immanuel Kant's noumenon-phenomenon does not hold, for Simmel, because in the case of the social as such, the conscious individual occupies both categories.

From the final claim we see that separating Simmel's philosophy from his sociology is difficult; *TPoS* occupies both camps and, for Simmel, all science is predicated on philosophical labour. Minimising this relation through a 'thematic' lens therefore overlooks a fundamental unifying element of Simmel's thought. Relatedly, this view of the whole to which Simmel constantly alludes belies the general view of Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim – Simmel is neither an insight-producing savant, nor a dilettante, nor a shallow thinker.

From my exegesis of *TPoS* in Chapters 3 through 5, I draw three general conclusions. First, the above together show that Parsons, Durkheim, and Poggi misinterpret Simmel in various ways, thus calling their characterisation of Simmel into question. Second, that I have presented Simmel's argument in a structured way – especially a philosophical argument – shows that a non-thematic presentation of his work according to its immanent logic is possible. I note, however, that this does not inoculate Simmel against all criticism – I sketch a few ways this might proceed. Third, my critique of Poggi's text reveals the danger of relying on 'classical' Simmel scholarship, which emerges from a history that is at times ungenerous to Simmel's work (see Appendix). Hence, contemporary scholarship often advocates a critical return to primary texts, subject to their availability.

From the above I draw four further conclusions in response to Poggi's analysis of *PoM*. First, insofar as the unity of Simmel's texts are concerned – especially *PoM* – any analysis must be situated in Simmel's conceptions of philosophy – both 'upper' and 'lower' – and the disciplinary knowledges which they underlie and overarch. Such analyses would better reveal the unity of these texts whilst avoiding the pitfalls of the NoU. Second, reading *TPoS* as a case study for the grounding of a perspective reveals that Simmel's relativism is not that of a 'dilettante' or 'flâneur'⁸. Rather, Simmel's so-called relativism expresses a deeper philosophical point: any new perspective must be

⁸ The latter Frisby's term denoting a similar point, see Appendix (§2).

grounded by philosophical labour, not by subjective speculation. This point is dismissed by Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons as pernicious relativism or ‘dilettantism’. Third, the proliferation of such perspectives results in a necessary entanglement of multiple, equally valid positions. Comprehensive analysis of a phenomenon – e.g., money or society – from multiple perspectives therefore results in contradictions between the various logics – i.e., disciplinary perspectives – involved in the analysis. By attempting to ‘resolve’ these tensions, interpretations such as Poggi’s overlook this point. Fourth, by implication, any attempt to comprehensively interpret *PoM*, for example, replete with the perspectives Simmel invokes and their tensions requires a large-scale study; focusing on a theme or concept will not elucidate Simmel’s fundamental, relativist point: the coexistence of apparently incommensurate possibilities. Together, these points constitute an alternative to the NoU lens, applicable to *PoM* and to Simmel’s thought in general.

After summarising the preceding argument, I present some general implications of the above concerning the analysis of Simmel’s work. Simmel’s thought is steeped in his conception of philosophy. Contrary to some ‘classical’ approaches in Simmel scholarship, we must account for his conception of philosophy to understand the valence of his concepts. Part of this account must involve an emphasis on totality (see Appendix, §3), which a ‘thematic’ approach cannot capture because it isolates Simmel’s ideas from one another. Relatedly, serious consideration must be given to the sense in which Simmel invokes ‘relativism’. Poggi dismisses this structure of Simmel’s thought seemingly based on the negative baggage entailed by the term. However, if each relativist perspective must be grounded in the manner of sociology in *TPoS*, this is anything but a glib subjective relativism, and therefore warrants a more nuanced approach.

Articulating this relativism necessitates contradiction. This is best expressed by Simmel’s student – Arthur Salz – who writes that “the coexistence of logical incompatibilities is a law of life” (1959, p. 235), where ‘life’ is an animating principle of Simmel’s philosophy (see Appendix, §3). Hence, simply pointing out ‘contradictions’ in *PoM* or surmising from them that Simmel does not take systematic thought seriously misses the crucial point: seemingly contradictory events occur all the time; it is the role of philosophy and disciplinary knowledge to make these contradictions intelligible. Here, too, one might include the entanglement of perspectives. Is *TPoS* a work of philosophy,

sociology, or both? And if it is both, do these perspectives contradict one another? Simmel, it seems, would say yes and both, but necessarily so, respectively. Finally, the above implies that a holistic analysis of Simmel's major works is necessary – including *PoM*. Appropriation by parts risks discretising Simmel's ideas and replicating Poggi's approach. Together, these points constitute an alternative schema and call to reimagine Simmel's thought, and thereby reinvigorate his insights into contemporary problems.

Chapter 2 – Poggi's Thematic View of Simmel: The Durkheimian and Parsonian Filter

Introduction: Producing the Contemporary Simmel

This chapter sketches some of the arguments which Poggi presents in *Money and the Modern Mind* (1993) to justify a reading of Simmel's work through the unsystematicity lens.

For Poggi, a 'narrative of unsystematicity' (NoU) approach to Simmel's work has historically been justified for three general reasons. First, Simmel's apparent 'strangeness' to the academy. That is, Simmel's conversion from Judaism to Protestantism, his challenging academic style, and association with the then suspect discipline of sociology – all these factors culminated in a suspicion and an excessively critical approach to his work⁹. Though the first and third of these reasons are dubious, for Poggi, the emergent approach was at least partially justified and correct. That is, Simmel's 'challenging' style is a valid reason to approach his work through an NoU lens. Second, Simmel's philosophical relativism, from which his challenging style emerges. Thirdly, as noted above, Poggi argues for a 'thematic' reading of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*¹⁰ (2011). That is, given Simmel's style and his philosophical relativism, no meaningful system is present in *PoM* around which an interpretation may be organised. Moreover, these themes or 'ideas' are often best expressed through the work of more 'systematic' scholars, such as that of Parsons. I claim that a 'thematic' lens may be justifiable given the breadth of Simmel's work but not – as Poggi claims for at least part of his justification – on grounds of Simmel's unsystematicity. If anything, Poggi's approach creates the appearance of lacking a system precisely where it seeks to rectify it.

Poggi's interpretation is predicated on the work of both Parsons and Durkheim, with whom he shares a similar view of Simmel's work. As Parsons' critique of Simmel that I discuss here is incomplete, I first outline Durkheim's similar argument. The root of Durkheim's critique lies in Simmel's form-content distinction, which he argues is insufficiently scientific because it does not adequately 'explain' social data and is too

⁹ To this one might add Simmel's tendency to publish in non-academic outlets towards the end of his life – e.g., Simmel (1909a; 1910b; 1911a; 1912; 1913; 1914; 1915; 1916; 1917c; 1918). See 'Georg-Simmel-Bibliographie' (Gassen 1958) for a comprehensive list of Simmel's publications, divided into books, essays, translations – as of 1958 – and lectures.

¹⁰ *PoM* hereafter.

metaphysical. This, I claim, is based on a misunderstanding of form – and therefore the entire form-content distinction – as essentially empty. Following this characterisation of form-content as ‘empty’, Durkheim argues that society must exhibit an ontological priority over the individual or else sociological analysis risks falling into mere subjective speculation, i.e., a Simmelian-type analysis. Even here, Simmel has a response. Through form and content, Simmel attempts to explain how social data emerge at all; he is considering an interpretive framing and the interpreted object together. In short, Durkheim appears to argue for a more analytical, top-down approach to sociology and misreads Simmel’s form-content as merely subjective. Whereas, I argue, Simmel attempts to offer a dialectical conception of sociology that explains the homogenising force emanating from social formations without simply, even artificially, placing it on an ontological pedestal.

Parsons’ argument runs along similar lines and is thus subject to similar criticisms. For Parsons, Simmel’s form is a relatively stable, emergent phenomenon arising from a confluence of individuals’ actions as caused by their ‘interests’ or certain mental states. However, this distinction is never developed beyond an analogy, according to Parsons. Hence, he claims the distinction is subject to two primary criticisms. First, form cannot be explained with recourse to the emergent structure of the interactions of ‘interests’ alone: at times, external factors are necessary. Second, form can only explain phenomena when the underlying conditions remain constant. Hence, Simmel’s distinction either applies only to relatively narrow cross-sections of society or it applies to society only superficially. For Parsons, this superficiality is masked by the peripatetic nature of Simmel’s work; had he developed it more thoroughly, Parsons claims, the limitedness of form-content would have become apparent.

I will develop a more thoroughgoing response to these criticisms in the following chapter. Here, it suffices to say that both Durkheim and Parsons’ interpretations of Simmel’s form-content distinction omit crucial details. Thus, form is presented as ‘empty’, and as emerging from a narrow conception of ‘interest’ by each scholar, respectively. That is, Simmel may be more systematic than Durkheim, Parsons – and by extension Poggi – give him credit for, even in the realm of the most fundamental abstraction of sociology. Thus, Poggi’s attempts to ‘systematise’ Simmel’s ideas or approaching *PoM* thematically *because of its supposed unsystematicity* is no longer

justifiable, though the thematic approach may be justified given its length and complexity.

Simmel as Savant: On Poggi's Thematic Lens

Simmel was from the outset a “stranger in the academy” on multiple accounts (Coser 1965, in Poggi 1993, p. 44). Despite the lack of “formal disqualifications attached to being of the Jewish faith” (Poggi 1993, p. 41), the “centuries of official discrimination against Jews” left its mark on Wilhelmine Germany (Richarz 1986, in Poggi 1993, p. 41¹¹). Informal discrimination remained widespread, particularly within “German universities and other academic institutions” and frustrated the development of Simmel’s academic career (Poggi 1993, p. 42). The “proud sense of apartness” of the “German spirit” occluded those who did not share ‘German’ historical roots, including the Jews” (ibid). Moreover, self-distancing from one’s “*Volk*” to align with another of self-proclaimed “superior significance” – i.e., the German *Volk* – was viewed with great suspicion (ibid). For Poggi, then, Simmel’s Jewish heritage, his conversion to Protestantism, and apparent secularity heightened the racist predilections of those determining advancement within academia. Simmel’s supposed denial of his heritage rendered him all the more ‘strange’ and ‘un-German’ to “many powerful, established members of the university community” (ibid, p. 43).

Simmel’s unorthodox academic style cemented the distastefulness of his ‘self-denial’ to the university literati. As a “maverick” of academia, according to Poggi, Simmel regularly published in non-academic outlets (ibid, p. 52¹²). Moreover, his work lacked both “an apparatus of footnotes” and often explicit citations altogether (ibid, p. 44). Perhaps more infuriating to his superiors, Simmel wrote in a “sophisticated, fluent, often brilliant style capable of capturing the attention of a wider public rather than in the style suited for addressing a restricted academic audience” (ibid). These texts, however, largely consisted of “collages of relatively unrelated essays” and were unsystematic despite their popular appeal, from Poggi’s perspective (ibid). This style extended to Simmel’s lectures. According to Poggi, these subjects often “crossed or ignored disciplinary boundaries and did not lend themselves *to the systematic treatment*

¹¹ Poggi’s translation.

¹² See footnote nine above for some examples. For an analysis of Simmel’s shift to publishing in ‘non-academic’ outlets, see Coser (1965b). For an analysis of some factors impacting Simmel’s final works – especially *The View of Life* – see Beer (2019, pp. 1-22).

*favoured by established academics*¹³ (ibid, emphasis added). That is, like Simmel's books, his lectures covered apparently disparate topics from "Rembrandt" to "the psychology of women" that – to Poggi, in sympathy with the "established academics"¹⁴ – appear guided by the whims of the lecturer, not any methodological concerns (ibid, pp. 44-45). Also, like his books, Simmel's lectures were well-received. As a "brilliant lecturer", Simmel competed directly and successfully with his superiors, damaging not only their "pride" but their "pocketbooks", too (ibid, p. 45).

In conjunction with anti-Semitism, Simmel's disavowed Jewish heritage, and perhaps the zenith of unorthodox style was his commitment to "an upstart discipline of suspect pedigree", namely sociology (ibid, p. 46). This commitment cemented Simmel's position as an outsider to the academy. Sociology lacked validity within academia for various reasons, especially, for Poggi, its "laughable" Comtean pretensions to pre-eminence in sciences and affinities with socialism (ibid). Simmel's association with such a discipline did his career no favours. This association was both "complex" and limited (ibid, p. 47). Though Simmel always saw himself "primarily as a philosopher", he nevertheless sought to legitimise sociology particularly, observes Poggi, in the decades either side of 1900, marked by the initial publication of *PoM* (ibid). Simmel's advocacy for the nascent discipline, too, did not aid his academic advancement. Prussian authorities were hardly "delighted" by Simmel's declaration of the importance of sociology, and – thanks to his work – its now-secure foundations (ibid, p. 48). That is, Simmel had in a manner commensurate with his so-called "neo-Kantianism", clarified the "concept" of sociology (ibid).

What, then, is the 'concept' of sociology according to Poggi's Simmel? Poggi identifies three related conceptions, which he terms "*formal*", "*interstitial*", and "*molecular*" (ibid, p. 51, emphasis original). Formal sociology is not defined by a unique "*content*" – which it shares in part with "law, political science, economics, religious studies, and history" – but by its study of "*form*" (ibid, p. 49, emphasis original). That is, in one sense, sociology studies patterns of behaviour that arise in the formation and dissolution of groups, according to Poggi. This sense of sociology is valuable as a method

¹³ Note the ambiguity of this statement. Is it that a 'systematic treatment' in general was favoured by 'established academics', or that a *specific* 'systematic treatment' or set thereof was favoured? I suspect it is the latter for both the established academics and for Poggi.

¹⁴ Poggi states his view of Simmel as unsystematic directly towards the end of this chapter (1993, p. 55 & 61).

of inquiry on three accounts. First, individuals necessarily “pattern” or regularise their behaviour in relation to the individual and the group (ibid). Sociology makes these patterns explicit. Second, these patterns manifest in various contexts, e.g., religious orders can be organised according to military-style hierarchies¹⁵. Finally, these patterns of internal organisation have “material consequences” for institutions serving the same function, e.g., for-profit and non-profit businesses may both provide healthcare, though whom they treat may differ according to their ability to pay¹⁶. Thus conceived, according to Poggi, Simmel’s sociology is an “emphatically” empirical enquiry – “unlike [Simmel’s] philosophy” – that aims to create a taxonomy of interactional forms (ibid, p. 50). Moreover, formal sociology does not conflict with other disciplines because it does not appropriate their content.

“Interstitial” sociology can be read as an extension of formal sociology and equally as “accommodating” to the then established disciplines (ibid). For Poggi, Simmel’s second conception of sociology defers analysis of the “massive and persistent social structures dominating the social landscape” – e.g., the “state” or corporations – to political science or economics, respectively (ibid). Interstitial sociology finds its niche in revealing the micro phenomena obscured by these larger structures, like “friendship” or “flirtations” (ibid). Interstitial sociology also reveals the necessity of these micro phenomena alongside macro institutions.

Simmel’s final conception of sociology on Poggi’s list is so-called “molecular” sociology (ibid). This conception extends the logic of both preceding conceptions of sociology, bringing them into conflict with other disciplines. That is, micro structures do not simply exist alongside or in between macro structures, but constitute macro structures, according to Poggi. Hence, molecular sociology claims the foundational *content* of macro structures, such as those analysed by political economy. Micro forms of interaction between individuals, such as “mutual acquaintance, accommodation, cooperation, and conflict”, underlie larger structures like legal systems or states; macro structures have “*resulted from*”, not simply “*rested on*”, micro interactions between individuals (ibid, p. 51, emphasis original). However, this radical understanding of sociology is – from Poggi’s perspective – peripheral for Simmel, who emphasised so-called formal sociology. At any rate, the ‘strangeness’ of Poggi’s Simmel to the academy

¹⁵ Poggi specifically references the military organisation of the Jesuits (1993, p. 49).

¹⁶ Again, Poggi’s specific example involves hospitals (ibid).

is largely a product of his association with sociology, rather than his specific view of it. This association, however, was exacerbated by Simmel's distinctive style of sociology and remained "qualified" by his self-conception as a philosopher (ibid).

Before sketching Poggi's understanding of Simmel's philosophy and *PoM*, it will be beneficial to critically consider Poggi's sketch thus far¹⁷. In so doing, I will also be foreshadowing the contemporary theorisations of Simmel's unity. Poggi identifies a rigid distinction between Simmel's philosophy and his sociology: one is empirical, and one is not. Yet, Poggi will rely on a 'relativist' characterisation of Simmel's philosophy to inform his reading of *PoM*, which he takes to be, if not sociology, of particular "significance for *social theory*" (ibid, p. 69, emphasis original). However, the relation between philosophy and sociology – indeed, all disciplinary knowledge – is much more nuanced, for Simmel. This will become clearer once I outline Simmel's 'upper' and 'lower' philosophy below and in the following chapters. Here it will suffice to say that disciplinary knowledge and philosophy – especially its 'upper' sense – refer to one another, for Simmel.

Moreover, it is striking that Poggi recognises the dialectical structure of Simmel's 'ideas' – e.g., objective spirit (1993, pp. 104-131) – while apparently failing to consider the broader dialectical structure of Simmel's work, not just its dialectical content (Goodstein 2017, pp. 223-226). For example, Poggi's conception of Simmel's molecular sociology might have benefited from a dialectical reading. It is true that Simmel conceives of micro forms as constitutive of macro institutions in one sense, it is equally true that institutions impact the nature of forms of interaction; 'causality', so to speak, is multidirectional. This can be seen in Simmel's 'method' for identifying form-content in *TPoS*, which I address in Chapter 4. The lack of a dialectical interpretation is even more striking when considering Simmel's self-promotional summary of *PoM*, in which its dialectical structure is made explicit (Simmel n.d., in Poggi 1993, pp. 62-68). To my knowledge, Poggi offers the only English translation of this summary. Poggi's reversion to the unsystematicity trope is explainable, at least in part, by his articulation of Simmel's general disposition and philosophy.

Given Simmel's willingness to challenge the prevailing academic conventions and attitudes of his time, Poggi states that "one may wonder whether Simmel was not something of a maverick in a broader sense" (1993, p. 52). That is, Simmel took a "more

¹⁷ Poggi addresses Simmel's philosophy far less than his 'sociology', which is significant for reasons I will outline shortly.

favorable view of the modern experience”, particularly the “avant-garde developments in the arts and in poetry” (ibid, p. 53). “Artistic modernism” was a lens through which sense could be made of the “restlessness” and “fragmentariness” of modern existence (ibid). For Poggi, these tendencies manifested in Simmel’s self-ascription as a “relativist philosopher”¹⁸ challenging “all that seemed solid and unproblematic to previous generations” (ibid). Simmel was audacious enough not only to threaten the pride and pocketbooks of established academics, but to challenge their core values. This modernist approach culminated at the end of Simmel’s life when, according to Poggi, “practically all his lectures and writings concerned philosophical as against sociological themes”, encapsulated in his “philosophy of life” (ibid, p. 54). Supposedly, this philosophy “emphasized life’s inherent, *irrational tendency* to transcend all the forms, material, social, and cultural, in which life itself unavoidably finds expression” (ibid, emphasis added). That is, in the end, Simmel reveals or develops his supposed irrationalist position explicitly.

Poggi does not stop here. Paraphrasing a “relatively recent German study of Simmel’s philosophical work” (i.e., Schnabel 1976, in Poggi 1993, p. 55), Poggi continues:

“[Simmel] had a relentlessly questioning intellect, with a self-consciously cultivated taste for surprising transitions in analysis of the very different themes to which it applied itself; a penchant for paradox and for striking formulations; and a distaste, or perhaps an incapacity, for systematic discourse” (1993, p. 55).

It seems therefore that Poggi’s Simmel possessed an over-refined analytical ability; Simmel had a savant-like capacity to make myriad useful distinctions yielding bountiful lines of investigation which he was unable to synthesise into a unitary framework. Simmel’s unsystematicity is, so to speak, inscribed into his very personality rather than solely in his avant-garde mode of theory. His switching between academic disciplines, predominantly philosophy and sociology, seems to be symptomatic of this. As alluded to earlier with reference to objective spirit, Poggi concedes minimal ground – though, admittedly, some – to Simmel’s philosophical project but nevertheless implies that the two can largely be considered separately. Moreover, as regards Simmel’s philosophy, this disciplinary perspective is also *internally* irrationalist, according to Poggi. Therefore

¹⁸ I will discuss more precisely what this means as regards *PoM* in the following chapter. Nevertheless, I note that an analysis of a fragmented reality does not imply a fragmentary, or unsystematic, analysis.

‘systematic’ scholars, among whom Poggi presumably includes himself, must eliminate any vestiges of irrationality which have wormed their way into Simmel’s sociology. That is, through Parsons and Durkheim, Poggi seeks to shape Simmel’s work according to ‘proper’ academic contours, to iron out the contradictions and discretise analytic frameworks.

The above caricatures the personality behind *PoM* from the perspective of the NoU; Simmel is an irrationalist modernist, albeit one with a unique insight into modernity, skilled in conveying the experience of modernity in both his writing and lectures. Naturally, therefore, Simmel’s erraticism of method and analysis continues into the development of *PoM*, according to Poggi. After all, Simmel was engaged by the “great savant Gustav Schmoller”¹⁹ to present his paper on “The Psychology of Money” in 1890, arguably the beginnings of *PoM* (Poggi 1993, pp. 56-57). Over the course of the next decade Simmel would shift from “psychology” to “philosophy” and “sociology” in his various treatments of money; “anything, one might say, to avoid locating his argument in the discipline more expressly and technically concerned with money, economics!” (ibid, p. 57). For Poggi, it seems, Simmel’s erratic personality surfaces in his disciplinary vacillation and avoidance of the ostensible discipline of his concern²⁰. Moreover, for Poggi, Simmel’s difficulty in writing the opening chapter of *PoM* “in which he could not help confronting problems (such as that of *value*) more directly related to the *economic* theory of money”²¹, purportedly shows the primarily economic nature of his investigation, despite Simmel’s declarations to the contrary (ibid, pp. 57-58, emphasis original). Instead, Simmel – in the vein of Marx – aims to excavate the “philosophical significance or[...] psychological and sociological implications” of money (ibid, p. 58). In doing so, however, Poggi’s Simmel encounters the limitations of a non-economic analysis of money.

Upon publication, *PoM* received a broad array of ostensibly positive responses. Schmoller, Simmel’s savant mentor, “reviewed it very positively”, which Poggi tempers

¹⁹ Note Poggi’s use of the term “savant” in relation to a figure with whom Simmel was associated during the development of *PoM*, as if to say that Simmel shared this characteristic (1993, p. 56).

²⁰ One may question whether in ‘shifting’ between positions Simmel is abandoning his previous ones, as Poggi is implying, or creating a cumulative picture of the object in question from multiple perspectives.

²¹ This is a rather odd statement. Surely any comprehensive theory of money – economic, political, sociological, etc. – must give some account of its value or desirability? However, this in turn implies an account of value as such: what do we mean when we ascribe ‘value’ to something? This more fundamental question seems to underlie all theories of money, not only or even predominantly an economic one.

with: “[Schmoller] was chiefly an economic historian, not a practitioner of what one might today call economics proper” (ibid, p. 58). By implication, for Poggi, Schmoller’s review does not indicate the economic or even critical-theoretical soundness of Simmel’s work, but its economic-historic veracity. Given the ultimately economic nature of Simmel’s inquiry, as Poggi presents it, this endorsement does not seem to amount to much. For a review of *PoM*’s economic merits, one must look to Carl Menger, who “valiantly opposed” Schmoller and the so-called German Historical School (ibid). According to Menger, though *PoM* is a “comprehensive, quite brilliantly and stimulatingly written work” (Menger 1901, in Poggi 1993, p. 58²²), it fails to acknowledge that many aspects of money are “within the competence of economic theory proper”, and therefore not subjectable to the “philosophical analysis” of *PoM* (Poggi 1993, p. 58). In other words, Simmel’s ostensibly philosophical approach is fundamentally misguided for Menger, a view with which Poggi appears sympathetic. A more charitable version of this view can be found in the review of Georg Knapp, who considered *PoM* as concerning not “money as such, but rather the sociological side of the money economy” (Knapp 1905, in Poggi 1993, p. 59). Despite its title, Simmel does not analyse money *per se*, but its sociocultural ramifications – for Knapp, an equally legitimate enquiry. George Herbert Mead wrote a somewhat positive, philosophically oriented review of *PoM*, and took inspiration for his development of social action (Mead 1901; Kemple 2018, pp. 185-186; see Appendix). Regarding outright negative reviews of *PoM*, Poggi limits himself to that of Durkheim for whom *PoM* is “a treatise on social philosophy” (Durkheim 1980, in Poggi 1993, p. 60). As Durkheim “was committed to distinguishing sociology from philosophy”, this does not constitute praise (ibid, p. 60).

Thus, Poggi is sympathetic to the general view that *PoM* contains, or at least potentially contains, many valuable, disparate ideas; for Poggi as for Menger in particular, the text remains valuable. However, a prospective reader must not be seduced by the “neatly symmetrical layout” of *PoM* (ibid p. 61). The near-symmetrical division of *PoM* into an analytic and a synthetic part, each subdivided into three chapters should *not* imply to the reader a “systematic scholarly treatise” (ibid). For Poggi, these divisions and their headings purportedly provide “little indication of what Simmel really does in the book” (ibid, p. 62). Rather, one should expect vacillations from “one topic to

²² Poggi cites Frisby’s quotation from and translation of Menger’s review in ‘Preface to the Second Edition’ of *PoM* (2004). A full translation Menger’s quote can be found in Frisby (2004, pp. lii-liii).

another”, in line with Simmel’s putative character and method (ibid, p. 61). To remedy this, the “English [i.e., Frisby, Bottomore, and Mengelburg’s] edition has usefully reproduced” subheadings that originally appeared in the contents and inserted them at “appropriate points” in the text (ibid). As if the foregoing were insufficient, Poggi cites Frisby to remind us that *PoM* “emerged out of a whole series of essays published by Simmel over the preceding eleven years” (Frisby 1990, in Poggi 1993, p. 62). Hence, “the whole architecture of the work is *not held together by a central argument* but by myriad analogies and meandering enlightenments” (ibid, emphasis added). This is the final nail in Simmel’s coffin: *PoM* emerged from a disorganised set of discrete shorter works and therefore, for Poggi and early Frisby, one cannot and should not expect a comprehensive system. At best one can expect thematic links, at worst tangential and tenuous ones.

Through the foregoing sketch of Simmel’s work and character, Poggi has established the lens through which Simmel’s work ought to be interpreted – in *PoM* and otherwise – a lens that he will adopt throughout his text. In short, Simmel was an outsider on account of his commitment to sociology and a supposed lackadaisical attitude to systematicity, a point Poggi repeatedly laments (e.g., 1993, pp. 70-71, 92, 102-103, 113). Poggi’s strategy for organising Simmel’s work involves filtering *PoM* through theorists who have ‘systematically’ developed ideas nascent in *PoM*, such as Parsons or Norbert Elias on a theory of action, or Hans Freyer on the development of objective spirit (ibid, pp. 70-85 – esp. pp. 84-85 – pp. 117-124, respectively). Simmel is thereby reduced to a wellspring of ideas more fruitfully developed by subsequent scholars.

Should we accept Poggi’s characterisation of Simmel, his work, and the subsequent approach to *PoM* as a set of ideas loosely aggregated around the theme of money? Should we operationalise these ideas as discrete concepts, clarified by the work of others? I argue no, we should not proceed with a ‘thematic’ reading of Simmel’s work on Poggi’s basis – a systematic reading of Simmel is possible. I will begin mounting this case by outlining the views of two of the theorists mobilised by Poggi to justify and enact his project – Parsons and Durkheim. I will consider whether their assessments adequately reflect Simmel’s ideas, and thereby whether Poggi’s invocation of them to justify and enact his approach is sound.

For Durkheim, Simmel’s distinction between forms of social action and their content cannot serve as a legitimate mode of abstraction for a science. That is, sociology

must distance itself from Simmel's "radical separation of form and content" (1994a, p. 84). As Goodstein notes and Everett Wilson – Durkheim's translator – implies, Durkheim's presentation of the form-content distinction is telling (ibid, pp. 84-85; Goodstein 2017, p. 72). That is, Durkheim articulates Simmel's form as fundamentally "empty", ready to receive or manifest "any sort of content" – a mere container of substances (Durkheim 1994a, p. 84). Simmel purportedly provides no justification for distinguishing between elements with "characteristics [i.e., content] in common", and thus Durkheim charges Simmel with arbitrarily privileging form as "the social" (ibid, pp. 84-85). Ultimately, this approach is, for Durkheim, an "unwarranted abstraction from the palpable reality of social facts and could therefore only lead sociology back toward metaphysics" (Goodstein 2017, p. 73). Simmel's 'formal' approach to abstraction is too diffuse, too vague for Durkheim to go beyond subjective conjecture "[u]nder the pretext of bounding" sociological inquiry (Durkheim 1994a, p. 85). For Durkheim, this is particularly evident in the examples or 'metaphors' Simmel utilises as proof of method in *PoM* and elsewhere. These proofs appear to be "a number of philosophical variations on the theme of life, chosen more or less randomly," and "do not tie together into a scientific system which forms a whole" (ibid, p. 86; see also Durkheim 1994b). Simmel achieves at best a thin veneer of systematicity under the auspices of the form-content distinction.

However, this is an unfair reading of Simmel's work. Durkheim and Simmel present "[t]wo very different versions of objectivity" and therefore distinct roles for abstraction in theory (Goodstein 2017, p. 73). For Durkheim, abstraction must emerge and be "systematically developed" from "natural distinctions in the data" as that which is common to and explanatory of them (1994a, p. 84). As above, the form-content abstraction fails in this respect because it cuts through common elements in the data, rather than neatly demarcating it according to 'natural' divisions. Conversely – at least around the turn of the 19th century – Simmel would dispute the possibility of a 'natural' division as such. That is, "there can be no ultimate units of analysis and no "social facts" as such in isolation from their interpretive framing"²³, from Simmel's perspective (Goodstein 2017, p. 74). How do we determine these facts in the first case? In explicit Kantian terms, Simmel is concerned with the mechanisms or precepts that make

²³ Simmel arguably tempered his Kantian elements around the revision of *PoM* onwards (Goodstein 2017, pp. 71-72).

concepts like ‘data’, ‘natural’, ‘division’, or ‘systematicity’ possible, for which his partial answer for the social is form and content²⁴. However, to avoid “empty generalities and abstractions which have brought about the ruin of philosophy” – and “have found a place even in sociology” in “the reduction of single events to a social basis” – one cannot return to Kantianism *per se* (Simmel 1895, pp. 52-53). Rather, extending the general insight of Kant regarding necessity of structures in interpretation²⁵, Simmel locates objectivity in its emergence through the interpretive frame of the socio-historically situated subject; epistemic claims “could only be anchored via a *quasi*-transcendental operation”, not a strict Kantian transcendentalism (Goodstein 2017, p. 73, emphasis added).

Sociology, then, as a form of knowledge explicating the social as such must be constructed upon the basis of quasi-transcendental categories through which phenomena are conceived. That is, fundamental concepts – which function like transcendental categories – are required as foundations for disciplinary knowledge²⁶. These concepts imply a certain constitution of the subject, within which they must operate – just like the possibility of society implies a certain constitution of the elements of society and their relations, namely individuals and their “becoming-social”²⁷ (Goodstein 2017, p. 17). Taken together, *knowledge* of the constitution of the individuals and the forms of interaction through which they become social must be situated within the constitution of the subject, though the processes which realise this are the domain of a different inquiry, namely psychology²⁸. Thus, Simmel’s methodological individualism is twofold: the fundamental perspectivity of the individual as *analyser* must be factored into sociology as science and the notion of society itself arises as a function of the interactions of individuals. Sociology must operate within the constitution of the analysing subject as it explicitly studies the interactions of individuals.

For Durkheim, the order appears reversed: the social totality cannot be explained with reference to the individual or else sociology risks falling into subjectivism (à la

²⁴ I would also add a third element not discussed by Durkheim, namely the interaction of the two.

²⁵ Very roughly speaking.

²⁶ This takes the form of fundamental concepts through which experience is first approached, logically speaking. The establishment of such concepts for sociology is the primary aim of *TPoS*, as I show in the following three chapters.

²⁷ This is Goodstein’s translation of “*Vergesellschaftung*”, which is often translated as ‘association’ (e.g. Goodstein 2017, p. 70) or socialisation (e.g. Simmel 1895) in Simmel scholarship. I opt for this translation here because it explicitly denotes Simmel’s meaning: sociology studies the forms of interaction through which individuals are transformed into parts of a social whole.

²⁸ More on the relation of sociology to psychology in Chapter 4.

Simmel's "*spéculation bâtarde*" (1994b, p. 159, emphasis original)) or psychologism, neither of which is conducive to sociology proper (1994a, pp. 88-90; Goodstein 2017, p. 74). To be sure, Durkheim admits to sociology the study of the preconditions of society, understood primarily as the determinants of its "form" (Durkheim 1994a, p. 86). The form of a society is "chiefly" determined by "the size of their territory", their peripherality or centrality in relation to other societies, and the nature of their "frontiers" (e.g., "geometric" or irregular lines) (Durkheim 1994a, pp. 86-87). Society itself, as opposed to its preconditions, must be taken as a "*sui generis*" force largely external to individuals, manifesting as a "constraint" upon them, according to Durkheim (ibid, p. 89, emphasis original). These constraints are not univocal but can manifest differently according to the individual; to claim the opposite "would not accord with the facts" (ibid, p. 91). Nevertheless, the "characteristic of social phenomena is entirely found in the *ascendency* which it exercises over particular [individual] minds"²⁹ (ibid, p. 92, emphasis added). That is, individuality can exist only within the range defined by social conditions, "a limit beyond which we cannot go" (ibid).

Durkheim presents two external indications that together purport to show the precedence of the social over the individual³⁰. First, "the resistances with which social groups oppose individual deviations in ways of acting and thinking" (ibid). That is, the contours within which individual action and thought must occur. These resistances may be formal, as in the "realms of religion, law, and morality" (ibid). Resistance may also be informal, such as the oppositions to "radical innovations in matters of economic methods" (ibid). For Durkheim, given the implicit nature of some forms of social sanction for individual deviation, another criterion is necessary. Namely, "the special way in which social phenomena are inculcated into the individual" (ibid). That is, the way in which norms of behaviour and thought are transferred to the individual. Crucially, for Durkheim, neither is sufficient in isolation: sociology is concerned with those actions and behaviours that are both general to society and a product of it. This would exclude, for example, the biological constitution of humans which is general but not social³¹. In

²⁹ Square parentheses are inserted by the translator, Everett Wilson.

³⁰ To be completely clear, these are not Durkheim's only arguments for the analytical priority of society over the individual, but the "relatively easy to use and especially appropriate" ones he references in response to Simmel (1994b, p. 92). A more comprehensive comparison of Durkheim and Simmel's notions of society and sociology is beyond the scope of this thesis.

³¹ This is not to say that *knowledge* of the biological constitution of individuals is not constituted within society or socially, but that biology as such is not within the remit of sociology. Biologists and the way they produce their knowledge, for example, may be within this remit.

essence, “*sociological phenomenon[a] par excellence[...]* express the way in which the collective intelligence and will are manifested”³², according to Durkheim (1994a, pp. 92-93, emphasis original). Those products of outer social forces and how they are internalised within individuals creating a tendency towards specific actions and thoughts: this is the remit of sociology for Durkheim³³.

However, Durkheim does not consider how society attains its ‘ascendancy’, at least in his response to Simmel. What kind of structure does the possibility of not only society, but society as an ‘ascendant’ constraint imply of the individual and their interactions? That is, he does not consider the perspective of the sociologist at Simmel’s quasi-transcendental level. Instead, Durkheim interprets Simmel’s centring the perspective of the subject – i.e., for Simmel the necessary pathway to *objectivity*³⁴ – as subjectivism. Hence, Durkheim appears to misjudge the level of reality at which Simmel intends form and content, and thereby his sociology, to operate. That is, form and content are not applied to directly available data to explicate ‘natural’ divisions but are constitutive of the data to which subsequent explicatory abstractions are applied. Nevertheless, one might generously concede that Durkheim’s characterisation of Simmel’s form as “mold” is perhaps somewhat accurate, if we interpret it metaphorically as the structure of content (Durkheim 1994a, p. 84). However, form is not simply an external force which ‘holds in’ and shapes the boundaries of content, but immanently binds content together. By analogy, if one pours water into a glass, Simmel’s form is not the shape of the glass. Rather, form is the hydrogen bonds binding water molecules together. Nor can any content be ‘contained’ by any form. Like the transcendental structures of apprehension, form limits which content(s) may emerge and how content(s) appear. Durkheim’s characterisation, then, remains at best misleading

Therefore, the distinction is not “radical” in that it does not falsely discretise elements of one and the same aspect of reality³⁵ (ibid), though it is dialectical: form and content are both distinct yet overlapping concepts, neither of which can take ultimate

³² Everett Wilson’s (translator) emphasis.

³³ Note the tension in Durkheim’s analysis of the social: society is both the ‘ascendant’ force that defines the contours within which individual thought and action can occur, yet it is also possible for individuals to ‘deviate’ from social norms.

³⁴ The supposed emphasis on the individual can also be read as a necessary particularity which must be transcended (see Appendix, §3).

³⁵ Here, Durkheim raises whether “a clear-cut distinction between egoism and altruism” can be ascertained, presumably relating to the diagnosis of ‘content’ from which form emerges (1994a, p. 84). For Simmel, a strict distinction is not necessary. As value-orientations, egoism and altruism refer to a more fundamental structure of value, Simmel sketches elsewhere (2011, pp. 68-75).

precedence over the other. That is, sociology for Simmel is the science of the forms through which society becomes possible or through which society – including its ‘ascendancy’ – manifests itself in “*Wechselwirkung*”, the reciprocal interaction of individuals (Goodstein 2017, p. 74). Becoming-social exhibits a wide array of forms that reveals the various modes of these immanent bonds, including those that ostensibly sunder society (Tenbruck 1965, p. 89). These are not in the first instance ‘downward’ forces that ‘constrain’ individuals but are produced and enacted by them; social forces, for Simmel, are a function of reciprocal interaction between individuals, which are in turn always socially embedded but not determined³⁶. Thus, there are two points of contrast between Durkheim and Simmel. For Simmel, simply labelling society as ‘*sui generis*’ avoids the interesting, necessarily philosophical question, which informs why and how society has ‘ascendancy’ over the individual. Secondly, one might consider what ‘subjective’ and ‘objective’ mean for both Durkheim and Simmel. For Durkheim, objectivity appears as that which is external to the subject, whereas for Simmel, objectivity is a (inter)relation with subjectivity, or an element of the ‘Ego’³⁷. What were stable concepts – society, subject(ivity), object(ivity) – are dissolved into processes. For Simmel, only by analysing these phenomena as processes, as relations, is ‘objectivity’ in its usual sense possible.

In short, for Durkheim the social has analytical priority over individuals and is essentially distinct from them; “social facts[...] are social and therefore not individual (1994a, p. 90)”. The analytical priority of the social is derived from its capacity to determine the poles between which individual action and thought must occur. These poles represent a constraint of society upon the individuals, inculcated into them in various ways. These pressures and the resultant societal organisation are taken for granted as simply ‘there’ – albeit as a product of largely material conditions – to be subjected to ‘scientific’ analysis and the phenomenon which sociology, as science, takes as “peculiar to itself” (Durkheim 1994a, p. 89). Strikingly, Simmel would not disagree with much of this formulation. Society does influence the realm of possible action and

³⁶ As another illustration of a similar, dialectical point, one may see the section in *PoM* on exchange. Simmel analyses exchange as a reciprocity or *inter*-action of processes within individuals that generates a ‘space’ of sociality between them (2011, pp. 82-85). Analogous to society, the structure of exchange emerges from a synthesis of individual valuations, where these valuations are produced by the ‘I’ which is itself a dialectic synthesis of subject and object (*ibid*, pp. 66-67).

³⁷ I say secondarily because I cannot pursue this point here due to the complexity involved in the question. I also note that the term ‘Ego’ comes from the English translation of *PoM*

thought, and these structures are – if not within the gamut of sociology – certainly a force requiring explication³⁸. However, Simmel’s consciously philosophical-transcendental approach attempts to *derive* the constitution of society – and not simply take it as given. As a sphere of knowledge, sociology must also adhere with the transcendental structures of thought common, for Simmel, to *all* individual knowers. Put paradoxically, Simmel emphasises the objectivities of subjectivities that all thought must traverse, including sociology. It is this paradox – the objectivity of subjectivity, the necessarily philosophical starting point – that Durkheim misconstrues as capricious vagaries; Simmel’s point is to show the ubiquity of objective structures immanent to “disparate” examples chosen according to the “inclinations of particular individuals” (Durkheim 1994a, p. 86), as well as the necessarily subjective basis of knowledge, where ‘subjective’ is understood to dialectically contain objectivity.

Parsons shares a similar view replete with similar problems. In a chapter conspicuously omitted from *The Structure of Social Action* (1949), Parsons’ draft outlines a critique of Simmel’s conception of sociology centred around the form-content distinction³⁹ (1998). In an arguably more charitable manner, Parsons presents Simmel’s conception of sociology not as accessing “a new class of concrete facts”, but as organising existing facts in a new way (ibid, p. 22). At the crux of this new organisation of facts is the form-content distinction from which “nothing is to be inferred[...] as such” or in abstract (ibid). Rather, for Parsons, form and content represent “analogies” for the relation of social forms and their abstraction from empirical reality (ibid). To the extent that empirical reality contains “social life”, it is constituted by the process of interaction between individuals (ibid). Individuals have many “motivations” (e.g., greed, ethical concerns) that are not social in themselves, but are social to the extent that they ‘produce’ interaction and thereby society (ibid). Counterfactually put, without interaction society does not exist.

Social forms, then, are the “modes of interaction” – as Parsons puts it – that emerge from interactions and are themselves the products of motives (ibid, p. 22). These motives are divided into “classes”, each of which is the domain of various sciences

³⁸ That is, Simmel is not precious about how the term ‘sociology’ is used (see Chapter 4); important issues should be pursued regardless. He merely seeks clarity and precision where possible.

³⁹ Although this is a draft and reads as such, I believe it is still possible to gain a general understanding of Parsons’ view of Simmel sufficient for the purposes of demonstrating why Poggi’s filtration of Simmel through Parsons is inappropriate.

of the “subjective point of view” (e.g., psychology). Conversely, “concrete acts” are classified from an “objective point of view” (ibid). Each class of motives “serves to activate” a specific class of concrete acts (ibid). Social science is delimited according to the classification of motives and the correlated “externally observable characters of the acts” (ibid). Thus, a motivation-action complex may be designated “economic, political, religious, aesthetic, etc.” according to both the class of motivations and of resultant actions (ibid). That is, for Parsons, Simmel’s social science studies how and which individual motivations manifest as specific sets of concrete interactions. At this stage Parsons laments the incompleteness of Simmel’s supposed “classification of the social sciences and their subject matters”, and the lack of a “*causal explanation*” as to how certain classes of acts emerge from certain classes of motivations (ibid, pp. 22-23, emphasis original). Still, Parsons considered it prudent that Simmel did not attempt to complete this list, as he “would certainly have run into very serious difficulties” (ibid, p. 23).

Based upon these motivation-action classifications of social science, Parsons’ Simmel concludes that no hitherto existing science analyses social relations as such. Rather, “motives” and “acts” that constitute the remit of hitherto existing social sciences could be “*thought of as existing concretely apart from social relations*” (ibid, emphasis original). However, many acts *are* social as are the motivations for these acts to the extent they motivate such action. This missing link – the explicitly social element of the motivation-action complex – is what Parsons takes as the referent of Simmel’s concept of “social form” (ibid). Form captures the social through a particular process of abstraction tentatively described by Parsons as “emergent” from “the processes of action” (ibid). That is, form cannot be isolated “even as a hypothetically *concrete* entity, but may be conceptually distinguished” (ibid, emphasis original). By analogy, one may consider the capacity to hold, which emerges from the relation between the sides of a cubic container. One cannot isolate this capacity from the sides except in abstraction⁴⁰. That is, if we take ‘capacity to hold’ as form, this form cannot be identified within any of the singular parts (i.e., sides) on which it supervenes but is rather a function of the parts as a *set* or in relation to one another⁴¹. This function of the parts, the ‘capacity to hold’

⁴⁰ My example.

⁴¹ However, this is not supervenience as modern analytic philosophy understands it, i.e., a “set of properties *A* supervenes upon another set *B* just in case no two things can differ with respect to *A*-properties without also differing with respect to their *B*-properties” (McLaughlin & Bennet 2018). For

as form, can be separated from its material base only in the mind and then applied to or recognised in other contexts, e.g., other enclosed shapes.

Simmel's purported justification for this abstraction, for Parsons, lies in the "fact" that "form and content could be shown to vary independently of each other" (ibid). That is, various organisations of content(s) can realise the same forms and the same organisation of content(s) can manifest various forms. For example, the form of "competition" can be realised "in the economic fields, in sports, in rivalry for the favour of women, etc." without changing its essential nature (ibid). However, the justification for the form-content abstraction is never developed into an "explicit methodological foundation", nor is a "systematic" theory built upon it (ibid). Mirroring both Poggi and Durkheim's ascriptions above, Simmel's "remaining sociological work took the form of a series of brilliant but disconnected essays on what purported to be specific social forms" (ibid). Here again we see Simmel presented as a capricious scholar whose vacillations from topic to topic are tolerated only on account of their brilliance.

After sketching Simmel's position⁴², Parsons begins the more pointed aspects of his critique. These can be divided into two related elements. First, not all social forms can be explained with recourse to "the immediate *ad hoc* action elements of the parties" (1998, p. 25, emphasis original), where 'ad hoc' refers to the "immediate concrete ends, and the means and conditions directly related to them" (ibid, p. 30). Second, structure is that which requires explanation, not an explanation itself. On the first, Parsons considers whether the form of exchange can be explained with reference to such 'ad hoc' motivations in the case of market exchange for services, i.e., "earning a money income" (ibid, p. 25). Actions involved in employment, e.g., teaching a class, can be explained by the internal immediate 'motive' for income, with which one satisfies further needs, food,

Simmel, the relation is not as strictly inverse such that any minimal change in A-properties necessarily implies a change in B-properties – except in abstract – because in practice many interrelated forms operative simultaneously, which renders it difficult to isolate any specific form. This will become evident below.

⁴² In fairness to Parsons, the foregoing is a consciously limited sketch of Simmel's work restricted to "the most general references" rather than "intensive textual criticism" given "the purposes of the present discussion" (1998, p. 30). For an idea of the scope of the limitation, Parsons cites only Simmel's *Soziologie* – the edition is not listed – and then only the first five pages, roughly up to page 297 in Small's translation printed as *The Problem of Sociology* (1909b). This determination is based upon Parsons' quote from page four (see footnote 5 (1998, p. 30)) of the edition of *Soziologie* that he uses (the full bibliographic details are not listed), which appears on page 296 in Small's translation (1909b). However, the remainder of Simmel's chapter is overlooked in this case by Parsons and presents significant problems for his reading of Simmel's understanding of: form-content, sociology as science, and the nature of reality. The shortcomings of Parsons' reading will be addressed shortly.

shelter, etc. At an elementary level, Parsons grants that a general form of exchange can adequately explain the structure of these actions.

An ostensibly similar exchange occurs in marriage and the “management of a household” (ibid)⁴³. That is, a degree of specialisation may occur wherein rough equivalences are drawn between the parties; I cook, and you wash the dishes, for example⁴⁴. However, intramarital exchange cannot be adequately explained by the exchange form. For Parsons, explanation of this interaction – why these specific parties are engaged in their respective exchanges involved in managing a household – must reference something external to the motivations of each party, namely the institution of marriage. Ultimately, marriage is a subtype of contractual relationship that is often – for Parsons as established by Durkheim⁴⁵ – reliant on an external “institutional framework” bearing down on the parties, so to speak, and forming their actions (ibid). As an institution, marriage must be explained as a top-down influence on action, at least in part, and therefore not solely residing in the motivations of individuals. These external structural elements of action, writes Parsons, “Simmel’s conceptual scheme entirely fails to provide” (ibid). Hence, Simmel is purportedly too reliant on the individual as the source of action rather than the normative force society imposes upon them.

Before considering how Simmel might, and to an extent does⁴⁶, respond to this kind of objection, Parsons offers a related objection on the following grounds: structure is often the explicandum, not the explication of social action. Simmel’s social form, for Parsons, is “a “mould” into which the pliable material of action was poured” (ibid). As outlined above, form emerges from the interaction or the ‘becoming-social’ of individuals, taken purely as social event, the same content (i.e., the social) shaped into varied modalities or organisations (i.e., forms). However, forms as such do not occur in reality: the ““form of a relationship” is not a concrete descriptive category” but a particular abstraction from it (ibid, pp. 25-26, emphasis original). For Parsons, Simmel’s

⁴³ It is unclear whether earning an income and managing a household are the services exchanged within a marriage, for Parsons, or whether managing a household itself involves exchanges analogous to those involved in earning an income (1998, p. 25). I have opted for the less problematic formulation, i.e., the second one. Parsons’ point, however, is relatively clear: action cannot always be explained with recourse to internal (i.e., the ad hoc) motives alone, as he takes Simmel to be presenting it; external structures influence action, too.

⁴⁴ My somewhat trivial example.

⁴⁵ Parsons here references a section of *The Structure of Social Action*, namely chapter VIII in the published version (pp. 308-323). I will not dwell on this argument here as it is not directly relevant, though I will note that Parsons’ reference to Durkheim to critique Simmel further establishes the similarity of the formers’ views.

⁴⁶ Anachronistically at least.

forms are an abstract *portrayal* of structures present in interaction; the prime importance of Simmel's work – and therefore its relevance to Parsons' titular project – is the identification of patterns in interaction. However, structure at the level of interaction between individuals, not just Simmel's forms⁴⁷, can serve as an explanation only when the underlying "*fact[s]*" remain relatively constant (ibid, p. 28, emphasis original). Where these facts are in flux, immediate structures such as the forms emerging from individuals in interaction dissolve into "process" only to re-emerge "on another level" (ibid). To paraphrase Parsons' example, the shape of a riverbed can be given as an explanation for the shape of a waterfall only within a limited timeframe (ibid). Given a longer timeframe one must factor in erosion and therefore the type of rock – or even their atomic arrangements – to comprehensively explain the structure of the waterfall. By extension, the structure of interaction between individuals portrayed by Simmel's forms are a snapshot relevant only to a narrow, if not instantaneous, circumstance in which the external influences remain unchanged.

Quite rightly, Parsons admits that Simmel did not see structure as "an ultimate category", but as a set of "relatively fixed constant[s]" that must be analysed in terms of more fundamental elements, namely forms (ibid). That is, in line with Poggi's sketch of Simmel's 'molecular' sociology, higher-order structures, such as society at large or nations, are constituted by interactions between individuals. Moreover, these individual interactions exhibit a feature analogous to higher-order structures, namely a degree of regularity or patterning that Simmel designated 'form'. On this, Parsons seems to agree with Simmel: "we must break down [higher-order] structure into combinations of process and more elementary structures as far as is necessary to arrive at an "adequate" judgement" (ibid). The 'adequacy' of a judgment, then, is "a matter of the scientific problem in hand" (ibid). Recall the previous example of the waterfall. Over a relatively short period, the shape of the riverbed can serve as an adequate judgement (i.e., explanation) of the shape of the waterfall. Over a longer timeframe, the shape of the riverbed is an inadequate explanation of the shape of the waterfall because the riverbed is subject to changes in accordance with more fundamental processes (erosion, etc.).

Similarly, Simmel's social forms are applicable, for Parsons, only to a relatively narrow aspect of sociology; Simmel's forms are confined to "the first descriptive level for concrete social phenomena so far as they constitute interesting problems to the social

⁴⁷ Parsons also references Weber and draws similarities with Simmel (1998, p. 27).

scientist" (ibid). That is, forms explain only lower-order phenomena and even then, only those within the limited range amenable to formalistic analysis. Recall that many social interactions are, for Parsons, unanalysable according to reciprocities of individual motives and must refer to broader institutions, such as contractual relations and their place within a broader social structure. Simmel restricted himself "to empirical essays on subjects where his method was genuinely illuminating", and thus was saved from the "sterile classification of possible relationship types" (ibid). Again, we see an account of Simmel-as-savant. For Parsons, Simmel's sociology (in this case) is valuable not only despite his unsystematicity, but his "dilettantism" prevents him from recognising the unavoidably 'sterile' culmination of his "formalism" in static taxonomies of social relations (ibid). Simmel's vacillations saved him from recognising the methodological dead end towards which he was heading.

Like Durkheim, Parsons viewed Simmel's fundamental abstraction between form and content as problematic: both argue that form-content cannot lead to a systematic sociology. For Parsons, this problem arises on two accounts. First, although the form and content of interaction can vary independently of each other and are thus justifiably, for Parsons, distinguished by Simmel, one cannot necessarily derive a specific content from the form of an interaction. That is, one cannot always derive the inner or the 'ad hoc' motivations – in Parsons' formulation – for the action of each individual from the social structure of their interaction or vice versa. However, on this account Parsons is more sympathetic than Durkheim: Simmel's distinction usefully analyses certain types of interaction, such as economic exchange. Nevertheless, the form-content distinction cannot be the general basis of sociology as Simmel purportedly claims because it cannot adequately explain the structure of interaction in a broad array of circumstances (e.g., marriage or broader institutions). Second and relatedly, structure as an explanation in general is often that which requires explanation; only in certain circumstances can structure serve as an explanatory factor. For Parsons, patterns in social interaction of both lower- and higher-order structures are precisely that which sociology should seek to explain. At best, Simmel identifies and describes lower-order patterns in interactions. Thus, the scope of Simmel's 'formal' sociology is fundamentally limited, according to Parsons.

As with Durkheim above, Simmel is not without a convincing avenue of response to the Parsonian critique, which in turn raises problems for a 'Parson-ised' reading of

Simmel a là Poggi. Moreover, a response can be drawn from precisely the text on which Parsons relies the most, namely *The Problem of Sociology* (Simmel 1909b) and will help illuminate the role of sociology in Simmel's broader theoretical outlook, especially its relation to philosophy. To avoid siloing Simmel's work along disciplinary lines, thereby obfuscating its unity and contemporary relevance, the relation between disciplinary perspectives and philosophy must play a role in future analyses of his work – especially of *PoM*. This case is developed in the following chapters.

Conclusion: The Discretised Simmel

Poggi begins his analysis of *PoM* from the following vantagepoint: Simmel is unsystematic, yet his work contains many contemporarily useful ideas⁴⁸. After presenting a justification invoking Simmel's status as an ethnic and academic 'outsider', and his quasi-compulsive inability to systematise – especially philosophically – Poggi concludes that *PoM* must be approached through the work of other, more systematic scholars. Poggi does not directly recruit Durkheim's work for this task. However, Poggi does cite Durkheim to justify his approach and Durkheim presents a more complete argument than Parsons, on whom Poggi relies to systematise Simmel's work. Hence, I sketched Durkheim's interpretation of Simmel's work. Durkheim levied two key charges at Simmel. First, form-content cannot explain so-called natural divisions in sociological data because form is a fundamentally empty concept. Second, society is not something to be explained beyond certain empirical factors – especially in so-called metaphysical terms – but is itself an explanation or causal factor of individual action. Parsons also took issue with Simmel's form-content distinction. Specifically, he argues that 'interests', i.e., content as Parsons interprets it, cannot explain the structure of action alone; often external factors are required for such an explanation. Moreover, structure is often that which requires an explanation. Form thus conceptualised can – for Parsons – only serve as an explanation of social phenomena in a very limited range of cases and only at a superficial level. Simmel never realised this supposed limitation because of his vacillation from analysis to analysis

⁴⁸ Which I identify as the orthodox, second-stage position in Anglophone Simmel scholarship (see Appendix). Moreover, Poggi is not alone in this. Lewis Coser, for example, characterises Simmel's work as 'skittish', lacking an "*esprit de système*" (1965a, p. 3, emphasis original). Also, the 'dilettantism' expressed by Parsons takes various forms, such as Frisby's "*flâneur*" (1981, p. x, emphasis original). For a brief exposition of Coser, Frisby, and others' similar views on Simmel's work, see the Appendix (§2).

However, Simmel's content is neither empty nor is it simply constituted by 'interest'. Rather, form-content elucidates the constitution of sociological data as such and thereby how society becomes a causal force in individual action. Similarly, and in response to Parsons, content understood as the interaction of 'interests' is deflationary; Simmel includes both 'external' factors – i.e., precisely that which Parsons says Simmel lacks – and socio-historical circumstance, to say nothing of the interaction these have with each other and with 'interests'. Hence, any conclusion of Simmel's unsystematicity arising from Durkheim and Parsons' interpretations is *prima facie* predicated on a misunderstanding; relying on Parsons' work to 'systematise' this misunderstanding only exacerbates the issue. Poggi's case is undermined by extension. By predicating his interpretation of *PoM* on Parsons and Durkheim's views and development of Simmel's ideas, Poggi ties his case to theirs. Thus, if it is comprehensively shown that Durkheim and particularly Parsons' conceptions of Simmel's sociological project and – at least in the case of Durkheim – hostility to philosophy do not reflect Simmel's work, then Poggi's interpretive schema for *PoM* is dealt a significant blow, too. This chapter has primarily provided a sketch of Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons' general position; the proceeding ones will show why this position is inadequate.

Chapter 3 – Responding to Poggi’s Thematic Lens: Reading *TPoS* I

Introduction: A New Science and its Fundamental Concepts

This and the following two chapters formulate a more comprehensive response to the view of Simmel presented by Poggi, Durkheim, Parsons, and the participants in the narrative of unsystematicity (NoU) more generally⁴⁹. Through a reading of Simmel’s *The Problem of Sociology*⁵⁰ (1909b), I challenge Durkheim and Parsons’ analyses of Simmel’s sociology upon which they base more central claims of Simmel’s unsystematicity, and which informs Poggi’s reading of *Philosophy of Money*⁵¹ (Simmel 2011). My response is centred around Simmel’s conceptions of form-content, sociology – and, by extension, disciplinarity in general – philosophy, and the relation between each of these. Aside from challenging these specifics, Chapters 3-5 together will show a logically advanced argument directly contrasting with Poggi’s presentation of Simmel as a ‘savant’ and ‘dilletante’. That is, I show that Simmel does not delve superficially into this or that inquiry; rather, he endeavours to create a holistic or, one might say, ‘total’ picture of the analysans, in this case the discipline of sociology. As sketched in the introduction, too, Simmel first develops ‘Wechselwirkung’ – the conceptual lynchpin of his later works – in relative depth throughout *TPoS*. Therefore, this work has relevance beyond Simmel’s conception of sociology. Thus, we have reason to question Poggi’s ‘thematic’ heuristic as applied to *PoM*, which seduces its reader to abandon the search for systematicity in Simmel’s work, relying instead on those who misunderstand Simmel for conceptual clarity. This approach potentially obscures the very thing it aims to remedy, namely the logic of *PoM* and Simmel’s work in general. Considering this challenge and other challenges to the NoU, then, a critical return to Simmel’s texts is warranted. At the very least, a reconsideration of them whilst keeping their breadth and Simmel’s understanding of philosophy to the fore is merited.

⁴⁹ See Appendix.

⁵⁰ *TPoS* hereafter.

⁵¹ *PoM* hereafter.

A brief editorial note before I begin. I draw partially on the same resource as Parsons⁵² – namely the first chapter of *Soziologie* (1992⁵³). However, I largely utilise *TPoS* – Small’s translation of the first chapter of *Soziologie*, excluding the excursus. As noted in the introduction, this was only English copy I could access for some time given COVID-related difficulties in Australia. In the interests of transparency, I wished to use an English version as much as possible. Small’s translation is mostly sufficient to mount my case, though is at times misleading. Where the translation is particularly problematic, I include original translations, the German text, and my rationale for the translation.

Simmel’s argument in *TPoS* can be divided into three central claims: the need for and development of sociology as a science, the relation between sociology and other sciences – especially psychology – and the relation of science to philosophy⁵⁴. This chapter will exposit the first of these claims, which proceeds along the following line. Simmel begins with the need for a fundamentally new approach to explain the socio-political changes underway in Prussia, Europe, and the world⁵⁵. This inquiry must be sufficiently distinct from existing disciplines; that is, it must be unique. Thus, one cannot simply claim the sociality of human beings as a starting point because this would not yield a new science. This claim is already recognised in politics and political economy, for example. Nor does Simmel claim direct access to a new field of reality in the vein of biology or chemistry. Rather, sociology is to cut across disciplines horizontally – so to speak – and must be a synthesis of other sciences, especially psychology and history. Once the initial synthesis has been established, a conceptual edifice will emerge such that sociology will function like the sciences it complements, replete with norms and

⁵²As noted in the second chapter, much of the Anglophone exposure to Simmel’s work was, and to a certain extent still is, mediated through ‘essay-ised’ publications of sections of larger works. Two of Simmel’s translated works are titled *The Problem of Sociology* (1885; 1909b), the latter of which was ‘essay-ised’ from his larger *Soziologie* in its English publication. As established previously, Parsons refers primarily to the opening few pages of Simmel’s *Soziologie*, of which *The Problem of Sociology* (1909b) is a truncated version of the first chapter. The portion of this chapter omitted by Small (translator) in an English version of *Soziologie*, chapter one was published separately under the title *How is Society Possible?* (1910a). In the interest of brevity, I will deal primarily with the truncated version (1909b) and elements of the omitted section (1910a); an explication of the development of Simmel’s ideas as they appear in English would require a study unto itself.

⁵³As stated in the previous chapter Parsons uses a different edition.

⁵⁴An editorial note before I begin this chapter: I remain ambivalent about dividing *TPoS* into three because I do not want to recreate the ‘essayistic’ Simmel, which has occurred in some translations and expositions of Simmel’s work (see Appendix). Yet, in the interests of accessibility, I have opted to do so. To minimise the disjointedness, I have chosen the most natural breaks in *TPoS*, unfortunately resulting in chapters of very unequal length. I stress that division does not reflect any vacillation in Simmel’s line of argument. This will become evident below.

⁵⁵Poggi provides a good overview of the relevant context (1993, pp. 1-37).

mores – a ‘culture’. In contrast to disciplines like politics or economics – which, for Simmel, focus on ‘externally’ structuring elements of society – and to establish a unique object of study, sociology will show the immanent relations that constitute the social as such. However, like all sciences, sociology is necessarily a particular endeavour. It is not a ‘master science’ and nor is such a science possible. Sociology is but another way to comprehend the totality of the world from a particular perspective. Hence, sociology must begin from a fundamental abstraction from this totality. This is where form-content enters the frame.

As sketched in the work of Goodstein (2017), Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen (2008), it is not possible to approach the world, for Simmel, without first dividing it into parts⁵⁶. In the case of sociology, this initial division necessitates a minimal definition of society, which Simmel sketches as individuals in interaction. Interactions can be specified according to the intentionality of *both* parties involved. That is, the ‘interests’ of each party reciprocally determine the ‘type’ of interaction⁵⁷. ‘Interest’, however, is not to be conflated with simple want or impulse but represents, for Simmel, the concrete actualisation of a consciousness within certain historical conditions. Even then, only the extent to which ‘interest’ leads to or shapes interaction does it condition sociality; only then does interest enter the purview of sociology. ‘Content’, therefore, refers to ‘interest’ considered in this holistic sense. Sociological ‘form’ in general is the interaction of individuals that constitutes society, and particular ‘forms’ are the modes in which these manifest. In concrete reality, ‘form’ and ‘content’ are intrinsically linked; only through abstraction can they be distinguished. Particular ‘forms’ ultimately constitute society in general, though they too become reciprocally determining and coalesce into intermediary ‘forms’. By enumerating these forms, then, sociology can contribute a unique understanding of society by showing the modes in which sociality is enacted, according to Simmel.

Next, Simmel proceeds to justify the form-content abstraction. Like every science or even philosophy, sociology cannot remain content with ‘pure’ abstraction; it must reveal something independent of us as subjects – i.e., something objective, in the usual sense. For Simmel, the objectivity of form-content rests on two inverse conditions: that similar forms can emerge from different sets of contents, and that similar sets of

⁵⁶ See Appendix, §3 for a brief exposition of these scholars’ central claims.

⁵⁷ For analysis of Simmel’s ‘type’, see Appendix (§3).

contents can precipitate different forms. After providing examples showing the fulfillment of these conditions, Simmel further distinguishes sociology from other modes of inquiry. Other inquiries address particular forms or clusters of forms (e.g., the state), and thereby presuppose the cohesiveness of such forms, whereas sociology attempts to demonstrate the cohesiveness of forms as such. Hence, multiple senses of the term 'society' must also be distinguished. In sociology, for Simmel, 'society' designates the sum of all forms of interaction, whereas other disciplines presuppose the 'oneness' of 'society', i.e., that society can be considered as a singular entity. Further, on this sociological definition, 'society' is not a static phenomenon but is comprised of many sets of forms and varying degrees of interactivity. Here, Simmel introduces another analogy that is perhaps overemphasised in the secondary literature (e.g., Sorokin, 1928, pp. 495-507), namely that of geometry. Geometry studies the forms of objects that appear in empirical objects without or – more accurately – with *minimal* content. Simmel's sociology, too, studies the 'shapes' of human interaction, i.e., forms, with minimal content. However, Simmel stresses that this analogy only extends so far because social phenomena are fundamentally more complex than geometric shapes.

This chapter will argue that content is broader than Parsons' 'ad hoc' interpretation of it, and that form is not without immanent links to empirical reality, as per Durkheim. I also claim that Simmel presents sociology as one synthesis of society, broadly considered, whereas Parsons intends sociology as an ultimate synthesis of political-economic value-systems, and unfairly judges Simmel on this basis. Moreover, Simmel aims to elucidate social elements of society – including political and economic institutions – and show how they are created through interaction, rather than taking society as a(n) (onto)logical presupposition. Finally, I conclude that Simmel presents his sociology as methodologically unified, which Poggi's threefold distinction fails to capture.

On the Development of Sociology as Science

What, then, is Simmel's conception of sociology, how does it invoke the distinction between form and content, and how is it distinct from Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim's formulation of it?

Simmel begins by briefly sketching the necessity for a science of the social due to the increasing inability to:

“explain the historical facts in the broadest sense of the word, the contents of culture, the types of industry, the norms of morality, by reference solely to the individual, his understanding, and his interests. Still less is it possible[...] to find recourse in metaphysical or magical causes” (1909b, p. 292).

In short, individualistic explanations or a conception of society as the sum of its parts were no longer sufficient to explain a multi-faceted reality undergoing rapid change. A new mode of inquiry was needed to uncover “the reactions and co-operations between individuals, by the aggregation of the social energies in structures which exist and develop *over and above the individuals*” (ibid, p. 293, emphasis added). For Simmel, insofar as this inquiry is related to other disciplines, it is under the guise of a “*method*, an auxiliary investigation, a means of approaching the phenomena of all these areas in a new way” (ibid, emphasis original)⁵⁸. That is, sociology in one sense does not carve out a new aspect of reality for itself as such. Rather, it furnishes existing sciences with new tools to resolve old problems. In this way, sociology bears an analogous relation to “the older disciplines not otherwise than, in its time, *induction*, which, as a new principle of investigation, invaded all possible sciences, acclimated itself in each, and helped each to new solutions”, according to Simmel’s conception (ibid, emphasis original).

However, a ubiquity of possible applications for induction does not render it a science. By analogy, the significance of society within existing disciplines, too, does not grant sociology entrance into the realm of science. Sociology as science cannot be founded on the claim that “man must be understood as a social being, and that society is the vehicle of historical experience” because this grants sociology “no *object* which is not already treated in one of the existing sciences” (ibid, emphasis original). The mere fact of the sociality of individuals alone, as evident and ubiquitous as it may appear, cannot ground sociology, for Simmel.

How, then, can sociology forge for itself an object from a reality already addressed by the other disciplines? We must first consider more precisely the term

⁵⁸ Small reads this as Simmel promoting two alternative conceptions of sociology – see footnotes five and six (1910a, pp. 293-295). On my reading, Simmel, in line with his perspectival methodology, is discussing two aspects of one and the same sociology, namely the relation of sociology to other sciences and sociology as an independent discipline. The internal relation between these aspects is and must be dialectic: on the one hand we must be able to treat sociology as ‘cut off’ from the world, on the other we must see sociology as an element of an interdisciplinary unity. This will become evident over the course of this and the following chapters. One could also argue for a Hegelian reading of this as the ‘in-itself’ and the ‘for-others (disciplines)’ of sociology, respectively.

‘object’ and whether a science must be founded upon the discovery of a hitherto unknown class of such ‘object’. For Simmel, the answer is steadfastly no; “it is not necessary that sociology should have discovered an object (*Gegenstand*) the existence of which had previously been unknown”⁵⁹ (ibid, p. 294, emphasis original). Rather, a reinterpretation of the totality from a new standpoint allows new ‘subject-matters’ to emerge from known objects because: “[e]verything which we characterize as *object* in the most general sense, is a complex of definitions and relationships, each of which, impressed upon a plurality of objects, may become the subject-matter of a special science” (ibid, emphasis original). That is, each ‘object’ is a composite of: rudiments of the object, internal relations between the rudiments constitutive of the object, relations of individual rudiments between ‘discrete’⁶⁰ objects, and the relations between objects as ‘discrete’ units.

Each of these rudiments and relations has the potential to become an object of science. In simple terms, one may consider the chemical compositions and socio-cultural relevance of a work of art – or the sociocultural relevance of the chemical compositions of a work of art – as legitimate scientific perspectives upon the same ‘object’, albeit focusing on different elements. In essence, a science can emerge by analysing existing objects and their internal and external relations in a new way. Thus, science does not necessitate the discovery of a new object as such. However, by enlisting new perspectives, science generates new *theoretical* objects from known ones – namely the rudiments and their relations which collectively constitute the subject-matter or object of a given science. In the above example, this may be the sociocultural relevance of chemically analysing works of art⁶¹.

This does not imply that, for Simmel, any uniqueness of rudiments and their relations is sufficient to ground a science, as is evident in the foregoing analogy to induction. Uniqueness of this sort may warrant a fundamentally new science, or it may be subsumed under an existing one. Only when that object, part thereof, or relationship is not amenable to any existing science is the creation of a new inquiry warranted.

⁵⁹ Parentheses are Small’s.

⁶⁰ The inverted commas here denote that I do not take Simmel to be offering a functionalist account in which each of the elements of a science are strictly distinct, but only distinct in certain senses. This will become more evident as we progress.

⁶¹ Another example here might be the chemical analysis of wine or coffee which purports to objectively determine a ‘good’ beverage. The currency of these approaches can be analysed from a social science perspective, perhaps synthesising chemistry and social science.

The other key element of science is, for Simmel, its dissective nature. On this point it is worthwhile quoting Simmel at some length:

“[e]ach science rests upon an abstraction, since it regards the totality of any given thing, which totality we can grasp as a unity through no one science—it regards this totality from one of its aspects, from the viewpoint of some particular concept^[62]. In antithesis with the totality of the thing and with things in general, each science grows through a decomposition of the unity and a corresponding division of labor, by virtue of which each thing is resolved into specific qualities and functions, after a concept is reached which is competent thus to resolve the thing into these factors and to grasp the latter [i.e. factors: qualities and functions] according to methodological correlations, wherever they occur in the real things” (ibid).

In other words, the root of any science, for Simmel, lies in a fundamental abstraction. Neither the totality of a given object, nor the totality of reality, can be considered as such, at least in the first instance. We must first grasp the object or reality in general through one of its elements. That is, a science must begin by isolating a specific element of reality or of an object, “a particular concept”⁶³ (ibid), from which we seek to generate an understanding of the object and – ultimately – of reality in general. However, in attempting to account for the totality in terms of objects or the object in terms of one of its parts, science sunders that which is experienced as a unity. The mode of understanding we call science is, then, for Simmel, paradoxically “antithetical” to that very reality (ibid); when engaging in science “we murder to dissect” (Wordsworth 2021). ‘Murder’, however, is a precondition of scientific knowledge.

For Simmel, along with the scientific “decomposition” of the unities of reality and the object comes a “division of labor” that formalises and entrenches the divisions of their parts (Simmel 1909b, p. 294). Only once the elements and their relations resulting from this division are adequately recomposed under a “concept”, putting aside the

⁶² This is particularly relevant to *PoM*, which invokes at least three such perspectives – psychology, sociology, and economics; or the ‘philosophy of’ them – because each captures an element of money that the other cannot. Philosophy is a ‘meta-perspective’ which binds these incommensurable perspectives together.

⁶³ I suspect the term ‘concept’ is carrying some German Idealist baggage here, though I will not explore this detail. In this case, I believe one could read concept very approximately as the ‘idea’ that binds together the fundamental elements of reality as ‘seen’ by given a discipline or science and makes it comprehensible.

precise meaning of 'adequate' for the moment, can the concept be identified in practice according to the methodological contours of a given science (ibid). That is, a science abstracts specific elements and their relations from reality. Science must then conceptually synthesise these, such that these "factors" both cohere and are identifiable "in the real things" (ibid).

The factors (i.e., qualities and functions) of objects that constitute the remit of sociology may be "well known" (ibid, p. 295). However, the contribution of sociology as science, for Simmel, is to bring these factors under the auspices of a *concept*:

"[t]he only thing lacking [from the incidental sociological factors in existing sciences] might be the concept which now for the first time might be brought into action to make known the side of these facts lying along this line, and to display them as constituting, from the viewpoint of scientific method a unity, because of these newly systematized common relations" (ibid).

Sociology, for Simmel, contributes to the understanding of "the highly complex facts of historical society" alongside "the concepts *politics, economy, culture, etc.*" (ibid, emphasis original). Each of these concepts represents a set of systematised relations to which sociology is the newest addition. Crucially, there is no guarantee that each concept takes an entirely discrete element of reality for itself, though each set of relations ultimately aims to make a unique contribution to the intelligibility of reality. For Simmel, "[i]t may be that these concepts combine certain parts of these facts, with elimination or merely accidental cooperation of the other parts, into a unique historical sequence" (ibid). If sociology is to make such a contribution, it must conceptualise society in a manner distinct from other sciences by organising its *internal* relations. That is, sociology cannot study society as the mere "external aggregation of the phenomena" because this is, for Simmel, already given in various forms by the other sciences. Rather, sociology must render intelligible "*society* [...]" as such "from the inside, i.e., *how* the elements of society cohere or relate to one another and constitute the phenomena we call 'social' (ibid, emphasis original).

To do so, Simmel must first distinguish the elements that are to be related from the relations themselves. As above, this always involves a division of reality that is somewhat artificial when compared with experience. Here, Simmel introduces the infamous form-content distinction: the need for a science of society as such "results

from an analysis of the idea of society, which may be characterised as a *discrimination between form and content of society*" (ibid, emphasis original). This is the "analogy" (ibid) identified as problematic by both Durkheim and Parsons. Both locate their criticism primarily in the term form – specifically its inability to fully capture the social as they respectively conceptualise it. Now, it will be useful to briefly recapitulate Simmel's understanding of the role of sociology in relation to Durkheim and Parsons' views. Recall that Durkheim, as presented in his response to Simmel, considered sociology as primarily concerned with the 'downward' effects of social institutions upon the individual. Insofar as the constitution of society was to be considered, this was in relation to matters of its geographical size, proximity to other societies, and the (ir)regularity of its borders. Parsons exhibited a similar conception in that he, too, argued that Simmel's forms fail to adequately reference broader social institutions, at least in certain cases (e.g., marriage and contractual relations in general). Social forms have only limited explanatory power and therefore do not adequately explain the patterns of social action, according to Parsons.

I note that Simmel does not aim to fully explain society and its structures but only that which is immediately social within society. The structure of society or action within it is not entirely given by its social elements and therefore forms alone cannot explain this structure, nor do they attempt to do so in isolation. Simmel's sociology is intended to operate in conjunction with economics, politics, and the study of culture, all of which are ultimately related to philosophy. Only by combining these modes of analysis can one explain a complex historical situation – such as the nature of a *society in general* – as opposed to the much narrower *sociality as such* occurring within it and partially constitutive of it.

Returning to Simmel's conception of the form-content distinction, the relation between form and content – the act of "*discrimination*" itself (ibid, p. 295, emphasis original) – is as crucial as understanding each element. Simmel begins with a broad, non-controversial definition of society, namely: "I [Simmel] think of society as existing wherever several individuals are in reciprocal relationship. This reciprocity arises always from *specific* impulses, or by virtue of *specific* purposes" (ibid, p. 296 emphasis added). That is, society is not simply a group of individuals in "mere spatial juxtaposition" (ibid, p. 297) – as aspects of Durkheim's perspective allude to, e.g., the size of a society's territory. Rather, a society exists when individuals interact with each other in some

sense⁶⁴. Reciprocity manifests in two general and related ways. First, as impulse reciprocity may be “[e]rotic, religious, or merely associative”, for example, in which desires or sentiments within individuals coalesce into shared understanding, though not necessarily in identical action (ibid, 296). Many sorts of actions and reactions can fall under these categories; religious worship, for example can take many forms⁶⁵. Second, reciprocity may arise in “purposes of defence or of attack, of play as well as of gain, of aid and instruction”, for example (ibid). That is, reciprocity emerging from shared purposes are typically more uniform; one may act very differently when engaged with others in play rather than gainful employment. Reciprocity arising from impulse and purpose may be categorised as actions beginning from and heading to identical points respectively, to the extent that they are distinguishable.

Nevertheless, the reciprocity emerging from intertwined impulses and purposes yields a “being-together” or a kind of “unity”, for Simmel (ibid). Essential to this ‘being-together’ is that *both* parties shape their activity and *both* parties are in turn shaped by it: being-together emerges from “relationships of acting for, with, against one another, in a *correlation* of conditions; that is, men exercise an influence upon these conditions of association *and* are influenced by them” (ibid, emphasis added). This mutual shaping of and subjection to the other – or, in a word, reciprocity – signifies the emergence of a society. Mutual influences cause ‘oneness’ of a specific kind, namely a “reciprocity of elements” or a dividual unity as opposed to an *in*-dividual unity of, say, a quark (ibid). That is, the mode of unity found in society is fundamentally a relation encompassing all its elements, not that of a static elementary unit. Society, however, remains a unity; by analogy, “[w]e could not call the world [or society] *one* if each of its parts did not somehow influence every other, if anywhere the influences, however mediated, were cut off” (ibid, emphasis original)⁶⁶. Through these mutual relations – and, crucially, their variations in “kind and degree” – Simmel attempts to conceptualise the ‘oneness’ of society at a fundamental level. For example, in broad terms the “ephemeral combination

⁶⁴ Perhaps the key implication of which is that modern communication seemingly largely eliminates geographical limitations on social interactions and thereby geography as an essential contour of societal formation, especially given the impacts of COVID-19.

⁶⁵ Another analogy might be a call and response in music, especially blues and jazz.

⁶⁶ As a general philosophical view, this speaks against the postmodern reading of Simmel (e.g., Weinstein & Weinstein 1993).

for a promenade”⁶⁷ as against “the family” exhibit variations in the ‘intensity’ or intimacy of their socialisation, despite both being instances of ‘being-together’ (ibid).

From whence, then, do these relations emerge? On this note again it will be useful to quote Simmel at some length:

“[e]verything now which is present in the individuals—the immediate concrete locations of all historical actuality—in the nature of impulse, interest, purpose, inclination, psychical adaptability, and movement of such sort that thereupon or therefrom occurs influence upon others, or the reception of influence from them—all this I designate as the content or the material, so to speak, of socialization” (ibid, p. 296).

Content in this sense is twofold. First, individuals are the tangible manifestation or product of historical conditions. Second, the internalisation of these conditions creates the possibility for specific drives, thereby creating specific possibilities for shaping or being shaped by the other. To take a very general example, the history of a feudal society concretely manifest in the peasant, feudal lord, and their relation as such elicits specific drives (e.g., to cultivate the land, imposition of taxes, etc.). History manifest through individuals in industrial society is both similar and distinct. As manifest in the factory worker, factory owner, and their relation as such, similar drives emerge on behalf of the owner (extraction of surplus value) and *prima facie* distinct drives on behalf of the worker (e.g., operation of machinery). Although the worker and the peasant both arguably strive towards the same ends – i.e., meeting their material needs – the way they achieve this – land cultivation versus machinery operation – allows or necessitates new relations and intermediate ends (e.g., subsistence farming versus wage labour) to meet their material needs. Thus, Simmel’s content of society is not psychologistic as such, as Parsons seems to interpret him. The individual is a *historical product* – a nexus of history. Their drives and potential drives are shaped by sociocultural and political circumstances. Put another way, by accounting for the “impulse, interest, [...etc.]” and their potentiality that moulds our interactions with others or vice versa – which I have abbreviated as ‘drive(s)’ – Simmel is consciously referencing the individual as a product of history. Historical circumstance allows certain drives to emerge and limits the manifestation or potentiality of others; the drives that emerge constitute Simmel’s

⁶⁷ Promenade is used as a verb.

‘content’ of society, though one may also inquire about the absence of certain drives in a given context⁶⁸.

Although drives and their potentiality are functions of history, “materials with which life is filled, [and] these motivations which impel it [i.e., life], are not social in their nature” (ibid, pp. 296-297). That is: “[n]either hunger nor love, neither labor nor religiosity, neither technique nor the functions and results of intelligence, *as they are given immediately and in their strict sense*, signify socialization” (ibid, p. 297, emphasis added). To continue the above example, the purpose ‘satisfying material needs’ simpliciter is not a social act, although empirical conditions may necessitate social interaction to realise this end. However, insofar as this purpose does lead to social action – as with the peasant’s interaction with the feudal lord or the factory worker with the factory owner, thereby conditioning *both* parties – does the purpose become social⁶⁹. Only when drives “shape the isolated side-by-sideness of the individuals into definite forms of with-and-for-one-another, which belong under the general concept of reciprocity”, can they be considered social (ibid). The mutual actualisation of drives is their social element, for Simmel; this actualisation he designates form:

“[s]ocialization is thus the form, actualizing itself in countless various types, in which the individuals, on the basis of those interests—sensuous or ideal, momentary or permanent, conscious or unconscious, casually driving or purposefully leading—grow together into a unity, and within these interests come to realization” (ibid).

Thus, forms are in a certain sense the structures or patterns of behaviour. However, unlike Durkheim’s interpretation, they are not empty containers waiting to be filled by any content whatsoever. Rather, Simmel’s form is demarcated according to its base content or that which it actualises. To continue a previous analogy, the chemical compound we call water ‘emerges’ or *is* a particular arrangement of hydrogen and oxygen atoms, and thus cannot be constructed from other chemical elements. Similarly,

⁶⁸ The emphasis on history introduces a dialectical element: where do drives come from? As a product of history, they are influenced – at least partially – by previous forms of association.

⁶⁹ Both could be subsumed in more general forms, perhaps those in ‘Über- und Unterordnung’ [Super- and Subordination] (Simmel 1992, pp. 160-283). Moreover, this is not to reduce any individual to such forms; as with the unity reality, forms at best capture one aspect of the individual as a unity, or even a smaller component of their social aspect.

Simmel's form emerges or *is* the arrangement or reciprocity of individual contents that therefore cannot simply emerge from a different content base⁷⁰.

As an *abstraction* from the unity of reality, however, forms as such are never present in reality; "a social form can no more attain existence detached from all content, than a spatial form can exist without the material of which it is the form" (ibid). In line with Simmel's general characterisation of a science, the study of social forms isolates an element of reality from which, in conjunction with other sciences, it aims to contribute to a picture of the whole.

With this basic grasp of the fundamental abstraction Simmel is proposing as the basis of sociology, and the role of abstraction in science in general, we can better understand the architectonic of Simmel's thought. Namely, we can best see his conception of sociology and the relation between philosophy and science. By extension, this will allow us to better distinguish the role of science, disciplinarity – sociology in particular – in Simmel's work in general.

As the object of sociology⁷¹, then, society is best understood as the "types of reciprocal influencing", i.e., social forms (ibid). That is, what is typically meant by the term 'society' is not simply an aggregate of individuals because this would be "a mere spatial juxtaposition, or temporal contemporaneousness or succession of individuals" (ibid). Such individuals do not influence each other and therefore do not exhibit sociality. Rather, society is a specific way of 'being-together' that constitutes a unity of some kind. And if individuals are part of a unity, they must influence each other, "whether immediately or through a third party" (ibid). If sociology is to abstract an element of reality for itself, this is best characterised as that which transforms the simple aggregate of parts into a whole, namely the mutual interrelation of the parts as such or the "forms of socialization", strictly speaking (ibid, pp. 297-298). For Simmel, this is because:

"everything else found within "society" and realized by means of it, and within its framework (*Rahmen*), is not "society" itself, but merely a content which builds or is built by this form of coexistence, and which indeed only together with "society" [in the narrow sense] brings into

⁷⁰ With the qualification that in actuality many forms operate simultaneously and therefore singling out any given form will retain some degree of ambiguity (Simmel 1909b, pp. 308-309). I return to this distinction between natural science and certain social sciences below.

⁷¹ As opposed to an object of economics or politics.

existence the real structure, “society” in the wider and usual sense”⁷²
(ibid, p. 298).

That is, Simmel is distinguishing the narrow sense of society – social forms or interactions between individuals – from the broader sense of society – the collective force as over and above the individual, of which they remain a part.

Here, it is worthwhile to contrast Simmel’s characterisation of his sociology with Poggi’s characterisation of it. According to Poggi’s formulations, Simmel’s sociology is threefold, namely: formal, interstitial, or molecular. These sociologies study: the empirical patterns of behaviour arising from the formation of groups, the neglected forms of association (e.g., flirtation), and the modes of association that constitute larger social institutions. Ostensibly, the first two formulations can exist harmoniously with contemporaneous disciplines (e.g., economics, jurisprudence), whereas the latter challenges such disciplines by appropriating their content. From the foregoing it is not obvious that any of these formulations or their conjunction are adequate interpretations of Simmel’s sociology. On so-called formal sociology, Simmel is not merely looking for patterns in behaviour, but is inquiring into how patterns in behaviour arise from specific conditions or specific constellations of interest (i.e., content). These constellations of interest are ultimately historical as “the immediate concrete locations of all historical actuality” (ibid, p. 296). Simmel does not consider it the remit of sociology to explain these constellations, at least in the first instance, but to explain the structure of ‘being-together’ in terms of them. In short, though Simmel does aim to uncover patterns or forms of socialisation, this is neither entirely empirical, nor is it divorced from his philosophy. Neither form, nor content, nor their relation in themselves may be found empirically in reality. Together, they constitute a mode of interpretation or abstraction that renders reality scientifically intelligible. This is not to say that sociology or science is entirely non-empirical, for Simmel, but that empiricism cannot ground scientific knowledge⁷³; what empirical, non-circular justification can one give for empiricism as a methodology? For Simmel, a fundamental, *philosophical* abstraction of the aforementioned sort is a necessary prerequisite of scientific knowledge upon which the empirical elements of a science can be founded.

⁷² This does not afford sociology a privileged position as a ‘master science’, as will become evident shortly.

⁷³ The nature of Simmel’s empirical emphasis will be outlined shortly.

Moreover, Simmel's sociology does not limit itself to highlighting the importance of overlooked associations, à la interstitial sociology, at least in principle. In practice, however, Simmel may have focussed on the putatively frivolous forms of association. Yet, it is unclear how Simmel's analysis of superordination and subordination fits with his supposed frivolity, for example (1992, pp. 160-283). Nevertheless, it is relatively clear from the above that the thrust of these analyses is that associations constitute the immanent coherence of larger institutions. The constellations of interest in individuals and their reciprocal influence constitute the immanent coherence of institutions, and the interplay of institutions ultimately constitute the internal logic of society, for Simmel. While other sciences take the unity or 'oneness' of, for example, society, the state, or the corporation, etc. as given to a certain extent, Simmel's sociology aims to explicate the internal linkages that make it possible to consider these entities – and the collection of them – as unitary and singular at all. In this sense, Poggi's third characterisation, namely molecular sociology is most accurate. However, Simmel's aim is not to subordinate other sciences, because they too must begin with an initial abstraction from the complex unity of reality, but to supplement them in line with his perspectivism. Sociology overlaps with other sciences to create a prismatic image of the object or element of reality in question. A crucial element of this prismatic image, sociology is indispensable. Thus, molecular sociology, too, does not adequately characterise Simmel's sociology. So-called molecular sociology is neither hostile to other sciences, nor is it peripheral to Simmel's understanding of sociology.

I now return to the exposition of *TPOs*. Alongside the need for abstraction from the unity of reality, for Simmel, science must remain connected to it or else risk falling into metaphysical thinking, pejoratively speaking⁷⁴. That is,

“however urgently such abstractions, which may *alone* bring science into being out of the complexity or the unity of reality, may be demanded by the subjective needs of cognition, some legitimation for them must reside in the structure of objectivity itself; for only in a functional relationship of some sort to actuality can protection exist against unfruitful inquiries, against an accidental character of the concepts that pass as scientific”
(ibid, p. 298, emphasis added).

⁷⁴ This is not to say that Simmel is not a metaphysical thinker, but that this must be connected to “actuality” in some sense (ibid, p. 298). I will address this shortly.

In short, how is sociology to avoid mere speculation, akin to debating the number of angels able to fit on a pinhead? As is clear, sociology cannot take reality 'as it is' without falling into "naïve naturalism", according to Simmel (ibid). Yet, not every scientific abstraction is equally valid; "the delimitations which it [i.e., reality, an object] actually possess are more or less conformable to those arrangements [i.e., abstractions]" (ibid, p. 299). How reality appears – i.e., the "thing given" (ibid, p. 298) – must in some way inform or be suited to the abstraction drawn from it.

As regards sociology, "the right to subject the historico-social phenomena to analysis according to form and content, and to bring the former into a synthesis, must rest on two conditions" (ibid, p. 299). The criteria according to which the legitimacy of the form-content distinction is to be determined, for Simmel, is twofold. That is, one must be able to show that each element – form and content – can vary independently of the other. One must be able to say that "similar forms of socialization occur with quite dissimilar content, for wholly dissimilar purposes; and *per contra* that interests similar in content clothe themselves in quite unlike forms of socialization" (ibid, emphasis original). This distinction remains, however, in the first instance philosophical and non-empirical; as abstractions one does not 'see' form and content separately in reality because they are necessarily intertwined. While the event analysed may be empirical, the conceptual frame through which it is analysed – form-content, Simmel's quasi transcendental precepts for sociology – is not, strictly speaking. Thus, to the extent that they are isolable, form and content must be determined via the differential analysis Simmel proposes. Schematically put, it must be shown that X constellation of interest can come apart from Y association by contrasting multiple scenarios, as neither can be isolated from a singular instance⁷⁵.

Simmel takes both criteria to have been fulfilled. On emergence of similar forms with dissimilar content, Simmel cites "superiority and subordination, competition, division of labour[...] and countless other variations [of content]" may be found in the social forms of "an industrial organization, in an art school or in a family", for example (ibid). On the other hand, content as "pedagogical interest leads now to a despotic relation of teacher to pupil, now to individualistic reactions between teacher and each pupil, now to a more collectivist relation between the former and the totality of the

⁷⁵ That is, unless multiple forms are occurring simultaneously, in which case these elements of the cases are the level at which differential analysis must occur.

latter” (ibid, p. 300). Taken together, both sets of examples attempt to illustrate the ‘coming apart’ of form and content. Factories can be organised according to a logic of competition or cooperation and the praxis of teaching and learning can lead to chaotic, individualistic, or collectivistic relations between teacher and student. Similar social forms can arise from dissimilar content and dissimilar content can lead to the emergence of similar social forms, respectively⁷⁶. By demonstrating the nonlinear relation between form and content – i.e., the presence of a given content does not necessitate a given form and vice versa⁷⁷ – “the facts furnish precisely that legitimation of the sociological problem which demands the identification, systematic arrangement, psychological explanation, and historical development of pure forms of association” (ibid)⁷⁸. For Simmel, content and form are related but distinct elements of socialisation – though only the latter is strictly social – which makes the transformation of isolated individuals into groups available to science. Thus, crystallised into a single question, Simmel’s sociology asks: what is it precisely that distinguishes the social from the non-social; how does society emerge from a multiplicity of individuals?

This question distinguishes sociology, for Simmel, from other social sciences that take a specific class of social phenomena or ‘content’ as their objects, such as “[n]ational economy and church polity, the history or pedagogy of morals, politics or theories of sexual relations” (ibid, p. 301)⁷⁹. In each case, a specific mode or cluster of ‘being-together’ is the object of each science, as politico-economic or moral relations, for example. If sociology were to proceed along these lines, it would be nothing more than a summary⁸⁰ of contemporaneous social sciences. For sociology to simply be the study of society, then, does not uniquely contribute to the intelligibility of reality, and therefore does not justify a new science. Where sociology can make a unique contribution is by studying and systematising the nature of ‘being-together’ as such, in a manner that cuts through the divisions of other social sciences without supplanting them:

⁷⁶ This is not to say that these are strictly distinct.

⁷⁷ To reiterate, this does not imply that any social form can be realised through any content, and vice versa.

⁷⁸ Again, this does not imply no relation or that any content can lead to any form, as Durkheim characterises it.

⁷⁹ Small points out this is an “ostensible distinction” rather than anything actual; “[t]he division has always been proved to be impossible on this basis” (in Simmel 1909b, p. 300).

⁸⁰ ‘Summary’ is my translation of the word “Zusammenfassung” which I think renders Simmel’s point more clearly; Small uses “correlation” (Simmel 1909b, p. 300).

“[t]here is needed rather a line which, intersecting all those already drawn, detaches the pure fact of associating, in all its manifold forms, from its connection with the most various contents, and [thereby] constitutes this fact [as] its peculiar sphere” (ibid).

Thus, sociology would become to social science as “epistemology” is to science in general. Sociology studies the arrangements that constitute sociality, as epistemology studies the constitutive elements of knowledge⁸¹ (ibid). That is, sociology ought not define and organise its subject-matter according to subsets of social organisations – e.g., economies, families, schools, etc.⁸² – but through its “peculiar abstraction” which applies to all social phenomena as such by focussing on the arrangements and interactions that produce sociality (ibid)⁸³. Considered in this way, Simmel’s sociology is not a glib, subjective ‘point of view’ on reality – as Durkheim claims of Simmel’s analyses – but an attempt to elucidate sociality across a broad array of phenomena.

Hence, it is imperative, for Simmel, that the two meanings of society “must be kept strictly distinct” (ibid). In a nutshell, the first general meaning is “the complex of associated individuals, the socially formed human material, as the full historical reality has shaped it” (ibid). Recall that history, for Simmel, is an incredibly complex phenomenon, and therefore that this sort of reference to society takes its object as largely given. That is, society is taken as ‘simply there’ or given to be analysed without considering its internal logic, outside of the specific social arrangements in question (e.g., the economic organisation)⁸⁴. The second and specific meaning is “the sum of those forms of relationship by virtue of which individuals are changed into “society” in the former sense” (ibid). A science operating according to the latter definition takes the “forces[...], relationships, and forms, through which human beings arrange themselves in association”⁸⁵ and considers how ‘subjective’ forces – which precipitate society – are

⁸¹ As with geometry above, I caution against overstating this analogy.

⁸² I reiterate the point emphasised by Small earlier: this division is hardly possible to maintain in practice.

⁸³ At this stage I rely on a German-language edition of *Soziologie* that distinguishes between object (“Gegenstand”) as theme of non-sociological social science and object (“Objekt”) as the remit of sociology (Simmel 1992, pp. 22-23). Both signify different types of abstraction, roughly a generalisation of phenomenon according to their content or ‘being’ and generalisation according to their form or ‘arrangement’ or relation, respectively. Naturally, there is some overlap, content implies a certain arrangement and vice versa, though the emphasis is, for Simmel, distinct.

⁸⁴ This does not imply that it is illegitimate to presuppose or take society as to a certain extent given in certain contexts, i.e., non-sociological social science, for Simmel.

⁸⁵ Small takes Simmel as being inconsistent when he supposedly introduces “forces” and “relationships” into the remit of sociology (1909b, p. 302). However, from the foregoing it should be relatively clear that forms cannot be accessed directly. Hence, although forms constitute the social as such and the sole remit

transmuted into 'objective' social arrangements existing over and appearing alien to the individual⁸⁶.

Even if certain "contents of socialization, the special modifications of its material purpose and interest, often or always decide about its specific formation", sociology as the study of forms as such remains legitimate, for Simmel (ibid). Even if economic interest tends towards an exchange relation, the study of social forms still uniquely contributes to an understanding of reality, for example. One cannot consider "all these [social] forms—hierarchies and corporations, competitions and forms of marriage, friendships and societary customs, [etc.]", as variations of pre-existing society (ibid). That society persists through the removal of any one of these relations justifies, for Simmel, the intuition that social forms emerge "as a variation of an already complete society or[...] within one" (ibid). However, if one removes *all* such forms, it becomes clear that there is no antecedent society of which a given form or set thereof is a manifestation; without interaction there is only spatial juxtaposition. An analysis of the "history and the laws of the so-occurring aggregate" – social arrangements as they immediately appear or as they are mediated through then existing sciences, e.g., political economy – are certainly the remit of the social sciences, for Simmel. However, such analyses do not address the social as such. Hence, sociology ought to fill this gap and approach society as "either the abstract general concept for these forms, the genus of which they are a species, or the sum of the same in operation at a given time" (ibid, p. 303).

Further, if sociology is to take the narrow definition of society, then society is not a static, absolute term, according to Simmel:

"[w]ith each new growth of synthetic formations, with each construction of party groups, with each combination for common work, or in common feeling and thinking, with each more decisive assignment of serving and ruling, with each

of sociology, they must be established through other, non-social elements and even other sciences, given the content world is largely carved up among existing sciences, for Simmel. Only and to the extent this is established can sociology proceed. In short, to say that sociology does not deal with "motives and interests" which produced forms" is not to say that this is not dealt with elsewhere, nor that sociology should not engage with the science that does deal with them (Small in Simmel 1909b, p. 302).

⁸⁶ Again, here I am partially referring to Small's translation and partially to a German-language edition of *Soziologie*. It is clearer in the latter that Simmel conceives society as an objective entity and he aims to uncover the means through which subjective elements (interest/motivation/drives) produce society as an objective entity (Simmel 1992, p. 23). Small translates "selbstständiger Darstellung" as "independent exhibition" which implies a more passive role of the subject in the creation of society than Simmel is proposing (Simmel 1909b, p. 302).

convivial meal, with each self-adornment to impress others, the same group becomes more “society” than it was before” (ibid).

That is, if the number and intensity of interactions increases or multiple interactions are synthesised, the “degree” of society as ‘being-together’ can be said to have intensified – or vice versa – because the prevalence or magnitude of reciprocal influence has intensified (ibid). This is not to say that forms are the “cause” or “consequence” of society, but that “[t]hey are themselves immediately society” (ibid, emphasis original). Why, then, does society appear as a stable, external monolith existing above our everyday interactions? Here Simmel speculates that “[p]erhaps this hypostatization of a mere abstraction is the secret of a peculiar inflation and uncertainty which have gone along with this concept, and with previous treatment of general sociology” (ibid). That is, without adequately conceiving of society and linking this conception to material constituents and their relations – namely individuals and their interactions – sociology risks ceding to society a mystical or Platonic existence⁸⁷, “an apparently independent historical reality”, to society that overstates its relevance or scientific boundaries (ibid)⁸⁸.

The primary aim of sociology, then, as a social science is to distinguish its unique contribution to the interpretation of reality. This “should first be understood in the following manner: what in ‘society’ is really society, just as geometry first determines in spatially extended things what their spatial extension really is” (Simmel 1992, p. 25). Put another way, sociology is a theory of the “societal-being” of humanity (ibid). This is not to say that humanity is purely social. Rather, the ‘societal-being’ of humans is one respect in which humanity is an “object of science” (Simmel 1909b, p. 304). For Simmel, just as “geometry considers the forms through which matter in general becomes empirical bodies—the form which, to be sure, in and of itself, exists only in abstraction” (ibid), sociology considers the forms through which individuals enact ‘societal-being’ which exist in isolation only in abstraction. Instantiations of geometric forms always enclose a content in actuality; just as social forms do. However, both “resign to other sciences the investigation of the contents, which manifest themselves in their respective forms, or of the totality of phenomena whose mere form geometry or sociology

⁸⁷ My translation. Small’s translation is somewhat rigid, “Only along this line[...]”, whereas I think Simmel’s concept is more open than this implies (1909b, p. 304). Moreover, Small mutes Simmel’s comparison of sociology with geometry as “things in space” and “extension”, which creates a less direct comparison than in the German edition (ibid).

⁸⁸ Paradoxically – from Durkheim’s point of view – then, ‘subjectivising’ society is a means to *avoid* metaphysical speculation and empirically ground sociology, albeit philosophically.

observes” (ibid). Manifest forms are the domain of sciences other than geometry, and to the extent geometry references manifest forms it is by analogy; a square drawn on a sheet of paper is not form in and of itself, though it represents form along with a minimum of content. Similarly, embodied, particular social forms are not the domain of Simmel’s sociology except to the extent that they represent or instantiate form. A specific instantiation is not a social form in and of itself, though it represents a possible instantiation of that form and thereby the constellations of interest from which this form can emerge.

However, the analogy with geometry extends only so far: “[i]t scarcely need be said that this analogy with geometry extends no further than to the elucidation of the principal problem of sociology” (ibid). The key distinction, for Simmel, is one of complexity. Geometry takes as its axioms relatively “simple structures” and consequently requires “relatively few fundamental data”, among which one may include line, angle, point, etc. from which a geometric shape can be defined (ibid). By contrast, sociology did not yet have analogous data points because its initial data – constellations of human interest – is a more complex⁸⁹. Thus, for Simmel, it is unhelpful to consider social forms present in every instance of association, except insofar as variations of a general form can be distinguished; “[i]f, for example, it be asserted that super- and subordination is a formation which is found in almost every case of human association, very little is gained with this cognition” (ibid). Rather, one would do better to limit the scope of this form to expand its explanatory power.

Conclusion: Rethinking Form, Content, and the Remit of Simmel’s Sociology

This chapter explicated the first of three major claims in *TPoS*, namely why sociology is needed and an initial sketch of what it entails. Simmel envisions sociology as a contribution to the comprehension of contemporaneous and historical events by elucidating a ‘third’ space between individuals and society⁹⁰. That is, sociology must address the social as such, initially abstracted from its empirical appearances to deepen our understanding of them. Simmel means to achieve this through a fundamental distinction between ‘content’ and ‘form’. Content is the ‘interests’ or drives which lead us to interact with one another in specific ways for specific ends. Crucially, these are not

⁸⁹ It is not clear whether these are even possible in the same sense, as Simmel tackles shortly.

⁹⁰ For more on the ‘third’, see Appendix, §3.

mere whims but are actualisations of historically produced – though not determined – consciousnesses⁹¹. Form emerges as the coalescence of actualised consciousnesses, which appear as both informal and formal social interactions or institutions. Despite being abstractions, form and content make intelligible an objective feature of reality⁹², namely the social as such. Thus conceived, society is no longer a pre-existing field within which the individual is bounded. Rather, it is produced by individuals through their interaction. Hence, there are modalities of ‘society’ which may be expressed differently according to the major interactions which constitute it. Fundamentally, though, society as such remains essentially the same, according to Simmel.

The above has begun to highlight four related misunderstandings of Simmel’s conceptions of sociology and of society. First, ‘interest’ is much deeper than Parsons takes it to be. That is, Parsons reads interest as an isolated, almost solipsistic psychological phenomenon, whereas for Simmel interest has greater significance in the following sense. Interests emerge as an expression of historical conditions and – as will become clear in the following chapter – must at times be diagnosed in terms of these conditions. To say, then, that interests cannot ‘explain’ certain interactions because it cannot account for external institutions – e.g., for Parsons, the interactions within marriage – is misleading. Accounting for institutions – like marriage – and their varied expressions may be necessary to diagnose which interests are relevant to a particular analysis. Hence, interests are intrinsically linked to ‘external’ institutions as at least partially emergent from them. Moreover, such institutions are themselves partial ‘reifications’ or ‘objectifications’ of these interests – that is, a process rendered as a static object. Hence, there are at least two links between Simmel’s interest and supposedly external institutions.

Second, form is malleable but not to the extent that it becomes meaningless or ‘empty’. As a general category, form encompasses all modalities of ‘becoming-social’. This sense most closely approximates Durkheim’s interpretations of form as empty, though even here it retains some content. Namely, form refers solely to ‘the social’, thus distinguishing it from anything which is not social⁹³. However, ‘the social’ bears a unique relation to a specific set of non-social phenomena, which Simmel calls interest. This

⁹¹ An explication of this point can be seen in *PoM* where Simmel expands on the desire/drives as actualisations of consciousness (2011, pp. 86-95)

⁹² Which, for Simmel, is always influenced or mediated by how we ‘approach’ reality.

⁹³ Or, perhaps more precisely, that element of an object which is not social.

relation is one of emergence or, in a sense to be qualified below, of supervenience. The types of form which emerge are therefore immanently structured by the interests from which they emerge. That is, any specific form cannot be entirely purged of content except as an abstract category. Any representation or instantiation of form must always occur with a minimum of content, just like the lines used to empirically demonstrate geometric shapes must have dimensions. However – as sketched in the previous chapter – such abstractions are necessary to anchor objectivity by explicating the interpretive frame of the subject as such and its relationship with the analysans, which determines ‘data’ and its ‘natural divisions’. The multiple aspects of form – the necessity of its abstractness on one hand, and its intrinsic link to content on the other – are overlooked by Durkheim.

Third, the remit of Simmel’s form-content together is simultaneously narrower and broader than Parsons and Durkheim concede. Simmel’s sociology theorises what distinguishes a group of individuals from a society, and the various manifestations of this process. Parsons’ conception of sociology aims to elucidate the “ultimate value systems” which emerge from the “action group of science”⁹⁴ and constitute the “organic wholeness of society” (Pinney 1940, pp. 172 & 174). That is, Parsons aims to show how society in the broad sense above is constituted – from a series of essential and intermediary value-systems to an ultimate synthesis in society – which he uses as the basis for sociology. Based on Parsons’ understanding of content, he appears to take Simmel’s project as aiming at a similar goal. However, as is made clear in Simmel’s distinction between the senses of the term ‘society’, he does not aim at such a broad project. That is, for Simmel, the unity of society may be expressed along various axes; here, he only presents one, sociological view. Therefore, to critique his work for failing to achieve this is uncharitable. However, Simmel’s project is also broader than both Durkheim and Parsons’ projects in that he does not take society as *sui generis*, instead showing how its modalities are produced. Moreover, given the relation between interest

⁹⁴ That is, technology – which is not a science, strictly speaking – economics, and politics (Pinney 1940, pp. 174-176). Schematically, technology deals with “the most efficient means to any given concrete end”; economics with the “relative costs affecting both immediate concrete ends and means”, and politics with “the struggle for power and the necessity to keep the struggle within bounds”. For Parsons, concerns of power and resource allocation refer to “a common value system”, and sociology must explain how these values are ultimately synthesised and expressed at a societal level (Parsons 1937, in Pinney 1940, p. 175). Conversely, Simmel’s analysis engages with the sociality of such ‘value systems’, without the hierarchy.

and historical circumstance, and that the latter is constantly changing, there is little risk of a Simmelian analysis becoming 'sterile'.

Fourth, Simmel's sketch of sociology thus far does not match Poggi's description of it as formal, interstitial, or molecular. Simmel's sociology and its philosophical foundations go beyond the empirical search for patterns of behaviour or in-group formation, concerning neglected associations or otherwise. The abstract elements of form and content play a crucial role in grounding the objectivity of Simmel's methodology, and inform the subsequent empirical investigation. Moreover, Simmel's sociology cuts across each of Poggi's articulations of it. That is, Poggi does not adequately address the crux of Simmel's point: what distinguishes a group of individuals from a society? Poggi's presentation of three distinct but overlapping conceptions of sociology – and presenting them as Simmel's, without highlighting the principle which underpins them – unfairly contributes to Simmel's unsystematic image.

One might add to these points that Simmel also begins articulating the necessary relationship between science and philosophy, most evident in the second point above. However, Simmel expresses this most explicitly towards the end of *TPoS*, so I will address it there. Suffice to say that these points begin to show that an interpretation relying on a framework determined along NoU lines is wanting.

Chapter 4 – Responding to Poggi’s Thematic Lens: Reading *TPoS* II

Introduction: Identifying Form and Content in Empirical Reality

This chapter concerns the second of the three central points of Simmel’s *The Problem of Sociology*⁹⁵ (1909b) – as I have partitioned it – namely, Simmel’s sociological method and the relation between sociology and science in general.

Having sketched and justified the fundamental aims of sociology, Simmel then discusses how we might realise them through sociology and science in general. Incommensurate with the customary divisions of science into ideographic and nomothetic aims and methods, Simmel locates sociology in both camps. On the one hand, sociology analyses particular cases and determines the forms present in them; on the other, sociology determines the logically necessary and universal elements of forms as such. Moreover, one must begin with initially approximated, concrete instances of a given form – broadly considered – to determine its essential features, as Simmel illustrates regarding competition. Here, approximation is warranted on account of the inherent complexity of social relations. After providing an example involving changes to Medieval guild structures, Simmel argues that sociological analysis may yield multiple answers or none, depending on how and the degree to which the ‘interests’ – i.e., the content – of a case can be determined. Again, this is due to the inherent complexity of social relations. At the very least, however, form-content provides a *provisional* sense of the object of sociology that avoids metaphysical speculation and remains open to further conceptual refinement.

After sketching the methodological aims of sociological analysis, Simmel directly considers the sociological method, and how sociology integrates nomothetic and ideographic tendencies. Sociological analysis must consider three standpoints: interactions and ‘interests’ of a specific case with reference to the individuals and institutions involved, the interaction and ‘interests’ as abstracted from specific individuals and institutions, and the material conditions that influence social structures. These conditions are necessary, for Simmel, despite their obvious overlap and the resultant potential for ambiguity; science – especially fledgeling disciplines – both creates and requires inferential norms. That is, sociology must establish a disciplinary culture through which its method may be refined. Moreover, this method allows for the

⁹⁵ *TPoS* hereafter.

conceptualisation of the many informal relations and institutions often overlooked in favour of more obvious social structures.

Given the ostensibly psychological nature of 'content' and the method for ascertaining it, Simmel deems it necessary to distinguish his enterprise from the discipline of psychology. Sociology, for Simmel, must concern ostensibly psychological phenomena – that is, the 'inner' elements of individuals such as affect or intentionality, and how they emerge as 'outer' elements, i.e., action or behaviour. Only through psychological phenomena can we distinguish the unity of individuals from the unity of a mere collection of things, or society and mere aggregation, respectively. All sciences are psychological in that they are exercises in rendering the world intelligible to and consistent with our mind, and thus we 'psychologise' them. Yet, a distinction between psychology and other sciences must be maintained, or else grounding sociology – or any other science for that matter – as a unique inquiry would be redundant. For Simmel, this distinction is ultimately identical for sociology as for other sciences: non-psychological science focuses on that which is mediated by psychological processes – nomothetic or ideographic – whereas psychology exhibits a nomothetic focus on psychological processes as such. Just as it is valid for other sciences to focus on the content of mental processes and be considered distinct from psychology – Simmel considers linguistic sciences, for example – so too can sociology claim this distinction. Despite this, sociology remains psychological in two senses: it includes 'inner' states in its analysis and is a specific process of rendering the world intelligible to the mind.

However, sociology can and must overcome the initial psychological terminology of its analysis. For Simmel, this is what sociology achieves by focusing on 'form', which is concerned with psychological elements insofar as they precipitate interaction, not with the psychological as such. To overcome a mere mechanistic view of society, this process must be dialectical, i.e., it must consider both immanent (psychological) and extrinsic (historical) causes for the unity of society as interaction. Abstracted from empirical cases and synthesised, these considerations constitute 'form'.

Here, I argue again that Parson's view of content is overly psychological – Simmel makes explicit reference to material conditions shaping content. Simmel's method, too, avoids Durkheim's concern of metaphysical speculation by anchoring abstraction in empirical analysis. Finally, *TPoS* can be charitably understood as the methodological

anchor from the remainder of *Soziologie*, which Simmel aims to demonstrate through the breadth of analysis in the text.

On the Relation Between Sociology and Science in General

Here, we progress to a discussion of the nature of science in general and sociology's place in it, which bears directly on the foregoing characterisations of Simmel's work by Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons.

For Simmel:

“[w]e are today accustomed to confront every science with this alternative: Is it devoted to the discovery of timelessly valid laws, or does it attempt to exhibit and explain historically actual circumstances? This alternative does not exclude innumerable intermediary phenomena, and accordingly the problem-conception [i.e., the problem of sociology] here defined is not from the start affected by the necessity of the decision of the question”⁹⁶ (ibid, p. 305).

That is, a given science typically concerns itself with either nomothetic or ideographic sorts of questions or methodologies. Sociology, however, is a special case that straddles the line between both. The essential object of sociology – i.e., the ‘social-being’ of humans – as an abstraction from reality can be viewed “with reference to its conformity to laws, which, residing purely in the actual structure of the elements, maintain an indifferent attitude toward their realization in time and space” (ibid). For any given social form there may be certain aspects that are necessarily the case, regardless of the number of times this form concretely occurs. However, forms can also be viewed within a “*there and then*” – i.e., as the product of “their historical development within definite groups” (ibid, emphasis original). Alongside their universal aspects, forms are also the product of specific historical forces, and are to that extent unique events. The former tends towards nomothetic “inductive material for the discovery of timeless uniformities [i.e., laws]” (ibid), whereas the latter tends towards an ideographic explanation of singular emergences of forms.

Sociology, for Simmel, must achieve a marriage of this universality with particularity, which he illustrates with respect to competition. In the first instance,

⁹⁶ As per the neo-Kantian division of labour along these methodological lines (Windelbrand 1998, esp. p. 13). By refusing to adhere to this division, Simmel again shows his non-Neo-Kantian colours.

sociology defines its forms broadly enough to be recognisable across a variety of contexts: “*competition*, for example, we meet[...] in countless varieties in the most varied connections: in politics and in economic management, in the history of religion and of art, etc.” (ibid, emphasis original). Second, sociology must be able to determine the particularities of competition to determine its universal elements. Namely,

“under what circumstances it comes into existence, how it develops, what modifications it undergoes through the peculiar character of its object, through what contemporary formal and material delimitations of a society it is intensified or the reverse, how competition between individuals differs from that between groups—in short, what sort of relationship between persons competition is, *inasmuch as it may involve all sorts of contents, yet by likeness of appearance along with a great variety of contents it proves that it belongs to a sphere governed by its own laws, a sphere which may with propriety be abstracted from other spheres*” (ibid, emphasis added)⁹⁷.

Only through synthesising the similarities across many intuited instances of competition – i.e., form – enacted by distinct interests – i.e., contents – are the “similar elements in complex phenomena[...] raised to prominence” (ibid). Conversely, the analysis of particular emergences of forms reveal the inessential aspects of competitions, the “dissimilar elements, in this case the interests which constitute the content of the relation, are reciprocally paralyzed” (ibid). Thus, for Simmel, sociological universality is a product of the particular, and the process of abstracting forms must begin with the concrete⁹⁸. Moreover, this methodology must guide analysis of “all great relationships and reactions which form human association”, among which Simmel includes “the formation of parties”, “imitations”, and “the construction of classes” (ibid, pp. 305-306).

Simmel divides these analyses into further categories, namely “more specialised” and “complex” elements (ibid). The former are concerned with determining the meaning of certain societal positions, e.g. “the “poor” as organic [i.e. immanent] members of

⁹⁷ This quote also shows the operation of intra-disciplinary perspectivism: forms as abstract entities are the product of the *similarities* – not of identities as such – between analyses. That is, there is some latitude when determining forms, given the then fledgling nature of sociology and the complexity of social phenomena.

⁹⁸ That is, after the initial, provisional framework has been decided. Yet even here Simmel begins with a general sense of the need for a new science, which is informed by experience. This experience then shapes the framework through which the general need can be organised into scientific inquiry.

society” (ibid). The latter address the synthetic elements of society, such as “the intersection of many social circles in particular individuals”, for example (ibid).

As to whether “*absolute* similarity of forms occurs along with [a] variety of contents”, Simmel refers us to and elaborates on his previous responses (ibid, emphasis original)⁹⁹. That is, in the first instance it is sufficient to rely on the “approximate likeness” of forms arising from different content and vice versa to justify the possibility of “complete likeness[...] *in principle*” (ibid, emphasis original). However:

“in that, that it [i.e. complete likeness of form/absolute form] never completely actualises itself, appears the difference between historical-mental events – with its never fully rationalised fluctuations and complexities – against the precision of geometry, that can – with its [i.e. geometry’s] concept – detach humble forms with absolute purity from their actualisation in matter” (Simmel 1992, p. 27)¹⁰⁰.

For Simmel, there is a fundamental distinction in theorising ‘historical-mental’ events – such as social forms – and the geometric shapes of matter. ‘Humble’ geometric shapes are simpler and therefore more readily identifiable and abstractable from actuality than social forms. The ‘squareness’ of a square is more readily definable – as four sides of equal length, internal angles that sum to 360 degrees, etc. – and applicable to various contexts than the ‘conflictiness’ of a verbal disagreement, for example. Hence, we should not expect social forms to be as identifiable and abstractable as geometric shapes; this

⁹⁹ I am also drawing on the German version – “Ich lasse dabei[...] die Frage dahingestellt” (Simmel 1992, p. 27) – here as Small’s translation – “I [Simmel] waive the question” (1909b, p. 306) – implies that Simmel has not responded to it.

¹⁰⁰ My translation of: “;darin, daß es sich nicht restlos verwirklicht, zeigt sich eben der Unterschied des historisch-seelisch Geschehens mit seinen nie ganz zu rationalisierenden Fluktuationen und Kompliziertheiten gegen die Fähigkeit der Geometrie, die *ihrem* Begriff untertänigen Formen mit absoluter Reinheit aus ihrer Verwirklichung an der Materie herauszulösen” (Simmel 1992, p. 27, emphasis original). I note that ‘mental’ translates “seelischen” and has a broader meaning than mental in a contemporary sense, i.e., as brain or mind states, for example. This taps into a similar debate around the translation of ‘Geist’ that I will not delve further into here, except to flag this difficulty. At any rate, Small’s translation – “[i]n the concrete, the difference between actual historical occurrences in the psychic realm, occurrences whose fluctuations and complexities defy rationalization, is evidenced by this very fact that the former are not realized without remainders (*restlos*). This fact may be brought out more distinctly by contrast with geometry, which can with absolute precision separate the forms subject to its idea from the matter by means of which they are actualized” (Simmel 1909b, p. 306, emphasis original) – inaccurately characterise Simmel’s distinction as between ‘actual historical occurrences’ and the ‘psychic realm’, rather than between the imprecision of ‘historical-mental events’ and the ‘precision of geometry’. To use Small’s terms, ‘historical’ and ‘psychic’ are not distinct; both conjoinedly qualify the ‘occurrence’ against which Simmel contrasts geometry’s methodology.

initial method is, after all, “primarily only an auxiliary to the work of achieving and justifying the scientific discrimination of form and content” (Simmel 1909b, p. 306).

However, the “difficulty” and potential impossibility of crystallising social forms to the degree they are apodictically identifiable between contexts does not invalidate the attempt, for Simmel; “just as the geometrical abstraction[...] would be justified, even if the body thus formed only occurred as a matter of fact once in the world” (ibid, p. 307). He illustrates this through an example involving an “extension of trade relations” and its effect on the “the heads of guilds” in the Middle Ages, specifically involving the “ancient guild tradition that every master [craftsperson] should have the same living” (ibid). Changes in trade relations, Simmel argues, necessitated “new means of obtaining materials, [...] associates, [...] and] customers” that were inconsistent with the traditions of equal income among master craftspeople (ibid). Regarding the purely social form,

“abstracted from the special content, this signifies that expansion of the circle with which the individual is connected by his actions goes hand in hand with a more pronounced expression of the individual peculiarity [i.e., individuality], with a greater freedom and reciprocal differentiation of the individuals” (ibid).

In short, the sociological significance of this situation can be interpreted, somewhat simplistically, along the following lines. With the broadening of the definition of any given social group along a specific axis – e.g., a professional association, university department, etc. – there is a greater scope for individual distinction along that same axis. In the above example, the shift from every master craftsman earning the same income to allowing inequality of income permits craftspeople to be distinguished in a new sense, with all the attendant possibilities and limitations this brings – e.g., an income-based hierarchy, concentration of wealth and power, etc. This general feature of social groups cannot be arrived at, for Simmel, by analysing this only as a particular event – i.e., “through its content” (ibid). Such an analysis explicates only the income inequality of master craftspeople in the Middle Ages, not a general social form. Thus, only by seeing the immanent structure of these relations – the form – can the broader significance of this particular event be generalised, that is, rendered sociologically.

The sociological significance of an event is not always univocal or even determinable; “there is no certainly effective method of wringing its sociological meaning from that complex fact realized through its content” (ibid). That is, there is no

sure-fire method through which one can extract the sociological meaning from a given event. Questions concerning “which solely sociological configuration, which specific reciprocal-forms of individuals – in abstraction from [both] the remaining interests and impulses in the individual, and the conditions of a more purely factual nature – are contained in the historical process” are answerable in multiple ways (Simmel 1992, p. 28)¹⁰¹. As has been outlined previously, ostensibly similar forms can arise from various sets of relations between intents and impulses, and vice versa. In some cases, these questions are unanswerable because “the historical facts which *guarantee* the actuality of the defined sociological forms must be cited in their totality” (Simmel 1900, p. 307, emphasis added). However, “the means are lacking for making instructive the decomposition of this totality” (ibid); we lack the conceptual means to strictly distinguish between the material and the sociological elements of reality, according to Simmel.

Simmel’s sociology is facing related problems: social form and content are not totally distinguishable in practice; and forms, to the extent that they are identifiable, can emerge from distinct contents and vice versa. How, then, does Simmel propose to resolve these difficulties? In the first instance we must assume the “odium” of “intuitive processes” (ibid, p. 308). That is, in the first instance sociology *attempts* a resolution by engaging in praxis and reflecting on it. By engaging at first intuitively with these problems sociology can furnish itself with the material from which “the discrimination [between form and content] can be later composed into methods that are capable of expression in precise concepts” (ibid). However, even intuitive processes are further complicated because – given the complexity of socio-historical phenomena – “no unquestioned technique is conceivable for sociological analysis” (ibid). As a result, “classification of cases under the concept [i.e., sociology], or under the concept of definiteness of content of the occurrences, often remain arbitrary” (ibid). Contemporaneous sociological practice, for Simmel, fails to distinguish as carefully as it could between form and content, whilst admitting that this requires further clarification.

¹⁰¹ My translation of: “;welche bloß soziologische Konfiguration, welches besondere Wechselverhältnis von Individuen, in Abstraktion von den im Individuum verbleibenden Interessen und Trieben und von den Bedingungen rein sachlicher Art, in dem historischen Vorgang enthalten ist” (Simmel 1992, p. 28). Small’s translation: “[w]e confront in this case the questions, What purely sociological configurations are contained in the historical occurrence? What special reactions of individuals are involved, in abstraction from the permanent interests and impulses in the individual, and from the conditions of a purely objective sort” (Simmel 1909b, p. 307). My version makes it clearer that, for Simmel, individuals do not simply ‘react’ but ‘interact’ with others reciprocally, and that sociology must isolate those interests relevant to the identified social form, which may have varying degrees of permanence. That is, social forms do not solely involve impermanent interests, as Small’s translation implies.

To that end, Simmel proposes that “[t]he historical phenomena as a whole may be looked at with reference to three principal standpoints” (ibid). These three standpoints – which are not in any order – are as follows. First, “with reference to the individual existences that are the real bearers of the conditions” (ibid). That is, a given circumstance must first be considered in its particularity. As with the example of guilds above, these considerations include members of a given social group as contextually embedded agents, their specific motives, etc. Second, “according to the formal [i.e., abstracted] interactional-forms [Wechselwirkungsformen] – that, to be sure, only occur in individual existences, but are now not considered from these standpoints – but rather will be considered in their togetherness; that is, with respect to their ‘with-an-otherness’ and ‘for-an-otherness’” (Simmel 1992, pp. 29-30)¹⁰². Once the individual motivations have been determined – to the extent possible – they must now be considered in abstract. For example, how might the relative individuality of group members intensify or shrink according to the number of members comprising a social circle? Third,

“with reference to the conceptually formulable contents, [that is,] of conditions and occurrences, in the case of which the question is not now as to their bearers, or the circumstances of their bearers, but rather as to their purely material (sachlich) significance” (Simmel 1909b, pp. 308-309)¹⁰³.

That is, sociology must also consider the so-called material factors leading to or shaping a given social arrangement. Referring again to the craftsperson example, the change in trade policy or economic arrangements determines the viability of the guild system. The potential non-viability of the system promotes certain kinds of motives and actions, such as those ostensibly aimed at its preservation – e.g., allowing income inequality between craftspeople.

A similar difficulty is replicated in these standpoints to that of the original distinction between form and content: “[t]he methodological necessity of keeping them

¹⁰² My translation of “;auf die formalen Wechselwirkungsformern, die sich freilich auch nur an individuellen Existenzen vollziehen, aber jetzt nicht vom Standpunkte dieser, sondern dem ihres Zusammen, ihres Miteinander und Füreinander betrachtet werden” (Simmel 1992, pp. 29-30). Small’s translation – “with reference to the former types of reactions, which, to be sure, are actualized only in the person of individuals, but are now contemplated not with reference to these individual existences, but only with reference to the relationships of *together*, *with*, and *for* one another” (Simmel 1909b, p. 308, emphasis original). The interests in the previous standpoint are now considered in abstract, i.e., as removed from particular circumstance or in general, and only in terms of their relevance as reciprocal influences.

¹⁰³ Round parentheses are Small’s.

[i.e., the standpoints] separate is ever and again crossed by the difficulty of setting each in a series independent of the others, and by desire for a composite picture of reality” (ibid, p. 309). In the preceding example, the third standpoint – the production of motives and interests by material conditions – clearly bleeds into the first and second – namely, the initial, situated diagnosis of motives and interests, and their abstraction. That is, material conditions shape which interests emerge and therefore what is abstracted. Moreover, a comprehensive analysis of the circumstance arguably necessitates an account of the source of the motives, as either *sui generis* or otherwise. Given, then, that “it can never be determined once and for all how deeply the one of these views [i.e., standpoints] interpenetrates the other”, any clarity gained “in the proposing of problems” will inevitably lead to ambiguity (ibid). And yet, according to Simmel, we must push forward because science “can scarcely dispense with a certain amount of instinctive performance”, particularly “in fields not previously opened up” (ibid). Established science relies on certain intuitions and norms to function, which, writes Simmel, “will emerge more surely, and even perhaps more clearly, from exposition of its concrete problems than from this abstract introduction” (ibid). However, by requiring the determination of these norms with absolute clarity before the fact, “science would be condemned to sterility if, in the presence of new tasks, a completely formulated methodology were a condition of making the first step” (ibid). In short, Simmel here asks of the reader: charity and that his introduction be considered in tandem with the subsequent analyses in *Soziologie*¹⁰⁴.

Yet, despite its ambiguities this distinction between form and content reveals a whole new set of investigations for sociology. These investigations are captured by the following question: how is the reciprocal synthesis of “actions and reactions between individuals” transmuted into the dialectical “coherence” of society? (ibid, p. 310)? If, as Simmel takes himself to have established, society *is* ‘interaction of individuals’, why has sociology largely overlooked the “essential and vital significance” of everyday interactions (ibid)? That is:

“sociology has virtually confined itself to those social phenomena in the cases in which the reciprocating forces are formed, at least into conceptual unities, by crystallization of their immediate bearers. States and labor unions, priesthoods and types of families, economic and

¹⁰⁴ Unfortunately, I can only oblige Simmel on the first request, given the constraints of this thesis.

military organizations, guilds and parishes, class stratification and the division of labor, these and similar great organs and systems seem to constitute society and fill out the scope of society” (ibid).

Sociology, for Simmel, has typically concerned itself with those forms of ‘being-together’ whose significance is immediately obvious. In this sense, Simmel aims to broaden the scope of sociology beyond these “official” institutions on two accounts (ibid). Micro associations which may appear “trivial in their individual instances” can form an aggregate of a similar order to the ‘official’ institutions (ibid). These aggregates can in turn embed “themselves into the comprehensive, official formations, so to speak, [and] bring society as we know it into existence” (ibid). Here, one might consider interactions with an individual as against an individual *enacting* an ‘official’ institution, such as a university or a government body; roughly, informal and formal interactions, respectively. The latter may typically involve rigid, official modes and media of communication or language. However, the latter also involves informal exchanges – the after-hours catchups, small talk – which contribute to its functioning. Moreover, the institution is actualised through individuals, in concert with socio-cultural meaning impressed and received from material symbols and conditions. To capture all permutations of these dynamics – individual-individual, individual-institution, the institution as emergent from individual-individual – then, requires both micro and macro analyses.

Alternatively put, without micro interactions “the actual life of society as we encounter it could never have been constructed” (ibid, pp. 310-311). Failing to recognise that ‘official’ institutions are “syntheses” of individual interactions would result in “innumerable discontinuous systems” (ibid, p. 311). That is, Simmel is attempting to diagnose the future dead ends of social theory and provide a sociological remedy; contra Parsons, Poggi and Durkheim, Simmel in this sense can be read as a prospective *systematiser* of social theory. At the very least, Simmel is concerned with systematic theory, whether he achieved this or not. But to designate Simmel as hostile to a systematic sociology – which Poggi diagnoses as a product of Simmel’s philosophical relativism – seems especially uncharitable given that Simmel actively avoids a sociology inconducive to a ‘continuous’ system. Moreover, for Simmel, the difficulty of analysing micro interactions highlights their importance a “for deeper understanding of society”; they are not explicitly captured in analyses of “rigid superindividual structures” (ibid). This does not imply that we must investigate the “historically unsearchable beginnings”,

which is impossible (ibid). Rather, the equal necessity of micro and macro phenomena, reveals their interconnection to require theorisation. Simmel aims to realise this necessity by dissolving each into the other, sharing a basis in processes. In essence:

“[s]ocialization between persons incessantly takes place and ceases, an eternal flowing and pulsing, which links individuals together even where it does not go as far as real organizations. Thus we have to do this in connection with the microscopic-molecular occurrences, so to speak, within the human material, which occurrences, however, are the actual occurring (*Geschehen*) which concatenates or hypostatizes itself as the macrocosmic permanent unities and systems” (ibid, emphasis original)¹⁰⁵.

Every interaction produces informal ‘synthetic’ associations which then in turn constitute broader institutions; absent of the micro institutions, macro institutions would cease to exist. Hence, for Simmel, though linking the synthetic stages – aggregate, macro – to their micro foundations may be difficult in practice – because they are not as ‘hypostatized’ or reified – there must be a link of some kind between all three.

However, Simmel is not claiming a unidirectional causal link from individual to society. As we see in the previous guild example, changes in macro institutions can impact the constellations of interest that drive interactions, which in turn alters the constitution of social groups. That is, changes in trade relations precipitated income inequality between craftspeople, and altered the guild structure, respectively. Macro changes are reflected in the interests of individuals which influence the processual interactions that constitute social formations, ultimately back to the level of institutions: a circular process. Further, the indeterminacy of diagnosing the constellations of interest themselves – i.e., the three interdependent standpoints of Simmel’s sociological analysis – means that a bottom-up analysis is equally inadequate as Durkheim’s analytical priority of society. Rather, Simmel is proposing a dialectic at multiple levels, between: individuals, individuals and institutions, and between institutions. Eliminating any one of these terms risks creating the ‘discontinuous system’ Simmel is at pains to avoid. At an individual level, the *sociality* of a relation cannot be located in any singular individual; both parties are required, at least in some simplified form. The same holds between the individual and the institution – e.g., the guild, the state. One cannot analyse the relation ‘craftsperson’ without reference to individual and to guild, for example. However, as the

¹⁰⁵ Round parentheses are Small’s.

processes engaged in by individuals constitute the institution – at least so far as their sociality is concerned – this too is a dialectical process; the individual shapes the institution and the institution shapes the individual. Similarly, to the extent that macro institutions can be said to have constellations of interests or ‘purposes’ – ultimately expressed via individuals – their interactions with one another and between the elements of each stratum will exhibit a similar dynamic.

Sociology, or any science, will never complete this understanding as such because each of its elements are constantly in a dialectical cycle. Thus, ‘completion’ would itself produce further change that would require theorisation. Rather, the humbler goal is “the discovery of attenuated threads, of minimum relationships between people, from the continuous repetition of which all those great objectified structures which afford a real history have been built up and maintained”, or those interactions without which society as it appears would not be possible (ibid, pp. 312-313). Hence, there appears to be little risk of – as per Parsons – ‘sterility’ in Simmel’s sociology. Instead, a dynamic field is opened wherein concepts must be thought and rethought. Institutions must be considered terms of individuals, and then individuals in terms of institutions; interactions must be considered from the perspective of one party, then the other. An adequate analysis of social relations must articulate and synthesise these poles. In a world that is constantly shifting – as has arguably only intensified since Simmel’s time – this task seems anything but ‘sterile’.

Here, Simmel shifts from the focus on sociological methodology to the relation of sociology to science in general. Contrasts and similarities in methodological aims are the cornerstone of this discussion, so I present them together in this chapter.

Simmel distinguishes the following chapters of *Soziologie* and their ostensibly psychological method from a psychological or social-psychological analysis proper, and natural science. For Simmel, the processes that drive associations are psychological:

“there is[...] no doubt that all societal occurrences [i.e., social processes¹⁰⁶] and instincts have their seats in souls, that socialization is a psychical phenomenon, and that for its fundamental fact—viz., a multiplicity of elements becoming a unity—there is not even an analogy

¹⁰⁶ I note that Small’s translation of “gesellschaftlichen Vorgänge” (Simmel 1992, p. 35) comes across as a more passive and static idea than Simmel appears to have in mind, i.e., as an event *in* society rather than a process *constitutive of* society; an understanding of social process as the latter is crucial to Simmel’s characterisation of sociology.

in the world of matter; since in the latter everything remains confined in the invincible apartness of space (ibid, p. 313)".

That is, intentions, interests, and behaviours, for example, are the drivers of the interactions that constitute society, and society is to that extent psychological or a product of the mind. As a psychological entity, the 'inner' links between its elements are fundamentally different to those between non-conscious entities; two rocks cannot exhibit intentionality towards one another and thus become a unity in this sense, for example. Theorising society as a purely or primarily "*external* occurrence", then, circumvents the key significance of sociology, namely how society emerges from reciprocal interaction between *conscious* beings (ibid, emphasis original).

Without a psychological or 'inner' understanding, sociology would be a: "Punch and Judy show^[107], not more intelligible and not more significant than the merging of clouds or the entangling of branches of trees, if we did not recognize quite independent psychic motivation[s], feelings, thoughts, needs, not merely as bearers of those externalities, but as their essence and that which really alone interests us" (ibid).

That is, a mechanistic conception of society – as a mere function of parts coexisting according to rules – cannot synthesise conscious beings into a whole that reflects their 'inner' life. Only by dialectically considering conscious beings – specifically, their sociality and its determinants – as simultaneously cause and effect, origin and endpoint, of society can this two-dimensional puppet show be avoided, for Simmel. Mechanistic analyses do not elucidate how such a seemingly all-encompassing structure – particularly its reified and therefore obvious 'official' institutions – can arise from intentional and somewhat capricious beings. The mechanistic understanding writes the possibility of this answer out of its question.

However, simply because sociology must account for the 'inner' or psychological element of society, Simmel stresses, does not subordinate it to psychology. To the extent that any knowledge of "historico-social existence" is a "concatenation which we reconstruct with either instinctive or methodical psychology", such knowledge "is an

¹⁰⁷ An English "glove-puppet" show of Neapolitan origin, first arriving in England as a marionette show in the 1660s (McCormack 2003). Small appears to be showing some artistic licence his translation of "Marionettenspiel" (Simmel 1992, p. 35), literally a play performed with puppets, specifically marionettes. The analogy remains: puppets are externally controlled by a puppeteer; Simmel claims we should not treat the elements of society like such puppets, that is, as externally controlled beings without consciousness or intentionality.

exercise in psychological knowing” (ibid, pp. 313-314). When we consider the meanings or intelligibility of social and historical events – that is, by bringing them into “subjective plausibility” or a sense of “necessity” – we render the events ‘coherent’ with the structures of the mind (ibid, p. 314). That is, we necessarily ‘use’ psychological processes when engaging in scientific inquiry or interpret events. Nevertheless, “it is a matter of extreme methodological necessity” that a distinction between the “psychical sciences [“Geisteswissenschaften” (Simmel 1992, p. 36)¹⁰⁸]” and psychology be maintained, even where the explication of a “fact is possible only in a psychological way, as is the case in sociology”, according to Simmel (1909b, p. 314). The psychological dimension of sociology is twofold, namely: its initial aim is a determination of the intentions and motivations, etc., that constitute interactions *and* generalising it beyond the particular case¹⁰⁹. Returning to the craftsperson case, sociology is psychological in that it aims to determine – and ultimately to generalise – the motivations driving the inequality of income between master craftspeople, which may include material conditions as part of this diagnosis. These motivations must be expressed in intersubjectively accessible ways, that is, rendered intelligible. In short, we both diagnose the interests of others and express them in terms comprehensible to others. Both are ‘psychological’ acts; only the first approaches psychology as science.

The scientific aims of sociology and psychology are divergent, for Simmel. Sociology does not aim at “the law of psychic process” but aims to interrogate that which is realised *through* psychological processes (ibid). In this sense, “[t]here is only a difference of degree between the sciences of mind and the sciences of nature” because

¹⁰⁸ Though informal, Tessa Gengnagel (2016), a ‘humanities’ researcher from Germany, provides a good sense of what gets lost in the translation of Geisteswissenschaften to humanities in the context of the “digital humanities”. Roughly, Geisteswissenschaften are typically narrower than humanities, conventionally including “philosophy, (art) history, philologies, musicology, and religious studies” and could be translated as science of mind/spirit (ibid). Disciplines such as “media/communication studies, performing arts, film studies, game studies, anthropology, [and] ethnology” are considered “*Kulturwissenschaften*”, i.e., cultural sciences (ibid, emphasis original). Both are sciences in the fullest sense of the word that, along with Sozialwissenschaften (social sciences), aim towards a “*Nachleben*” of socio-cultural-historical events, or a “re-experiencing[... of] a stranger’s existence through its expression in writing, speaking, gesturing, art, etc.” (ibid, emphasis original). This conception of the humanities, broadly speaking, was heavily influenced by Wilhelm Dilthey (ibid; Makkreel 2021). Though Small can hardly be faulted for not making this nuance explicit, his rendering of Geisteswissenschaften as “psychical sciences” is particularly unwieldy (Simmel 1909b, p. 314). If we consider Simmel’s aim here as a ‘re-imagining’ of past events, the sense in which this can be construed as a psychological exercise becomes clearer.

¹⁰⁹ This ‘generalisation’ can occur across two axes: application to other empirical cases or universal conditions which must hold regardless of whether another such case empirically exists.

both are ultimately realised in and through the mind (ibid)¹¹⁰. Yet, natural science can uncontroversially distinguish itself from psychology as science, and instead focus on “their contents and their interdependences” (ibid). The distinction is, for Simmel, like that between the physical constitution of an artwork and its meaning. That is, “we [may] deduce a painting, according to its aesthetic meaning and its relation to art history, not from physical oscillations, which produce the colours, and which we must admit create and maintain the real existence of the painting” (ibid). Simply put, multiple, equally valid analyses of an object such as a painting are possible¹¹¹. One can consider the processes through which something becomes tangible, for example, the chemical structure of its materials, their interaction with light and the biology of the eye, etc. One may also consider its socio-cultural and historical relevance; what is the significance of this painting in relation to past works or what is its significance to a social group? Both sorts of questions, broadly speaking, necessitate distinct methods and hence distinct abstractions from:

“one reality which we cannot scientifically comprehend in its immediateness and totality; but we must take it up from a series of detached standpoints, and consequently shape it as a multiplicity of mutually independent scientific subject-matters” (ibid, emphasis original).

Here we see quite clearly Simmel’s methodological perspectivism once more.

This perspectivism continues within sciences of the mind or spirit, in the Teutophone sense. Objects within the mind possess a degree of objectivity or independence from it, like objects of the “independent spatial world” (ibid). That is, both ‘external’ and ‘mental’ objects can be considered separately from the psychological processes which realise them¹¹². Simmel provides the following elucidatory example:

“[t]he forms and laws of a language[...], which is certainly constructed out of energies of the soul, for the purposes of the soul, are nevertheless treated by a linguistic science [i.e., Sprachwissenschaft (Simmel 1992, p. 37¹¹³) which disregards the only given realization of its object, and it

¹¹⁰ This distinction is roughly between the sense of Geisteswissenschaften in footnote 101, or “geistigen Lebens” (spiritual/mental life), i.e., the ‘re-imagining’ of another’s experience, and Naturwissenschaften, i.e. the natural sciences (Simmel 1992, p. 36).

¹¹¹ This does not mean *all* analyses are valid, i.e., subjective relativism.

¹¹² I use inverted commas to denote the broad sense of ‘mental’ reflected in ‘Geist’.

¹¹³ One could make a similar point about the distinction between Sprachwissenschaft and linguistics, and Geisteswissenschaft and humanities. However, I think it sufficient in this case to simply consider linguistics in a broad sense as the specifics of the distinction are not central to Simmel’s argument.

presents, analyses, or construes that object (i.e. the forms and laws themselves) purely according to its substantial content and according to formations which exist only in and upon its content” (Simmel 1909b, pp. 314-315¹¹⁴).

That is, though the purview of the science of speech is a direct product of the mind – literally the soul, i.e., “Seele” (Simmel 1992, p. 37) – for Simmel, it is distinct from the mind and is an objective entity with determinable features. The ultimate ends of such a science – the laws of speech or grammar – only ever manifest with a content and in the mind. However, to make its unique contribution to the intelligibility of reality, it must abstract the structure of language from the specificities of particular instances and its realisation in the mind.

Sociology, then, is justified in taking psychological content and subjecting it to new methodology – that is, to consider the content realised by psychological processes as distinct from them – just as the science of language and natural science do. The reciprocal influence of people upon one another, “that one does or suffers something[...] because others are there and express themselves, act, or feel” (ibid, p. 315), is certainly:

“a mental phenomenon and the historical realisation of each individual case is such [i.e., a mental phenomenon] only through psychological re-shaping [re-imagining] – [i.e.] through the plausibility of psychological series – [that is] to comprehend [historical realisations] through the interpretation of the externally diagnosable by means of psychological categories”¹¹⁵ (Simmel 1992, p. 37).

¹¹⁴ Round parentheses are Small’s.

¹¹⁵ My translation of “ein seelisches Phänomenon und das historische Zustandekommen jedes einzelnen Falles seiner ist nur durch psychologisches Nachformen, durch die Plausibilität psychologischer Reihen, durch die Interpretation des äußerlich Konstatierbaren mittels psychologischer Kategorien zu begreifen. Small’s version, “psychical phenomena, and the historical occurrences of each several case [sic] of it is to be understood only through psychological repetition, through the plausibility of psychological series, through the interpretation of externally observable by means of psychological categories” (Simmel 1909b, p. 37) – aside from having a forgivable typo given the structure of the sentence – lacks clarity on four accounts. First, ‘psychical phenomena’ implies a plurality where Simmel is arguably stressing the unity of these phenomena as a *reciprocal* mental influence. Second, ‘occurrence’ is passive and diminishes the link between an event and its theorisation; as mentioned above, though science involves abstractions, for Simmel, the elements theorised are present in the event even if they never manifest as they would in abstract due to their confluence with other factors lost through the process of abstraction. Third, mere ‘repetition’ obscures the ‘re-imagining’ inherent Geisteswissenschaften, as mentioned previously, that I have attempted to make explicit. Finally, I have attempted to explicitly state the referents of the indexicals.

To reiterate, sociology is ‘psychological’ in two senses, for Simmel. First, sociology must initially adopt a quasi-psychological method to diagnose the relevant mental components from which the social is constituted. Namely, sociology diagnoses the interactions through needs, wants, and desires of each party – including, at times, their material influences – that structure the emergent ‘social-being’. This initial quasi-psychological method, however, is only a technique through which to analyse the ‘inner’ aspects of interactions through their outer manifestations in historical events¹¹⁶. The confluences of these ‘inner’ aspects constitutes the object of sociology. Second, the medium in which sociology ‘re-imagines’ and renders intelligible is mental, just as the “discovery of every astronomical or chemical truth, equally with reflection upon the same, is a consciousness-event”, for example (ibid, p. 314). This does not imply astronomy, chemistry, or linguistics are subdisciplines of psychology, for Simmel; each focuses on the content realised through psychological phenomena and should therefore be treated on their own terms. In both cases sociology is concerned with what is realised through psychological processes – both in the analysed case and in the analyser – rather than general laws of the process per se¹¹⁷.

Only with the advent of sociology can the ‘inner’ aspects of the social be analysed on their own terms. For Simmel, “[o]nly now can a unique scientific intent completely disregard these mental events as such, and pursue, distinguish, and put into relations the contents themselves as they [i.e., the content] arrange themselves according to the concept of becoming-social” (Simmel 1992, p. 37)¹¹⁸. That is, the initial psychological element of the analysis, however, is only a method to analyse the ‘inner’ aspects of interactions, the confluence of which is the object of sociology, through their

¹¹⁶ This seems to be in line with a general understanding of psychology at the time which straddled the gap between *Naturwissenschaft* and *Geisteswissenschaft* (Windelband 1998, p. 11).

¹¹⁷ This distinction between the psychological process and that which is realised appears to reflect that of form-content, operating at another level.

¹¹⁸ My translation of: “[a]llein nun kann eine besondere wissenschaftliche Absicht dies seelische Geschehen als solches ganz außer acht lassen und die Inhalte desselben, wie sie sich unter dem Begriff der Vergesellschaftung anordnen, für sich verfolgen, zerlegen, in Beziehungen setzen” (Simmel 1992, p. 37). Small’s version, “[b]ut a peculiar scientific purpose may leave this psychic occurrence as such quite out of sight, and it may give its attention to the contents of the same as the set themselves in order under the concept of socialization” (Simmel 1909b, p. 315). I have formulated a more idiomatic translation that retains something of the admittedly complex structure of the original sentence. Moreover, I have retained the ‘pursue, distinguish, and put into relations’ as a gesture towards what Simmel takes to be the next step for sociology, rather than simply the contents ‘setting themselves in order’.

outer manifestations in historical events¹¹⁹. Interactions are both driven by the mind – i.e., Seele/Geist – and responsive to the circumstances. Hence, motives can be related to or be inferred from historical circumstances – e.g., the above changes in trade policy necessitating certain actions, which altered the composition of guilds. Nevertheless, these responses are not mechanistic; if purely external forces determined action and therefore interaction, society would be nothing but the aforementioned marionette play, fully explainable in terms of ‘external’ – i.e., non-psychological – forces. Rather, mental states are, for Simmel, a sort of abbreviation or proxy of a given circumstance, themselves a historical product but not historically determined. Thus, analysis of the social in terms of mental states can account for both the ‘inner’ and the ‘outer’ in a manner that external analyses of material conditions cannot. However, because the ‘inner’ is not directly accessible, a psychological method is required to ‘access’ it, insofar as is possible, and as mediated as this access may be.

In both above instances – namely sociology as diagnosing ‘inner’ interests relevant to ‘becoming-social’ and their ‘mental’¹²⁰ representation – the psychological represents a first step that must be left behind, so to speak, in higher orders of analysis. With the development of the titular ‘problem of sociology’ as the being-together of individuals as such, it becomes possible to transcend the particularity of psychological analysis. That is, consideration of interactions without tangible interactors – interactional forms as such – and systematic referral of empirical cases to such interactions becomes possible. For example, if there is a relation of “*primus inter pares* [first among equals]” between a “stronger” and a “weaker person”, and this form tends to “eliminate the elements of equality”, one may ask the following sorts of sociological questions, according to Simmel (1909b, p. 315). In reference to a subsequent chapter of *Soziologie* entitled ‘Über- und Unterordnung’ [Super- and Subordination] (1992, pp 160-283)¹²¹, “[t]o what degree is a super-ordination in a given relationship compatible with

¹¹⁹ This is in line with the general understanding of psychology at the time that straddled the gap between Naturwissenschaft as study of the ‘outer’ and Geisteswissenschaft as study of the ‘inner’ (Windelband, 1998, p. 11).

¹²⁰ Again, I use inverted commas here to signify the broader sense of mental as Geist.

¹²¹ A translation of this version may be found in Wolff’s *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950, pp. 181-306), albeit without the “Exkurs über die Überstimmung” or ‘Excursus on Overriding’ (Simmel 1992, pp. 218-228). This and other of Simmel’s sociological investigations placed after a rendition of Simmel’s subsequently published *Grundfragen der Soziologie: Individuum und Gesellschaft* (1917), translated by Wolff as *Fundamental Problems of Sociology (Individual and Society)* (Simmel 1950, pp. 3-86), which includes an abbreviated account of Simmel’s formal sociology – he asks permission to “call to attention” *Soziologie* as a more comprehensive account of formal sociology (ibid, p. 21) – and a contrast with two other conceptions of sociology. Namely: general sociology according to which certain “facts” may be

equality in other particulars” or “[b]eginning with what degree of superiority does the super-ordination wholly destroy equality?” (Simmel 1909b, p. 315). In these sorts of cases different constellations of interests can cause the superordination in question.

To refer again to the guild example, superordination of craftspeople according to income can be motivated by greed, a more altruistic desire for the survival of the guild structure – or a combination of both – or a sense of fairness that allows for differentiation in quality or promptness to be recognised by greater income, etc. However, regardless of the motivation, there may be certain limits to the degree of superiority possible whilst retaining cohesion amongst the group. One need only consider the ramifications of income inequality today, and the extent to which this damages societal cohesion (or not). This interest in more general, abstract limitations distinguishes Simmel’s sociology from psychological analyses of particular events, though the former may appear in the first instance as a mode of the latter:

“[a]s an occurrence, this [i.e., the internal aspect of historical events] can be made intelligible or even described only psychologically; but considered as a sociological formation, the course of events in the consciousness of each of two individuals is not of interest in itself, but rather the synopsis of the two under the category of union and disunion” (ibid).

More specifically, what degree of “hostility” between individuals is possible such that it may be legitimately called an “attachment”¹²², or how an “attachment” followed by its severing yields a “more cruel, deeper wounding” than “alienation from the beginning”, for example (ibid, pp. 315-316).

In a word, just as natural sciences generalise certain impressions on the mind to comprehend the ‘outer’ world, the humanities – Geisteswissenschaften – generalise products of the ‘inner’ world according to their respective abstractions. Simmel considers the ‘being-together’ constitutive of society in the latter category, in itself an ‘inner’ phenomenon of the mind not a reflection of the ‘outer’. Sociology requires, then,

analysed as “products and developments of society”, though the “fundamental structure of society itself” is largely overlooked (ibid, p. 18 & 21); and philosophical sociology deals with “the conditions, fundamental concepts, and presuppositions of concrete research” and questions beyond the empirical facts, such as “the ultimate value of social development”, or, for Simmel, “epistemology” and “metaphysics”, respectively (ibid, p. 23 & 25). The dichotomy in merit between these sociologies is, for Simmel, seemingly a false one, a mere debate over nomenclature that I will discuss shortly.

¹²² An apparent reference to the subsequent chapter on conflict (Simmel, 1992, p. 284-382), translated by Wolff in Simmel (1955, pp. 11-124).

a method through which to ascertain the ‘inner’ workings of the mind insofar as they constitute this ‘being-together’; that is, insofar as the ‘inner’ impacts and is impacted by the ‘outer’ manifestations of the ‘inner’ workings of another¹²³. Psychological analysis is the method by which the ‘inner’ aspects of *specific* socio-historical events are explicated through observations of the ‘outer’ aspects. These explications constitute the data of which sociology is one possible mode of generalisation: the confluence of interactions into recognisable forms. These confluences or syntheses may be fleeting and informal relations, grand institutions, or something in between. Identification and analysis of syntheses at each level helps us comprehend the immanence of society – i.e., the layered processes through which society is enacted. These layers of processes elucidate, for Simmel, the connection between immediate interactions and seemingly indestructible behemothic structures.

A final word on sociology proper. I now turn to a footnote omitted in Small’s translation that highlights the lack of charitability manifest in the interpretation of Simmel’s sociology as characterised by unsystematicity. It reads as follows:

“[t]he introduction of a new approach to the facts [e.g., sociology] must support the various aspects of its method through analogies with more recognised fields [i.e., established sciences]; but only that – perhaps endless – process in which the principle determines its implementation within concrete research and this implementation of the principle is legitimated as fruitful can such analogies be purified [of the more recognised fields], wherein first the varieties of materials that currently obscure the crucial sameness of form; this process removes from them [i.e., analogies] their obscurity, of course, only to the extent that it [i.e., process] makes them [i.e., analogies] superfluous” (Simmel 1992, p. 39)¹²⁴.

As mentioned previously, the grounding of a new science is always an endeavour fraught with the spectre of impossibility; it can never be completely determined before the first concrete step is taken, if it can ever be fully determined at all. It must be said, then, that despite its length this chapter is only a partial exposition of Simmel’s sociology, a full account of which would include a complimentary examination of his specific analyses.

¹²³ Without getting too bogged down in the inner/outer dialectic here, both are divisions in the way the mind represents itself to itself (Simmel 2011, pp. 66-67).

¹²⁴ My translation.

Nevertheless, Simmel presented an extensive groundwork that seeks to avoid the foreseeable pitfalls of establishing a new science. Namely, sociology must constitute a *unique* contribution to the intelligibility of reality – or else risk redundancy – and one pathway to achieve this is to reconceive the concept of society. Many existing sciences already engage with the effects of society – e.g., politics or economics – without a sophisticated account of what ‘the social’ is, at least precisely, according to Simmel. Hence, a path forward was clear: sociology ought to fill this gap and study the interactions that constitute both the obvious and the less discernible social institutions, as precisely as possible.

For Simmel, one must conceive of society as immanently produced by conscious beings to avoid the pitfalls of a mechanistic conception of society. Conceived in this way, sociology best coheres with human complexity and malleability, avoiding determinisms of all kinds. That is, Simmel advocates for society as in part an *ideal* phenomenon, a product of the mind in interaction, and in part a concrete phenomenon with tangible effects on our lives; both aspects of society are necessary, and both are interconnected. Sociology, then, must study these interactions and that which produces them, which leads Simmel to psychological methods. This, too, is only a first step: psychological analysis provides the data from which to infer sociological insight, just as other sciences are distinct from psychology despite dealing with interests, motives, etc. It is difficult, then, to see Parsons’ dilettantism, Durkheim’s bastard speculation, or Poggi’s savant given the self-consciously provisional, yet comprehensively grounded nature of Simmel’s project. If this methodology and the subsequent analyses aim to ‘purify’ the field of the non-social – insofar as is possible, and thereby to legitimate it – then it stands to reason one must determine the boundaries of this field. To determine the boundaries, then, the best method is arguably to deploy the methodology in ostensibly disparate cases – for which Simmel is often castigated. Only by seeing whether the methodology ‘works’ across many, unique contexts can it be purified of its status as an ‘analogy’. Simmel, it seems, had a method to his madness.

Despite this lengthy conceptualisation of sociology, Simmel is not militant in his defence of it. That is, although Simmel advocates for sociology as “the theory of socialization as such[...], the important matter is not this nomenclature, but the discovery of a new complex of social problems” (ibid, pp. 316-317). That is, Simmel would not debate Durkheim or Parsons insofar as they claim the title sociology for their

investigations into the effects of society on action; this, too, is a valuable avenue for research. However, such investigations cannot circumvent the question raised by Simmel, “that is, knowledge of society as such and as a whole” (ibid, p. 317).

Conclusion: A Provisional Sociological Method and its Distinction from Psychology

The second of the three central claims in *TPoS* involved Simmel sketching a method for sociology. This method is predicated upon the form-content distinction and situated sociology with respect to other sciences according to their respective methodologies. Sociology is both ideographic and nomothetic, analysing specific cases to determine their universal structures – to the extent possible – anchored by the provisional form-content distinction. To determine social form more precisely, Simmel set forth three related standpoints which will form the basis of a scientific culture. Namely, the interests (content) and interactions (forms) as related to the particular case, as abstracted from the empirical individuals and institutions, and as a product of material conditions. Together, these conditions provide an initial way to think the ‘social as such’ which, for Simmel, remains open to refinement.

Due to its ostensible focus on traditionally psychological concepts, Simmel’s sketch of sociological method spends considerable time distinguishing sociology from psychology. This takes the form of two basic arguments. First, psychology is primarily concerned with nomothetic laws of psychological processes, whereas sociology straddles the line between nomothetic and ideographic orientations. Second, sociology is concerned with the content realised by the psychological process and accessed by psychological methods. For Simmel, other sciences distinguish between content realised in the mind and the processes which realise it; Simmel claims the same right for sociology. Moreover, sociology requires a method to access the ‘inner’ for which the model – at least initially – is quasi-psychological, though sociology must move beyond psychological terminology. Yet, sociology must avoid mechanistic sociology if a non-deterministic understanding of society is to be achieved; the individual must occupy the dialectical position of being both the cause and effect of sociality.

Like the previous chapter, this reading raises three further issues for Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim’s readings of Simmel. First, Simmel is not as ‘psychologistic’ as Parsons reads him. As I argued in the previous chapter, ‘content’ and its diagnosis involve more than intuiting what based on immediate circumstances. In this chapter,

Simmel states consideration of broader institutions as one of the three initial perspectives through which analysis of 'becoming-social' ought to proceed. Applied to Parsons' example of marriage, then, the institution of marriage is precisely an institution that would shape the relevant social form and would therefore be included in a Simmelian analysis.

Second, Simmel's abstractions are not as prone to metaphysical speculation as Durkheim suggests. In addition to Simmel's reflexive conditions of objectivity that I sketched in Chapter 2, Simmel ensures that abstraction is bounded by the empirical on two accounts. Namely, the first and third perspectives of his method: any case must be considered with respect to the immediate concrete conditions of those involved – initially via psychological concepts – and to broader institutions, respectively. Any resulting abstraction thereby remains bookended by them, making it difficult to slip into the conjecture Durkheim warns of. The second perspective of Simmel's method remains necessary, however, to purify given content of its sociologically irrelevant parts. Thereby, one comes to form as such, to the extent possible. Just like consideration of geometric shapes in isolation affords better comprehension of their instantiations, so too will the consideration of social forms in abstract – freed from any 'interference' – afford better comprehension of social formations.

Third, Parsons, Durkheim, and Poggi by extension lament the apparent lack of a comprehensive, systematic sociology built upon Simmel's foundation, and all are ultimately sceptical as to whether this is possible. While this is partially true, it is a highly uncharitable view given that Simmel never intended to provide it. Rather, Simmel stresses here – and earlier in his argument, as outlined in the previous chapter – that his formulation of sociology is both provisional and necessary. That is, previous attempts to analyse the social have, for Simmel, failed address the social as distinct from its specific manifestations, forgoing all the insights this may bring. Simmel's efforts to sketch the fundamental aim – form-content – and the three prongs of his method are initial attempts to clarify what such a sociology might look like. The subsequent 'dilletantism', viewed in this light, could be more charitably viewed as Simmel's attempt to test the scope of his ideas; were Simmel to confine himself to a narrow set of analyses, this would do little to evidence the scope of his sociology.

However, only in the context of the NoU in Anglophone scholarship does the discretisation of Simmel's ideas become a major issue (see Appendix). Concluding from

the fact that Simmel did not produce a comprehensively systematic sociology – in addition to other factors – that Simmel is compulsively unsystematic alters the way we interpret his work. Thus, building on the problematic interpretations of Durkheim and Parsons, Poggi does not countenance the possibility that *Philosophy of Money*¹²⁵ (Simmel 2011) exhibits a system of any kind, despite these interpretations dealing largely with Simmel's sociology¹²⁶. Perhaps ironically, *PoM* is then carved into discrete chapters and organised around themes which do not systematically represent the ideas present in it¹²⁷. At a minimum, the possibility of Simmel's ideas being organised according to an immanent logic of *PoM* is overlooked.

Though not yet complete, this final point approaches the crux of my argument. Poggi claims that Simmel is undeniably an unsystematic thinker and writes his analysis of *PoM* accordingly, based on thinkers who – as we have seen – themselves interpret Simmel's work problematically. While partially useful, Poggi's approach is essentially limited. It does not pursue a methodologically unified analysis of money but assumes that *PoM* lacks such unity. Aside from contributing to a general trend in 20th century Anglophone Simmel scholarship, this view appears predicated on misinterpretations and uncharitable interpretations of Simmel's work. Thus, the question is emerging: is a methodologically unified articulation of Simmel's work possible, or even necessary? Concerning *PoM*, can a methodologically unified account of money be drawn from it, and how might it contribute to contemporary discourses on money?

¹²⁵ *PoM* hereafter.

¹²⁶ *PoM* has often been considered largely or wholly a work of sociology, its title notwithstanding (see Appendix, §2).

¹²⁷ Especially considering recent developments in Simmel scholarship (see Appendix, §3).

Chapter 5 – Responding to Poggi’s Thematic Lens: Reading *TPoS* III

Introduction: The Philosophical Boundaries of Science

This chapter expounds the third and final of Simmel’s claims in *The Problem of Sociology*¹²⁸ (1909b) concerning the relationship between science – especially sociology – and philosophy. To situate sociology, Simmel discusses the ‘lower’ and ‘upper’ position of philosophy that bookends all science. The former is constituted by the preconditions and fundamental concepts necessary to conduct an inquiry and – regarding sociology – is the primary remit of *TPoS*. This particularised approach to the world, however, leads to discrete and at times empirically incompletionable lines of inquiry. Hence, these lines of inquiry require both extension and reunification, which is the role of philosophy at and beyond the ‘upper’ bounds of science. This reunification is both necessary and necessarily philosophical because science cannot answer normative questions, though it provides the material to do so; such questions are in the domain of philosophy, for Simmel.

This line of thought continues in the excursus to *TPoS*, published separately in English as *How is Society Possible?* (1910a). I include a brief discussion of the opening few pages of the excursus because it further fleshes out the significance of sociology and its ‘upper’ boundary with the philosophical, for which it provides content. Here, Simmel begins by sketching Kant’s philosophy of nature, which is essentially an arrangement produced by the mind according to its transcendental conditions – i.e., the forms of intuition, the apperceptive I, the reproductive imagination, the categories of the understanding, etc.¹²⁹. The unity of Kant’s nature is a product of the intellect that synthesises its elements into relations from what is given by intuition, not the elements themselves. For Simmel, society can be treated in a similar manner; that is, in terms of its necessary preconditions determining the relations between its elements. However, Simmel’s conception of society is fundamentally distinct from Kant’s conception of nature because the unity of the former is realised and comprehended in its elements, i.e., in individuals.

Based upon this final exposition, I reach two conclusions. *TPoS* – as at least partially philosophical – reveals that separating Simmel’s philosophy and sociology is

¹²⁸ *TPoS* hereafter.

¹²⁹ For the development of and the use of these transcendental preconditions the context of ‘pure reason’, see Kant (1998).

problematic; they both inform each other. A thematic lens obfuscates this link. Relatedly, Simmel's concern with a holistic view contradicts Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim's general presentation of Simmel's thought as savant-like, shallow, or pejoratively subjective.

I also present three further conclusions based upon my entire exegesis of *TPOs*. Namely, Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim's view of Simmel is complicated by their misunderstandings of his work. Moreover, my presentation of Simmel's philosophical argument here – according to its immanent structure – shows that a non-thematic explication of Simmel's thought is possible. Hence, relying on the canon of Simmel scholarship insofar as it embodies the 'narrative of unsystematicity' (NoU) is problematic.

On the Relation Between Science and Philosophy

For Simmel, "exact science" in general – including sociology, however it is conceived – is "hemmed in by two philosophical regions" (1909b, p. 317). These boundaries demarcate what is 'below' and 'above' disciplinary knowledge: roughly the quasi-transcendental precepts and conditions, and metaphysical, respectively, the latter being divided into further categories¹³⁰. The lower, epistemological-logical boundary "comprises the conditions, fundamental concepts, presuppositions of the particular investigation, of which no completion can be found in this [i.e., the unique investigation] itself because they [i.e., conditions, fundamental concepts, presuppositions], rather, already constitute its basis [i.e., the investigation]" (Simmel 1992, pp. 39-40)¹³¹. The articulation of such a lower boundary for sociology appears to be the predominant aim of *TPOs* (Simmel 1909b) and *Soziologie*, chapter one (Simmel 1992, pp. 13-62), and the sense in which this chapter is philosophical.

¹³⁰ See Appendix, §3.

¹³¹ This is my translation of "[d]as eine umfaßt die Bedingungen, Grundbegriffe, Voraussetzungen der Einzelforschung, die in dieser selbst keine Erledigung finden könne, da sie ihr vielmehr schon zugrunde liege" (Simmel 1992, pp. 39-40). Small's version, "[t]he one embraces the limitations, elementary concepts, presuppositions of the particular investigation which in the special investigation itself can find no complete expression, since they rather are at the basis of the investigation" (Simmel 1909b, p. 317), is too passive. The use of 'embrace', though perhaps a more literal translation, renders less clear that 'conditions, fundamental concepts, and presuppositions' constitute philosophy at the 'lower' bounds of disciplinary knowledge. Also, I think it necessary to include 'already' rather than simply 'at the basis' to emphasise that, for Simmel, it is impossible to begin any inquiry without implicit or explicit philosophical preconditions.

In brief, philosophy is the essential condition under which sociology and science in general must analyse reality and synthesise science with the unity of experience, according to Simmel. To produce knowledge under such conditions, science must divide reality into parts, which are nevertheless *connected* and are ultimately understood as elements of a singular reality. This division or abstraction cannot be performed arbitrarily, but rather ought to be carried out according to a set of related, fundamental concepts. Moreover, given the existence of other sciences, any new abstraction must be justified; these concepts must themselves be or lead to a unique understanding of reality. The fundamental concepts of sociology for Simmel are *both* form and content. Roughly, form denotes the momentary crystallisations of interactions between people or the social as such, whereas content denotes the mental – *Seelisch* – source of interactions, which itself interacts with material conditions. Next comes the problem of filtering reality through these lenses, which is particularly troublesome in the case of mental phenomena. Hence, Simmel opts for an initial, quasi-psychological method. However, this method is qualified with the attendant nuance that mental phenomena are themselves a non-mechanical product of historical conditions, which may at times only be interpreted through an analysis of socio-historical conditions. Once these concepts are provisionally formulated and a methodology articulated, then all that remains is their application and reiteration – of which Simmel is fully aware – as is clear in the footnote omitted from Small’s translation. Again, it hardly seems that a so-called ‘dilletante’ would go to such lengths to establish the legitimacy of a particular mode of analysis, rather than simply conducting the analysis. The justification for the apparently disparate nature of Simmel’s analyses – demarcating the field of applicability, the complexity of the human as a non-mechanistic entity influenced by historical circumstance, etc. – has been entirely overlooked, unintentionally or otherwise.

The ‘upper’, metaphysical boundary of ‘exact science’ has a distinct role, for Simmel. That is, “in the other region this particular investigation is carried to completions and correlations [i.e., coherences], and is put in relationship with questions and concepts which have no place within experience and immediately objective [i.e., unmediated] knowledge” (Simmel 1909b, p. 317)¹³². The general role of philosophy as

¹³² Here, I would make some minor clarifications which do not warrant full translation. The original German reads: “in dem andern wird diese Einzelforschung zu Vollendungen und Zusammenhängen geführt und mit den Fragen und Begriffen in Beziehung gesetzt, die innerhalb der Erfahrung und des unmittelbar gegenständlichen Wissens keinen Platz haben” (Simmel 1992, p. 40). Small’s translation

metaphysics is the extension and unification of the particularities generated through the singular investigations (i.e., exact science) that are not found as such within the immediacy of concrete experience. Nevertheless, though these extensions and unifications of particularities are not found as such in experience, they must be integrated into that experience. Put somewhat less abstractly, the ‘extension’ of knowledge aims to remedy the “dissatisfaction with the fragmentary character of the particular details of knowledge[...] and of the series of provable things, [and] leads to attempts at completing these by means of speculation” (Simmel 1909b, p. 317). Where empirical methods fail, ‘epistemological metaphysics’ takes the logic of that which is demonstrable into new formulations reminiscent of a Kantian synthetic a priori, albeit in this sense beginning with empirical determinations and not necessarily yielding apodictic conclusions¹³³. The same speculative means, however, entrench the “disconnectedness and reciprocal incoherence” of these epistemological series – i.e., their epistemological base, that which is demonstrable from this base, and the epistemological-metaphysical speculation built upon this base and the empirically determinable – when organised “into the unity of a complete view” (ibid). On account of belonging to distinct epistemological series, then, sciences may be incommensurate with one another. In short, the mere extension of the epistemological series alone cannot bring coherence to fundamentally distinct sciences, given their divergent abstractions.

How, then, can we bring sense to these fragments of the world? To that end, Simmel asks: what are the “metaphysical significance[s]” of these phenomena (ibid)? These questions can be posed as “the sense or the purpose, as the absolute substance under the relative phenomena, also as the value or religious significance” of said phenomena (ibid). What is the point of these phenomena and how do they impact our lives? As regards the concept of society, such questions, according to Simmel, may be: “[i]s society the purpose of human existence, or the means for the individual?” (ibid, p. 318); “[d]oes its [i.e. society’s] value lie in its practical life, or in the production of an

underplays the type of relation Simmel has in mind by using ‘correlations’. Rather, it seems that Simmel specifically has something like coherence in mind – *Zusammenhang* literally refers to a ‘together-hanging’ or how something hangs together. The plural form suggests that Simmel is referring to multiple axes on which coherence can occur, either internal to ‘particular investigations’ and/or between them. I also include ‘unmediated’ as an alternative to ‘unmittelbar’ to stress that Simmel’s philosophy and disciplinary knowledge mediate a directly accessible knowledge.

¹³³ The best example that comes to my mind is theoretical physics or abstract economic models that take varying degrees of empirical phenomena (e.g., models of natural occurrences or elements of human behaviour) into account.

objective [collective] spirit [Geistes], or in the ethical qualities that it [i.e. society] elicits in the individual"?¹³⁴ (Simmel 1992, p. 40).

These questions do not possess the same "unique relationship" as between that which appears as independent from the "method" that analyses it, roughly the subject matter of a science and the science itself (ibid)¹³⁵. For Simmel, then, such questions do not warrant "a new science which would co-ordinate with existing sciences", as is the case with sociology (ibid). That is, these are rather "*philosophical* questions, and that they have taken society as their object ["Gegenstand" (Simmel 1992, p. 40)] signifies only the extension of an already given type of understanding to a further territory" (Simmel 1909b, p. 318, emphasis original). The meaning of phenomena, in this sense, belong to a well-established tradition – namely philosophy – and are hence not sociological as such, though their theme or "presupposition" is drawn from the particularities of sociological investigation (ibid)¹³⁶. Regardless of the scientific status of philosophy, however, society has no right to be withdrawn as an object of philosophy. This metaphysical aspect of the study of society – namely its significance – cannot be removed "from the advantages or the disadvantages of its relationship to philosophy in general by constituting itself a special science of sociology" because the value of the phenomena is, for Simmel, always an imperative question (ibid).

Similarly, for Simmel, science cannot distance itself from another kind of philosophical question. Returning to epistemological-metaphysical concerns, what are the presuppositions through which society can be thought and how do we determine

¹³⁴ My translation of: "[I]iegt ihr Wert in ihrem funktionellen leben oder in der Erzeugung eines objektiven Geistes oder in den ethischen Qualitäten, die sie an den Einzelnen hervorruft?" (Simmels 1992, p. 40). Small's version, "[i]s the value of society to be found in its functional life, or in the production of an objective mind, or in the ethical qualities which it calls into being in the individual?" (Simmel 1909b, p. 318), warrants two minor and one major change. The two minor changes refer to 'functional' and 'calls into being', which I have rendered more clearly as 'practical' and 'elicits', respectively. Most importantly, the translation of 'Geist' as 'mind' I think overlooks the vital juxtaposition between society and the individual. 'Objective spirit' carries with it the connotation of the will of a people or social relations made manifest, especially post-Hegel – see Redding (2020) for an overview of the term. Small's translation as 'objective mind' elides this subtle point, instead giving the impression that Simmel simply refers to the development of rational individuals, perhaps even in contrast to ethical individuals.

¹³⁵ Small's rendering of "Gegenstand" (Simmel 1992, p. 40) as "object" is ambiguous (Simmel 1909b, p. 318), though understandably so. Gegenstand can be translated as object – as in the aim of an action, or as the thing in front of me – or subject – as in the theme of something. I think previous instances are, I think, relatively clear, though here Simmel seems to be invoking a combination of these meanings best articulated through a more literal translation, namely 'that which stands as over from and against', i.e., independently, of the observation.

¹³⁶ A related distinction between philosophy and science, for Simmel, that appears implicit here is that philosophy generates its own starting point, so to speak, whereas science does not; philosophy 'creates' its conceptual objects where science appropriates them from philosophy as its epistemological preconditions (see Appendix, §3).

these? Such questions are the inverse of normative-metaphysical questions in that they do not presuppose society as such, but only the elements of society. The question ‘how is society possible?’ presupposes that people capable of manifesting sociality – i.e., ‘being-together’ or reciprocally influencing one another – exist, and asks “what are the preconditions of their consciousness that allow their social-being to exist?” (Simmel 1992, p. 42). In other words, the constitution of society is reverse engineered through questions like: what are the structures of consciousness that allow it to influence and be influenced by other consciousnesses? This is not an “historical”, “physical”, or “anthropological” question, for Simmel, though such answers can be legitimately given (Simmel 1909b, p. 318). Rather, this question aims at a more general answer as to how empirical societies, present and past, can “stand under the universal concept of society”; that is, how can “society in general [emerge] as an objective form of subjective souls?” (ibid, p. 319).

Simmel’s response to this question is the subject of the excurses published separately in English as *How is Society Possible?* (1910a). I note that part of Small’s justification for publishing these separately is “that it is a waste of energy to attempt to rehabilitate the term society as an instrument of precision” (in Simmel 1909b, p. 319). This dismissal disregards Simmel’s unwillingness to debate over nomenclature; the *content* of the terms is vital, not their signifier. However, it is likely that the length – over 60 pages total – and complexity of translation also played a role. At any rate, I will not explicate this piece except to make clear its distinction from its obvious Kantian overtones. As an inquiry into the ontology of society – or whichever term one wishes to use – this excursus deserves more space than I can afford it here.

Simmel begins by sketching the Kantian inquiry into the possibility of nature along the following lines:

“Kant could propose and answer the fundamental question of his philosophy, How is nature possible?, only because for him nature was nothing but the representation (*Vorstellung*) of nature. This does not mean merely that “the world is my representation,” that thus we can speak of nature only so far as it is a content of our consciousness, but that what we *call* nature is a special way our intellect assembles, orders, and forms sense-perceptions” (Simmel 1910a, p. 372, emphasis original¹³⁷).

¹³⁷ Round parantheses are Small’s

That is, as Simmel is paraphrasing Kant, nature is an organisation within consciousness of the “given” sense-perceptions – “color, taste, tone, temperature, resistance, smell”, for example – of the mind in various ways (ibid). These basic sense perceptions are then arranged into “objects and series of objects, into substances and attributes and into causal sequences”, for example (ibid). However, this intelligibility or “coherence” of sense-perceptions does not exist in sense-perceptions per se, but in the mind; colour alone does not demarcate an object, but the mind may unify colour and taste (etc.) into aspects of an object, for example (ibid). Absent of this intelligibility, sense-perception is “purely subjective” – i.e., solely dependent on the nature of a given subject (ibid). However, when “taken up by forms of the intellect” (ibid) – quality, quantity, relation, modality¹³⁸ – sense-perceptions are transformed into “fixed regularities”, i.e., objects and their relations (ibid, p. 373). These forms of intellect constitute the “unchangeable”, i.e., objective, basis on which the possibility of nature is grounded (ibid). For Simmel, then, the question:

“[h]ow is nature possible?, i.e. what are the conditions which must be present in order that a “nature” may be given, is resolved by him [Kant] through discovery of the forms which constitute the essence of our intellect and therewith bring into being “nature” as such” (ibid).

That is, the being of nature is not found in the ‘outer’ elements themselves – the ‘thing in itself’ – but in the organisation of these elements as they appear in consciousness according to quality, quantity, relation, and modality.

Society, according to Simmel, can be subjected to a similar analysis; “it is possible to treat in an analogous fashion the question of the aprioristic conditions on the basis of which *society* is possible” (ibid, emphasis original). Like Kant’s conception of nature, the elements of society, too, are “given” in a way that maintains their “discreteness”, namely the individual and their mental life (ibid). The “synthesis” of such elements, too, is a process of consciousness that places these elements into relationships “in definite forms and in accordance with definite laws” (ibid). That is, there are fundamental rules according to which the mental life of individuals coalesces into what we call society. The purpose of Simmel’s investigation is to discover these. However, there is a vital distinction between the unity of Simmel’s society and that of Kant’s nature, namely:

¹³⁸ I take the ‘forms of intellect’ here to refer to Kant’s categories of the understanding (1998, pp. 201-266; see pp. 204-219 for a brief sketch).

“that the latter – for the Kantian standpoint here presupposed – exclusively comes about in the observing subject, [that is,] exclusively from him and is generated from the in-themselves unconnected sensory elements; against which the social unity of its [i.e. society’s] elements, since they are [self-]conscious and synthetically-active, are realised without further [syntheses] and require no observers” (Simmel 1992, p. 43)¹³⁹.

The basic elements of perception comprising Kant’s nature require – or strictly speaking *are* – an imposed synthesis through the forms of intellect. However, the elements of the social are themselves already conscious entities and are thus capable of relations in and of themselves.

That is, the forms of intellect – quality, quantity, relation, and modality – found in the observer bind the non-conscious ‘givens’ of colour, taste, tone, etc. into recognisable objects and their relations. However, the ‘givens’ of society, individuals or perhaps just their mental life, are capable of relations in and of themselves through their reciprocal influencing, i.e., their ‘being-together’ or association. Individual mentalities are both that which is related and the relating force. Thus, Simmel concludes:

“[t]he Kantian theorem: relation[s] can never lie in the things themselves – since it is only brought about by the conditions [of possibility] of subjects – does not apply for social relation, which rather, in fact, actualises itself without mediation in the “things”, that are here the individual souls [Seelen, i.e., ‘minds’]” (Simmel 1992, p. 43)¹⁴⁰.

¹³⁹ My translation of “:daß die letztere – für den hier vorausgesetzten Kantischen Standpunkt – ausschließlich in dem betrachtenden Subjekt zustande kommt, ausschließlich von ihm an und aus den an sich unverbundenen Sinneselementen erzeugt wird; wogegen die gesellschaftliche Einheit von ihren Elementen, da sie bewußt und synthetisch-aktiv sind, ohne weiteres realisiert wird und keines Betrachters bedarf” (Simmel 1992, p. 43, emphasis original – the entire excursus is italicised in this edition). Small’s translation, “the latter–according to the Kantian standpoint here presupposed–comes to existence exclusively in the contemplating unity (Subject), it is produced exclusively by the mind upon and out of the sense materials which are not in themselves inter- connected. On the contrary the societary unity is realized by its elements without further mediation, and with no need of an observer because these elements are consciously and synthetically active” (Simmel 1910a, p. 373). Small gives the impression that the subject is exclusively a ‘contemplating unity’, whereas Simmel presents this unity as a *product* of the subject, implying that the subject retains some independence from this unity. Relatedly, ‘consciously and synthetically active’ imply that consciousness and synthesis are conjoined two activities of the mind, whereas Simmel distinguishes consciousness from the activity of synthesis.

¹⁴⁰ My translation of: “Jener Satz Kants: Verbindung könne niemals in den Dingen liegen, da sie nur vom Subjekte zustande gebracht wird, gilt für die gesellschaftliche Verbindung nicht, die sich vielmehr tatsächlich in den “Dingen”- welche hier die individuellen Seelen sind- unmittelbar vollzieht” (Simmel 1992,

Simmel, then, is articulating a realm which can be comprehended *in itself* by the elements of which it is composed. That is, individuals – or the souls or mental lives of individuals – can comprehend society as such because individuals produce society; unlike the Kantian ‘thing in itself’, society as such is knowable.

Sociology, then, or at least its ‘lower’ philosophical bounds are a de facto critique of Kant’s transcendental idealism because – in the case of the social – phenomena and noumena are collapsed into each other; connection or relations in this case occur in the ‘things themselves’. This also points to one aspect of the value of sociological inquiry, i.e., the ‘upper’ philosophical elements predicated on it. As the site in which phenomena and noumena come together, the social represents an opportunity to comprehend the world without privileging the subject or relegating the ‘in itself’ to unknowability¹⁴¹. In this sense, Simmel also offers a further response to Durkheim. Rather than leading to subjectivism, the social construed along the lines of form-content shows how a new type of objectivity emerges from subjectivities – an objectivity which is both stable and malleable, independent of yet produced by the subject. Philosophising society and sociology – which emerges from and returns to philosophy – thus reveal in their unique and at times overlapping ways this new form of objectivity. Therein, too, lies the value of a philosophy of sociality.

p. 43). Small’s version is as follows “[t]he Kantian theorem: *Connection (Verbindung) can never inhere in the things, since it is only brought into existence by the mind (Subject)*, is not true of the societal connection, which is rather immediately realized in the “things”—namely, in this case the individual souls” (Simmel 1910a, pp. 373-374). This version omits the nuance of Simmel’s portrayal of Kant’s position, namely that the objectivity of the fact that the relation of nature is brought about in the subject is grounded in the conditions of possibility of the subject, which appears to feed into his criticism in the footnote to this sentence (in Simmel 1910a, p. 374).

¹⁴¹ Thinkers like Milà (2005, esp. p. 117 onwards) take this and similar lines of thought in *PoM* to show that Simmel’s account of value is essentially sociological. I would argue that Simmel’s approach is more resolutely philosophical in that the social represents an ontological foundation, so to speak, perhaps analogous to Cornelius Castoriadis’ ‘social-historical’ (e.g., 1997, pp. 196-217). For Castoriadis, the ‘social’ is a self-instituting foundation which creates the valences or “significations” existing “in and through” it (ibid, p. 202 & 209, respectively). These are never univocal within a society – let alone between them – and attain a quasi-discreteness an exactness from historically received ontological categories and “the necessities of language” (ibid, p. 211). To speak of phenomena ‘pre-existing’ society – including the “theorist” (ibid, p. 209) thus understood, is invalid, for Castoriadis. Like Simmel, then, Castoriadis articulates the need to consider the ‘always-situatedness’ of the analyser – that through which so-called ‘natural data’ is constructed – and the “type” of society instantiated by its manifestations (ibid, p. 209, emphasis original; see also ibid pp. 210-216). For Simmel’s conception of ‘type, see Appendix (§3). Moreover, this conception of sociality arguably better approximates ‘form’ – as viewed from a particular perspective and as a self-instituting ontological foundation – than Poggi, Parsons, or Durkheim’s interpretations. Alas, I do not have the space to further pursue this point here.

Conclusion: Rephilosophising Simmel

In the final of the three central claims of *TPoS*, Simmel situates sociology as science into a broader intellectual worldview. Like all science, sociology begins and ends with philosophical questions – what is analysed and through which precepts must one analyse it; what are the implications of the analysis? That is, lower and upper philosophy, respectively. The former involves sundering the unity of the world as it is immediately experienced, and the latter involves piecing it together in a mediated form. The two poles of philosophy are mediated by disciplinary knowledge in the form of sciences.

Delving further into the ‘upper’ bounds of philosophy as applied to sociology, Simmel takes the social to be of particular significance. That is, the social as such is comprised of conscious beings which are both cause and effect of reciprocal influence. In effect, beings become – in Kantian parlance – noumena and phenomena simultaneously, and thus a mode of objectivity becomes possible through analysis of the social which is not possible in relation to other objects¹⁴².

Reflecting these divisions of philosophy onto Simmel’s argument, the first two claims – the subject-matter of sociology and how we study it, respectively – are examples of ‘lower’ philosophy as regards sociology and the third – the relation of science to philosophy – gestures towards ‘upper’ philosophy. Thus, Simmel’s ‘problem of sociology’ is equally philosophical, and straddles the line between ‘pure’ philosophy and ‘pure’ sociology, should such things exist.

This chapter raises a further two specific points against the interpretations of Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim, after which I will make some more general remarks concerning this and the preceding two chapters. First, the boundaries of disciplinary knowledge are, for Simmel, liminal spaces where the strict distinction between philosophy and science is blurred. Though science must ‘outgrow’ its philosophical foundations, it can never escape invoking them either implicitly or explicitly; these foundations are implied in the inquiry. Hence, to argue that Simmel’s philosophy and sociology – or its “significance for *social theory*” (Poggi 1993, p. 69, emphasis original) – can be largely considered separately – as Poggi does – is a fundamentally limited view, particularly if this sociology is viewed as “emphatically” empirical (ibid, p. 50). The

¹⁴² I note that this point also has implications for ‘lower’ philosophy in the sense that it may precipitate a reconceptualisation of objectivity and, hence, of fundamental concepts for both sociology and other sciences. This shows the reflexivity of Simmel’s thought.

underpinning 'lower' philosophy which provides its methodological coherence is overlooked and we are left with the 'unsystematic' view. Here, again, a more accurate view would be dialectical. Simmel's sociology must be considered in two interdependent senses. First, as linked to its philosophical foundations and culminations; second, as an independent inquiry. Any analysis of Simmel's sociology must account for the distinct structure present in each order of analysis, and – for Simmel – their necessary interactions. Similar care must be taken when considering any of Simmel's other works, especially *PoM*. Though the focus of this thesis has been on Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim, this general point could be extended to Simmel scholarship more generally (see Appendix, §2).

Second, a holistic sketch of the relations between sciences further complicates Parsons' picture of Simmel as a 'dilletante' and Durkheim's concerns of conjecture which Poggi appears to have internalised. English translations of Simmel's work were often collections of essays – or simply the excurses to them – cobbled together according to the aims of translators and editors (see Appendix). To arrive at the above view might be understandable if these publications were taken to reflect the structure of Simmel's work. However, to proceed with this ascription despite addressing Simmel's deep – if provisional – methodological engagement which underpins these analyses is, again, uncharitable. To argue for a reconceptualisation of society to avoid mechanistic analyses, to provide an admittedly provisional method, to sketch the relation between an emerging discipline and an established one, all before providing examples of this methodology in practice is not the work of a shallow or whimsical thinker. This view of Simmel's work becomes more problematic when it is predicated on misunderstandings of his concepts, which – as I have shown in Chapters 3-5 – seems to be the case here¹⁴³.

The above leads to three further conclusions. The general aim of this and the previous two chapters was to challenge the NoU as a basis for Simmel scholarship, particularly in Poggi's interpretation of *PoM*. I presented a close reading of Simmel's *The Problem of Sociology* and *How is Society Possible?* – i.e., much of *Soziologie*, chapter one – to justify this challenge. The preceding exegesis has revealed three points. First, the specific arguments of this and the previous two chapters synthesised into a general claim runs as follows: Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim misinterpret various aspects of *TPoS* – the nature of form-content, the remit of sociology, the distinction between disciplinary

¹⁴³ See also Appendix, §2-3.

knowledge and philosophy – and conclude that it – and even Simmel’s work in general – is necessarily unsystematic or unsystematisable. However, their conclusions are called into question on account of their misinterpretations.

Second, the exegesis serves as a general counterexample to Poggi’s interpretation of Simmel. Poggi considers Simmel a pathologically unsystematic thinker, therefore his work – including *PoM* – is unsystematic, therefore one is justified in approaching it according to its ‘themes’. Such a thematic approach, for Poggi, may even improve Simmel’s ideas by introducing some structure. That it is possible to reconstruct Simmel’s work – even if only a chapter or so – and show the progression of the argument, undermines Poggi’s basis for his analysis of *PoM*. That is, the previous three chapters do not align with the connotations Poggi attaches to Simmel’s ‘relativism’ – i.e., superficiality, subjectivism, or irrationalism. Simmel does not begin from a mere whim, but from the need to create a new scientific perspective. This is an extraordinarily complex and fundamental task. Hence, the relative brevity with which Simmel addresses it here – though he certainly addresses them – can be excused without interpreting it as superficial. As illustrated above, the breadth of Simmel’s argument is rather astonishing; hence, to keep this chapter to a manageable size – it already runs into the scores of pages – some degree of generality in his remarks is warranted, especially when considered with the remainder of this work and with his corpus as a whole¹⁴⁴. To begin an argument for and sketch of a unique discipline from the nature of being itself hardly gives the impression of superficiality, except under the most uncharitable interpretations. At least in this case, then, Poggi’s character assessment of Simmel does not hold.

Nor does Simmel appear to be advocating subjective relativism. In sketching this new perspective on the world, Simmel is adamant that it must at least provisionally identify something with at least part of its existence *independent* from the subject, i.e., an object. However, part of this identification must account for the constitution of the subject – i.e., the necessary structures of the interpretive lens. Only thus can it avoid the kind of speculation that both Durkheim and Poggi ascribe to Simmel – regarding specifically form-content and in general, respectively. This ‘independence from the subject’ can be understood in two senses. First, that the object can be analytically

¹⁴⁴ Unfortunately, I did not have the space to further explicate the relation of the introduction to *Soziologie* to its subsequent chapters, which comprise the ‘application’ and further determination of sociology as sketched in chapter one.

removed from the subjects under analysis, and hence exists – if only conceptually – apart from them. Simmel demonstrates this sense of independence from the subject by provisionally illustrating cases where ostensibly similar intentions result in different kinds of interactions and vice versa, i.e., the relative independence of form and content from one another. Second, that form-content is independent from the subject conducting the analysis. That is, the science that Simmel is developing – sociology – is intended to be open to all subjects, at least in principle. Alone, this may appear somewhat banal. However, it hints at Simmel's more fundamental conception of objectivity. Namely, objectivity is only possible with respect to criteria of some sort: objectivity implies or is a relation of sorts. The development of sociology, then, aims to determine the criteria according to which the social can be objectively theorised. The ontological status of the criteria does not appear to be addressed here, except that they are precursors to scientific perspectives and that, lacking corresponding empirical objects, they require a different type of justification. In *PoM*, however, Simmel appears to extend something like this conceptualisation of objectivity to criteria themselves¹⁴⁵ (Simmel 2011, pp. 114-126), thus hinting at a consistent understanding of objectivity between his works.

Simmel's efforts in closing his sketch of sociology involved demarcating the limits of the sociological perspective. As he briefly articulates in this chapter, these limits are – or stray into – philosophy. That is, given that neither sociology nor any edifice of scientific perspectives is itself a complete picture of the world – and yet these perspectives are both derived from and return to the world – Simmel must invoke something other than science¹⁴⁶. For Simmel: sociology begins and ends with non-empirical – i.e., philosophical, questions. At the foundational and 'uppermost' levels of sociology, the line between it and philosophy is blurred. Form-content is a contribution to sociology's foundation, whereas a potential critique of transcendental idealism and the value of 'being-together' points to its significance. Defining the scope of any enterprise – in this case of scientific discipline – is not, again, the mark of a subjectivistic or illogical thinker, à la Poggi's view. Rather, this displays an appreciation of the depth of the question of scope, considered at the level of perspective. Or, to use Goodstein's

¹⁴⁵ Here, Simmel analyses objectivity and value as the function of the constitution of subjects, which is not 'subjectivism' in its usual sense.

¹⁴⁶ I leave open the question of whether philosophy is, for Simmel, a unique perspective or something qualitatively different.

(2017) more contemporary idiom, Simmel considers the questions of scope at the level of 'disciplinarity' and in general in relation to the totality of things. This points to a broader structure in Simmel's thought, which operates at an interdisciplinary – as opposed to intradisciplinary – level. Not only does Simmel consider the structure of sociology, he also – with an eye to the total picture – considers the role of sociology within the suite of sciences and philosophy in general. Individual sciences function like sets of criteria according to which objective investigations may be undertaken. Consideration of this order of structure is entirely absent from Poggi, Parsons, and Durkheim's analyses. This highlights the need to account for multiple orders of structure in Simmel's work. Before this, however, one must recognise that a method is present.

Thus, Poggi's framing of Simmel's work does not accord with the Simmel of *TPoS* and is further undermined by his reliance on Parsons and Durkheim. Poggi's interpretation of *PoM* is thereby called into question. How might Simmel's ideas be expressed in a system or unity derived from his work, then? As regards *PoM*, might an immanently unified account of money be drawn from it, rather than discrete insights? These questions are reopened.

This is not to say that Simmel's work is beyond criticism. Far from it. From the above, one could legitimately question Simmel on several key points. Consider the nature of a 'perspective', for example. If the world can only be rendered intelligible through a perspective, what is the ontological status of the space from which we determine the parameters of this perspective? Is this prior (pre)theoretical space itself a perspective upon the world in Simmel's sense? If this is a perspective, how can it ground other perspectives if they are fundamentally limited? Where does it fit in relation to the edifice of perspectives? If it is not a perspective, what is it and how can it relate to perspectives? Moreover, how is it possible to determine whether something is missing from our worldview – i.e., that a unique contribution to its intelligibility is possible? Prior to developing this perspective, how can we comprehend what is missing? On the specifics of Simmel's sociology, one might also critique its apparent unwieldiness. Is the requirement to consider the socio-historical context or the potentially infinite reciprocity of interaction too impractical, especially when Simmel admits that his method may not be possible in certain cases? At any rate, as Goodstein, Lehtonen, and Pyyhtinen have shown in general¹⁴⁷, responses to these sorts of questions can be derived from Simmel's

¹⁴⁷ See Appendix (§3).

work. However, an understanding of Simmel's philosophy is key. To conduct such an investigation, one must first see the possible synthesis of Simmel's peripatetic work, rather than present it as a 'problem' to be solved – a contamination to be purified.

Thirdly and relatedly, the above reading has shown that we cannot rely on second-hand accounts of Simmel's supposed unsystematicity. At the very least, in combination with contemporary scholarship the above shows that any reading which strays too far from the text is suspicious (Appendix, §3); any interpretations relying on previously 'established' norms of Simmel's unsystematicity ought to be questioned. This can be difficult when the 'authorities' on his work emphasise its apparent disjointedness, such as Frisby's translation of *PoM*¹⁴⁸. However, my reading of *TPoS* provides further insight into how Simmel's thought coheres. That is, in broad alignment with contemporary scholarship, this text further demonstrates that Simmel sees philosophy as bookending 'perspectives' – i.e., sciences, roughly speaking – by furnishing them with initial concepts to begin their inquiries – i.e., to divide the experiential unity of the world into manageable parts – and by relating these inquiries to normative questions, reunifying them into an image of the totality. Philosophy must thus retain a connection to the world and science a connection to philosophy: either one alone is fundamentally incomplete or implicitly invoking the other. Further, we see Simmel's non-positivist conception of objectivity; the objective is that which exhibits a *relative* stability in relation to subjects and to criteria, which shift according to the perspective¹⁴⁹. Society – i.e., interaction – may be stable when considered in abstract, yet the forms through which it is realised may change¹⁵⁰.

More fundamentally, form – which is a conceptual precursor to Simmel's metaphysical principle, Wechselwirkung – (see Appendix, §3), shows the beginnings of Simmel's dialectics. That is, the analysis of 'form' is one in which the elements – contents – refer to, shape, and are shaped by each other without losing their independence from

¹⁴⁸ Frisby inserts subheadings – which were not originally included in the text (e.g., Simmel 1907) into the body of *PoM* (Frisby, 2004, p. xiii), arguably emphasising its 'fragmentariness'. Moreover, Frisby implies in his introduction to the translation that all of Simmel's works "are either actual essays or collections of them" (Frischeisen-Köhler, in Frisby 2011, p. 5)

¹⁴⁹ This is more fully developed in *PoM* and, in perhaps an intensification of his perspectives, Simmel argues that the subject contains something of this objective.

¹⁵⁰ On the relations of concepts to their manifestations bears a similar relation to that in *PoM* between the concept of money to its instantiations: the concept is not a generalisation or set of universally present features. Rather, money is "one of those normative ideas that obeys the laws they themselves represent (Simmel 2011, p. 130); an idealisation of the *logic* of the phenomena taken to its endpoint. For an elucidation of form along these lines, see Tenbruck (1965 pp. 85-96).

one another. Content is both discrete and interconnected; a full appreciation of content requires both viewpoints. Consideration of any social form, then, necessitates not reducing the individuals involved to that form – i.e., the senses in which they are *not* social, and how this contributes to the emergence of form. Our biological constitution, for example, determines how we can speak or motion to one another without itself precipitating interaction in Simmel's strict sense. As a mode of analysis expanded beyond the social, Simmel's dialectics, then, operate in a similar way. As regards money, for example, this may involve multiple viewpoints brought to bear in analysis. Each viewpoint contributes something to the overall picture that the others cannot, thus collectively determining what money 'is' *without eliminating or overcoming any of these perspectives, but by showing both their discreteness and their interrelation*. A demonstration of this, however, is beyond the scope of this thesis. All I claim here is that this possibility remains open.

On the question as to whether such dialectics, as they operate in specific analyses or in a multilayered 'perspectival' method generally, exhausts the significance of *PoM*, this requires determination elsewhere. The possibility of determining such a significance, however, *is* predicated on understanding both *that* a method is possible and something of *what* that method may be.

Chapter 6 – Conclusion: A Case for Returning to Simmel on His Terms

I began this thesis by identifying and sketching the need to rehabilitate Simmel's work. My starting premise was the existence and historical prevalence of the 'narrative of unsystematicity' (NoU) in Simmel scholarship – only now being rethought (see Appendix). Moreover, this narrative emerges at least partially from a sociological lens, which has influenced both which works were translated and how they were interpreted. The elements of the NoU which remain are exacerbated by the piecemeal 'use' of Simmel's concepts – particularly in the context of money – which contribute to Simmel's Anglophone image as an unsystematic thinker. I argued that Poggi's analysis of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*¹⁵¹ (2011) provided a sound basis for critiquing the NoU because: it addresses one of Simmel's major works, it embodies the NoU position, and it provides an opportunity to engage with other historically important figures in Simmel scholarship – namely, Durkheim and Parsons. Rather than analyse *PoM*, I opted to derive a response from *The Problem of Sociology*¹⁵² (1909b). This is warranted, I argued, given: the broad scope and complexity of *PoM* relative to the scope of this thesis; the relative underuse of *TPoS* in Simmel scholarship; and that *TPoS* articulates the concepts around which Parsons and Durkheim centre their critique.

On this basis, I began sketching the NoU as presented by Poggi. Drawing on and making similar arguments to Durkheim and Parsons, Poggi concludes that Simmel's thought is pathologically unsystematic, and his concepts insufficiently refined, both of which likely emerge from his 'relativist' philosophy. Yet, for Poggi, Simmel presented some useful insights in *PoM* which justified a 'thematic' reading, often through the lens of other so-called systematic thinkers. Here, I argued Poggi's justification for a 'thematic' reading of *PoM* falls short; that is, such a reading is not reflective of Simmel's work and instead distorts it. As a preliminary demonstration of this, I pointed to several misunderstandings by Durkheim and Parsons that underpin Poggi's position. For Durkheim, Simmel's concept of form is an 'empty' concept too imbricated with 'philosophical' speculation. For Parsons, the explanatory power of form-content is limited, and which must resolve itself in lifeless taxonomy, speculation, or fundamental revision. I argued, provisionally, that both Durkheim and Parsons misunderstood Simmel's form-content, which undermined both Poggi's basis for his 'thematic' approach

¹⁵¹ *PoM* hereafter.

¹⁵² *TPoS* hereafter.

and his 'resolution' of Simmel's unsystematicity. To that extent, then, Poggi's analysis of *PoM* is fundamentally limited, though his contribution did bring it into some contemporary relevance.

As a further response to Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons, I explicated Simmel's *TPoS* over the following three chapters. This explication, I argued, revealed the inadequacies of these thinkers' interpretations of Simmel. In Chapter 3, I showed that 'content' has a broader scope than Parsons' interpretation admits, and 'form' is not an empty abstraction in Durkheim's sense. Moreover, Simmel's intentions for sociology are, on the one hand, narrower than those of Parsons, who intends sociology to synthesise the emergent value systems of technology, economics, and politics. For Simmel, sociology is related to and intermeshed with other disciplinary knowledges, and thus provides a unique synthesis but is by no means the only unitary perspective on society in its broad sense. In fact, Simmel draws our attention to the need to distinguish society as a community versus the social as such; Parsons appears to address the former sense. On the other hand, Simmel's sociology is broader than that of Parsons and Durkheim. That is, for Simmel, society is not *sui generis* but is produced by reciprocal interactions; sociology must analyse these interactions. In both cases, a misrecognition of Simmel's aims and concepts leads to an uncharitable dismissal of his ideas. Poggi, too, creates a distinction between the three supposed modes of Simmel's sociology without tying each mode to its singular methodological base, thus giving the impression of vacillation in Simmel's work and character where there is none.

Chapter 4 continued the explication of *TPoS* and arrived at three further intermediary conclusions. Related to the previous discussion of content, Simmel's sociology is not narrowly psychologistic. Unlike Parsons' interpretation in particular, Simmel goes to significant lengths to distinguish sociology from psychology. Sociology must initially resort to quasi-psychological methods, though its aims are different from those of psychology. For Simmel, the aims of sociology are nomothetic and ideographic, whereas those of psychology are nomothetic. Moreover, contra psychology, sociology addresses what is realised by psychological processes rather than these processes *per se*. Again, the emphasis on material conditions influencing content is overlooked. Simmel explicitly buttresses the form-content abstraction between empirical perspectives: the specific agents, their immediate circumstance, and broader historical circumstance all feed in to diagnosing content. Hence, Durkheim's fear of subjective

conjecture fuelled by unchained abstraction is unwarranted. And finally, that Simmel did not build a comprehensive systematic sociology on his methodological foundation does not render him an unsystematic or capricious thinker. Rather, if Simmel's contributions are considered as demonstrations of a general methodology – which are best demonstrated by a broad array of analyses – then the disjunction between these analyses is understandable: they demonstrate the breadth of applicability of Simmel's sociology, and an attempt to refine it. Hence, designating Simmel 'unsystematic' on the grounds of disparate sociological analyses – as Poggi does, in part – is uncharitable, too.

In Chapter 5, I explicated the final section of *TPoS* and part of *How is Society Possible?* (1910a), in which Simmel provides a holistic sketch of the relation between science and philosophy. Here, two further intermediary conclusions arise, after which I outline three general conclusions that follow from Chapters 3-6. The first specific conclusion is that Simmel's sociology must be considered in relation to philosophy. *TPoS* itself is an example of Simmel's 'lower' philosophy – roughly, methodology – applied to the development of sociology. However, *TPoS* also constitutes, for Simmel, a preliminary foray into sociology; the distinction between both fields is blurred. To the extent that this liminal space is sociological, Simmel's sociology is not – as per Poggi – an exclusively empirical inquiry, though it must certainly be empirically informed. Sociology and all disciplines must, for Simmel, be considered dialectically: as both independent inquiries and as emerging from and returning to philosophical questions – i.e., 'lower' and 'upper' philosophy respectively. Second, that Simmel addresses the structure of an intellectual worldview in general again complicates the picture presented of him as intellectually shallow or capricious, especially when this is predicated on the above misinterpretations.

From the specific intermediary conclusions in Chapters 3-6, I reached three general conclusions. First, a synthesis of the preceding conclusions, which may be presented as follows. Poggi, Durkheim, and Parsons' interpretations of Simmel's work are all undermined by their various misunderstandings of it. Poggi's schema for interpreting *PoM* is particularly compromised because he diagnoses its unsystematicity as emerging from a pathology of Simmel's, which then manifests in Simmel's work. Durkheim and particularly Parsons do so, too, but perhaps less explicitly. In short, why should we accept an interpretation of *PoM* predicated on misreadings, misunderstandings, and excessive narrowness? I claim we should not.

Second, that it was possible to present Simmel's argument in a structured way belies Poggi's general view of Simmel as a capricious, unsystematic thinker. Taken in its entirety, I claim the above hardly appears as the work of Poggi's whimsical relativist or an unsystematic thinker. Though it is complex¹⁵³, I have presented Simmel's sketch of sociological methodology in a relatively straightforward fashion. Schematically put, Simmel's argument runs as follows:

- (1) Due to the increasing inability of science to comprehend a changing world, a new science of the social is necessary; the concepts of 'form' and 'content' best capture what is missing in contemporaneous social science, namely an inquiry into the social as such;
- (2) 'Form' and 'content' can be apprehended through a threefold method analysing and synthesising associations as: situated in immediate circumstances, abstracted from immediate circumstances, and in relation to broader institutions;
- (3) This science – like any other – requires philosophically determined precepts and generates material to answer philosophical questions; disciplinary knowledge is situated within philosophical contours in a broader intellectual worldview.

That is, Simmel identifies the need, the object, the method, and position of sociology within the general corpus of science and philosophy, respectively. As a methodology, this sequence seems altogether straightforward. In the case of *TPoS*, then, Poggi's view of Simmel does not hold. Moreover, as a *philosophical* argument – remembering that Poggi considered Simmel's philosophy irrational and his philosophical ideas lacking systematic expression – this shows that Simmel's philosophy is structured, even if his articulation of it here does not constitute a system in the conventional sense. In conjunction with Simmel's explicit concern for and reconceptualisation of objectivity¹⁵⁴, and general depth of thought, Poggi's pathologising of Simmel's character such that no immanent unity in Simmel's thought is possible – except thematically – is excessive. Poggi's subsequent presentation of *PoM* therefore does not attempt to unify its 'insights' and instead discretises them. Therefore, Poggi's approach is fundamentally

¹⁵³ I note also that this complication can in part be attributed to translation issues.

¹⁵⁴ As cited in Chapter 5, this is more fully expressed in *PoM*, which I can only flag here due to brevity concerns.

limited, and a new approach sensitive to the possibility of this unity in Simmel's work is required, for both intrinsic and instrumental purposes.

Third, Poggi represents a more general view found in Anglophone Simmel scholarship (see Appendix, §2). This view takes it for granted that Simmel is an unsystematic thinker, and that his 'insights' ought to be parsed into discrete, disciplinary units often purified of any philosophical influence. My reading here contributes to an emerging view which argues that the former is untrue and the latter only partially (see Appendix, §3). Namely, reliance on secondary scholarship – much of which replicates the above view in its practice or intent – must be tempered with critical analysis of original texts. A fundamental rethinking of Simmel's work is underway. With it, many opportunities to revitalise Simmel's work for contemporary problems – including analyses of money – are emerging. Simmel's work has also been shown to be intrinsically philosophical in a peculiar sense. This philosophy is nascent in *TPoS*, most obvious in the necessary and general relation between science or disciplinary knowledges and philosophy. Both highlight the need to return to primary texts as much as possible given the language barriers¹⁵⁵, and the importance of (re)translating Simmel's oeuvre.

From the above we can draw several valuable implications for Simmel scholarship. First, neither mine nor Simmel's point is that the philosophical – whatever this involves – takes precedence over disciplinary knowledge; rather, the point is that neither science, so to speak, nor philosophy in its fullest sense is possible without the other. Any initial 'intuitive' and 'philosophical' position must articulate something novel or significant – and necessarily particular – about the world to avoid unhinged speculation. The determination of its significance, however, takes us back to the realm of philosophy, albeit in a distinct sense¹⁵⁶. Thus, when interpreting Simmel, it is crucial to understand the methodological role of philosophy and its relation to disciplinary knowledge – i.e., as constituting its boundaries and 'reaching in' on either side. Without this understanding, Simmel's works – or their elements – will appear disjointed. As applied to *PoM*, for example, the 'Analytic Part' and the 'Synthetic Part' must be situated within Simmel's conceptions of 'lower' and 'upper' philosophy, respectively. Moreover,

¹⁵⁵ I note that Poggi, too, urges his readers to read *PoM*, not to rely on his interpretation (1993, p. xi).

¹⁵⁶ Even if it takes a new name as a sub-discipline of a general science, 'upper' philosophy cannot remove itself from philosophy. For example, "[w]hether philosophy is recognised as a science or not, the philosophy of society has no legal right to withdraw itself from the advantages or the disadvantages of its relationship to philosophy in general by constituting itself a special science of sociology" (Simmel 1909b, p. 318).

PoM must be read as underlying, overarching, and ‘reaching into’ various disciplines – i.e., contemporaneous conceptions of psychology, economics – not just or even primarily into sociology¹⁵⁷. By emphasising the various disciplinary knowledges around which Simmel’s philosophy orbits in *PoM* according to its divisions, I suspect one would get a better sense of the prismatic unity that Simmel generates in the text. Thus, one would not need to resort to thematic interpretations except for reasons of brevity¹⁵⁸.

Secondly and relatedly, labour of the sort undertaken in *TPoS* is necessary to legitimate a perspective, and this labour is philosophical. That is, Simmel’s ‘relativism’ is categorically *not* a case of anything goes, as is suggested by the label relativist – in its superficial sense – dilettante, or flâneur. Any new perspective must therefore articulate its own necessity and significance to and in the world, respectively; that is, it must be “independent and precisely delimited” (Simmel 1909b, p. 294). The process of establishing a perspective “assume the odium of alluding to intuitive processes”, regarding an initial demarcation of scope and method, however “far as the thing now in mind is from the intuition presupposed by speculative metaphysics” (Simmel 1909b, p. 308). Only once this initial, intuitive process has been traversed can it be transmuted into “motives and norms” that constitute the culture of an established perspective (ibid, p. 309). The perspectives in *PoM*, for example, take this labour for granted in the case of psychology, economics, and sociology – at least to a certain extent – and engages with their ‘lower’ and ‘upper’ philosophical elements – i.e., their fundamental concepts, methods, and object; and normative implications, respectively. Such engagement with perspectives in *PoM* seems to be the source of confusion as to whether *PoM* is ‘really’ sociological – e.g., Coser (1977, p. 193) – or whether its themes might have been better treated within economics (Poggi 1993, p. 57). Curiously, few seem to consider *PoM* a psychological work on these grounds. At any rate, Simmel sees any complex phenomenon – e.g., money – as explicable only with respect to multiple disciplinary foundations. To shoehorn *PoM* or any other of his major works into a singular discipline overlooks this crucial point.

¹⁵⁷ Milà (2005) partially realises this approach by recognising the unity of *PoM*, but for reasons that I alluded to above, falls short of fully situating it in Simmel’s broader philosophy.

¹⁵⁸ As outlined in the Appendix (Excursus), given the predominantly economic, not to mention the functionalist, conceptions of money, Simmel’s *PoM* offers a largely untapped, rich avenue to contribute to the growing non-economic literature on money.

Building on this point, thirdly, one of Simmel's central points in his work appears to be the mutual legitimacy of contradictory points of view. As Salz articulates it, Simmel's relativism expresses that "the coexistence of logical incompatibilities is a law of life" (1959, p. 235). This expression of relativism cannot simply state paradoxical claims or contradictory viewpoints. Rather, relativism must render it plausible through a form of grounding labour, which in the case of disciplinary knowledge is philosophical. Such a point cannot be expressed from within a singular perspective except in a cursory way. By showing that radically different perspectival logics established from distinct philosophical bases each reveal a unique aspect of reality, Simmel's fundamental point is most fully articulated. From the perspective of *PoM*, for example, the fundamental concepts constituting economics, psychology, and perhaps sociology are necessary to explicate the phenomena of money. Hence, for Simmel, there is a necessary entanglement or tension of perspectives in the comprehensive analysis of an object.

The necessity of entanglement has extensive consequences for Simmel scholarship – especially for *PoM* as the first holistic expression of this point. Any attempt to 'systematise' Simmel's work along the axis of any singular perspective – e.g., sociology or philosophy – or the attempt to isolate each perspective from these tensions – e.g., into themes – entirely overlooks this point. Starting from and entrenching a position that views Simmel's work as requiring 'systematisation' – as Poggi and many before him do – elides the expression of Simmel's relativism. That is, by purifying contradictory experience of that contradiction, a crucial aspect of Simmel's account of experiences is destroyed.

Thereby, such inquiries essentially limit the radicality of Simmel's views – e.g., that of money, which must be understood precisely as a phenomenon composed of contradictory elements. For example, as a precept of economics, money may be a set of identical units; whereas certain quantities of money may impact the ways we interact with one another, thereby becoming something other than identical units – an impossible analysis if money is considered only economically¹⁵⁹. Moreover, money is

¹⁵⁹ For example, money as such represents "what is common to economic objects" (Simmel 2011, p. 127) – i.e., that aspect of things which is exchangeable. Yet, when the concept of money is limited by its socio-cultural situatedness, it faces limits to the expression of economic value and retains a peculiar, unique aesthetic quality (ibid, pp. 296-298).

determined by or largely *is* use-value, yet as a use-value becomes an end in itself¹⁶⁰. For Simmel, to the extent that each claim is derived from or is constitutive of a well-grounded perspective, each claim is valid; that is, neither claim underlying these tensions ‘really’ constitutes money on its own. Resolving either of these tensions – and many more elucidated in *PoM* – in favour of either side underplays the complexity of money. To say otherwise is, in a sense, unsystematic because it does not accord with the phenomenon as it is experienced from other valid perspectives – the structure of Simmel’s intellectual worldview is overlooked. In short, Simmel’s theorisation of money is in dialectical tension with itself, and *PoM* is in many ways an effort to render each of these perspectives and their tensions plausible and intelligible. The current proliferation of ostensibly new forms of money – e.g., digital currency – and the forced adoption of digital forms of existing money due to COVID-19 restrictions arguably multiplies the perspectives necessary to analyse it. However, Poggi’s view of Simmel would have us limit such perspectives on account of their ‘contradictoriness’. This limitation can only produce an anaemic interpretation of Simmel’s work, unable to comprehensively elucidate multifaceted and complex phenomena.

Following from this point and fourthly, elucidating Simmel’s major works require holistic studies. This requirement also informed my decision to provide a comprehensive and close reading of *TPoS* here, the need for which is best articulated in retrospect. That is, explicating the multiple and mutually contradictory perspectives necessary to explicate Simmel’s analyses is difficult via analyses of narrow sections or – as often occurs in journals – via the ‘use’ of certain concepts – e.g., ‘pure’ money (Chainiyom & Giordano 2019). Again, if the tension of multiple viewpoints and their conceptual logics is constitutive of complex phenomena, for Simmel, then this cannot be achieved except at a cursory level by using one or two concepts; and the use of many more concepts from discrete perspectives is difficult in a standard-length paper. Rather, this tension must be generated through a suite of concepts and perspectival logics, which is difficult to achieve in the limited scope of academic papers. This is not to say that nothing of use can be gained by such approaches. Poggi does not consider his work a substitute for reading *PoM* and encourages others to read the original text; articles may develop concepts used by Simmel in interesting ways. Whether this constitutes a Simmelian

¹⁶⁰ For Simmel’s means becoming ends, see – as per Frisby’s insertion of subtitles into the text – ‘The psychological growth of means into ends’ (2011, pp. 245-249); for its relation to money, see ‘Money as the most extreme example of means becoming ends’ (ibid, pp. 249-250).

analysis, however, is a distinct question. That Poggi's approach is ultimately not representative of a Simmelian analysis has been addressed. Regarding shorter papers, given the necessarily minimal or only first-order role of tension of plausible and logically incompatible perspectives in such analyses, I suggest that perhaps the distinctive element of a uniquely Simmelian analysis is missing in these shorter attempts.

Together, the above constitutes a sketch of why and how Simmel's work ought to be reconsidered. That is, Simmel's work – especially *PoM* – remains largely misunderstood. In sum, then, Simmel's work offers both a response and an invitation. He invites us to think complex phenomena in paradoxical yet grounded ways. Societal-being – forms – is predicated on non-social content. Money is in some sense present as an object of barter, of credit, as commodity¹⁶¹, and as social institution. Analysis of both is open to philosophy of the deepest kind. Simmel does not ask us to choose between disciplines nor between disciplinary knowledge and philosophy: both require the other. Nor does this result in a 'fragmented' analysis, wherein each fragment is arbitrarily determined and isolated from every other one. Each fragment requires grounding labour of the sort manifest in *TPoS*, and reunification in questions of value – 'upper' philosophy. Nor is this analysis confused; Simmel's position is more radical. Seemingly mutually exclusive possibilities can and do coexist in the world. Anything less than a holistic analysis risks overlooking the radicality of Simmel's reconceptualisation of structure according to his relativist contours, replicating Poggi's – and Durkheim and Parsons' – discretisation of Simmel's ideas. The role of philosophy, then, is to disclose how this seeming impossibility becomes possible. Precisely how Simmel achieves this – in *PoM* and elsewhere – must be the object of another study, for which this thesis merely charts a course.

¹⁶¹ That is, regardless of the precise historical sequence in which they occur.

Appendix: A Historiography of Anglophone Simmel Scholarship with Special Reference to the NoU and *PoM*

Introduction: A Sketch of Simmel Scholarship

This appendix provides an overview of the past century of Anglophone Simmel scholarship. Simmel's work has at times been subjected to narrow, overly instrumental interpretation. Such interpretations have contributed to a general, unfair characterisation of Simmel as an unsystematic, capricious thinker. However, an awareness of these instrumental interests in Simmel's work reveals how such interests may lead to very distinct, often incommensurate analyses. Highlighting the various viewpoints of these analyses is itself part of the propaedeutic aim of this appendix: from the articulation of these viewpoints, I argue for a rereading of Simmel's work that unites some of its themes. I am not advocating for a purist reading as such, whatever that may mean; rather, I gesture towards what many secondary texts may obscure – namely, the unity in Simmel's work. This is especially the case with analyses that diagnose Simmel's work as 'unsystematic' and therefore attempt to systematise it.

Given the broad nature of the task to sketch a century of scholarship, the discussion must remain somewhat general; many discrete strands must be woven together into a composite picture. These approaches may be roughly categorised as those that focus on Simmel's 'sociology' (e.g., Albion Small, and Kurt Wolff¹⁶²), those that focus on his 'philosophy' (e.g., Rudolph Weingartner), those that focus on *PoM* (e.g., Lewis Coser) and those that focus on method (e.g., Elizabeth Goodstein). These categories are not mutually exclusive – most analyses include elements of multiple, or even all these approaches. However, those who emphasise all but the last category tend to consider Simmel as an unsystematic thinker, with notable exceptions (e.g., Arthur Salz), and thus contribute to a more general representation of Simmel's work that I termed 'the narrative of unsystematicity' (NoU). Though I present these approaches in an approximately chronological order, I also suggest how each 'stage' emerges from the preceding scholarship, either as a continuation or as a response. Moreover, in charting this course I also emphasise the legitimacy of each approach. That is, I do not argue that these approaches are simply or simplistically 'wrong', but that their aims – what they

¹⁶² Albeit in different senses: Small is interested in Simmel's attempt to legitimise sociology as a discipline, whereas Wolff is more concerned with providing a comprehensive overview of Simmel's method of sociology. This will be elucidated below.

seek to ‘get’ from Simmel’s work – the analytical frame – often limits what may be found in Simmel’s work.

A final editorial note. In this appendix, I have given relative prominence to some scholars who typically have not featured prominently in Anglophone Simmel scholarship (e.g., Friedrich Tenbruck, Salz, Anna Wessely). These thinkers prefigure contemporary Simmel scholarship and thus I consider it important to show that these currents existed prior to its current revival – often due to a lack of translation or the limited scope of their contribution – by more famous and comprehensive contributions by the likes of Wolff, Coser, or David Frisby. What the overshadowed thinkers’ works lack in comprehensiveness, however, they make up for in incisiveness. This will become evident below. Also, where I address contemporary Simmel scholarship, I do so at relative length because it illustrates the thrust of this thesis – the need for a rethinking of Simmel’s work.

In the interests of clarity, I have divided Simmel scholarship into three broad ‘stages’. The first stage concerns the introduction of Simmel’s work to the Anglophone world. Perhaps the most important journal in this regard is *The American Journal of Sociology* and its editor at the turn of the nineteenth century, Albion Small. To establish and foster the development of sociology at the University of Chicago, Small would become a prolific translator of Simmel’s work. However, Small’s focus would result in many of Simmel’s ostensibly ‘non-sociological’ works to be overlooked for translation, in turn contributing to a picture of Simmel as primarily a sociologist and dilettante. Robert Parks and Ernest Burgess would include some of Small’s translations and some of Parks’ in their contribution to the development of sociology in the US. Also at the University of Chicago, George Herbert Mead would pen a generally positive review of what was then and is today, Simmel’s major work, *Philosophy of Money*¹⁶³ (2011). Although sensitive to the disciplinary affiliations made overt in its title, Mead considered it a work of sociology, at least in the last analysis. From the beginning, then, Anglophone interest in Simmel’s work took a specific, largely sociological form. With few other disciplinary channels to convey Simmel’s ideas, Talcott Parsons’ subsequent and conscious omission of Simmel’s work from his tome on social action was therefore more impactful. Simmel was thereby condemned to relative obscurity.

¹⁶³ *PoM* hereafter.

The second stage may be characterised as having a more immanent focus on Simmel's work, that is, a lesser emphasis on the utility of Simmel's ideas than their explication. Emerging in the mid-twentieth century, the first among these scholars whom I discuss is Kurt Wolff. Beginning from perceived limitations in previous scholars' engagement with Simmel's work, Wolff aimed to develop Simmel's sociology into a logically coherent theory, particularly by clarifying Simmel's fundamental distinction between form and content. This would also involve purging the so-called philosophical aspects of Simmel's work which – for Wolff – contribute to its generally 'unsystematic' nature. In what initially appears as a contrasting view, Rudolph Weingartner tackles Simmel's work from a philosophical point of view. He argues that a kind of coherence is present that is neither one of style nor personality. Rather, it is an underlying philosophical position resulting from the common structure of Simmel's philosophies of 'culture' and 'life'. Weingartner ambivalently concludes, however, that this structure falls short of a system but remains a novel contribution to philosophy. As for Weingartner and to some extent Wolff, Lewis Coser concedes a pattern to Simmel's work but falls short of designating it systematic. For its systematic iteration, one must turn to Robert Merton or Coser himself. Like Wolff alone, however, Coser advocates for a 'sociological' reading of Simmel's work, including *PoM*, that may – at least – extract at coherent disciplinary approach from it.

The views of Coser heavily influenced – and Wolff provided many of the translations for – yet another viewpoint on Simmel's supposed unsystematicity, namely that of Donald Levine. Himself a translator of Simmel's works, Levine stresses that the apparent disjointedness of Simmel's sociology arises from his pedagogic aims. That is, Simmel aims to educate and provoke his audience, rather than present a system of philosophy or sociology. Moreover, in conjunction with Ellwood Carter and Eleanor Gorman, Levine provided an overview of Simmel scholarship up to the mid-1970s. The authors present the trajectory of Simmel scholarship in the US and argue that Simmel's supposed unsystematicity is a function of selective interpretation, the increasingly empirical and instrumental nature of North American sociology, misreading, and some inherent incoherence within his work. Thus, claim the authors, a reassessment of Simmel's position within the North American academy – especially sociology – is warranted. Frisby would arguably provide such a reassessment by developing Coser's (et al.'s) justification for Simmel's supposed unsystematicity, whilst also levying new

criticisms against it. For David Frisby, Simmel's conceptions of both society and sociology attempt to dissolve the analysing subject in a flurry of impressions, and thus liberate analysis from mere vacuous forms of scientific completeness and pure impressionistic novelty. Hence, Frisby claims, Simmel's *modus operandi* in general is the essay, which navigates these poles. Whereas, in sociology, Simmel replicates this approach using perspective, circumstance, and form. Like Coser, this does not constitute a system for Frisby, but at best a pattern or set of idiosyncrasies. Crucially, too, Frisby along with Tom Bottomore and Kaethe Menkeberg translated *PoM* into English, the impact of which is difficult to overstate.

Finally, I have included three dissenting voices in this stage of Simmel scholarship. I note that all three are somewhat liminal figures in terms of my stages. However, in the interest of chronological clarity, I include them in the third stage. The first of these figures, Friedrich Tenbruck, can be taken as an ambivalent critic of Simmel scholarship and a similar ambivalence can also be read into the second, Arthur Salz. Tenbruck criticised the typically narrow interpretation of Simmel's sociological program which belied the vivaciousness of his analyses, thus creating an apparent disjuncture between Simmel's methodology and his analysis. This is especially the case for 'formalistic' interpretations of Simmel's work. Yet, Tenbruck concedes, Simmel falls short of fully explicating the nascent, sociological system of his work due to the then conceptual infancy of sociology. That is, for Tenbruck, early 20th-century sociology in general lacked the conceptual development to adequately express itself systematically. The second ambivalent 'dissident', Salz, engages with his firsthand experience of Simmel's teaching. As a student of Simmel's at the University of Berlin, Salz presents Simmel's lectures as outwardly appearing improvised yet possessing an internal and intentional structure. This, for Salz, is a performative example of Simmel's dialectics – the mutual legitimacy of logically exclusionary perspectives – permeating the world in which we live. Ultimately and in accordance with Frisby, Salz interprets Simmel's sociology as aesthetic or even stoic, concerned with understanding society as a coping mechanism for living in it.

The third dissident is more resolute in her criticism of Simmel scholarship up to the late-twentieth century. After establishing the dominance of the 'sociological' interpretations of Simmel's work, Anna Wessely claims that such an approach avoids looking precisely where Simmel's systematicity and even his ethics may be found,

namely in his philosophy. Thus, for Wessely, sociological interpretations tend to backhandedly praise Simmel when calling him 'essayistic' or 'insightful', sidelining anything deemed too metaphysical. Instead, we must understand that Simmel is transgressing the then established disciplinary norms by introducing new concepts that circumvent the need for absolute principles. As for Salz, for Wessely one must pay close attention to Simmel's dialectical method and the concepts he consistently uses, especially form, whether in his so-called 'sociological' or his 'philosophical' works. Only by being attentive to both kinds of works and their overlap can we determine Simmel's system.

The final section of this chapter addresses the third stage, i.e., contemporary Simmel scholarship. The first of these is itself a review of Simmel scholarship by Otthein Rammstedt, the general editor of Simmel's collected works in German. This review reveals several structural determinants of Simmel's apparently selective reception. Among these are the theft of unpublished manuscripts soon after Simmel's death, the purging of his work from the German academy resulting from the rise of National Socialism, and the difficulty in establishing a collected edition of his works until the twenty first century. For Rammstedt, these factors alongside the primarily 'sociological' interest in Simmel's work – particularly from North America – fundamentally shaped contemporary Anglophone and Teutophone Simmel scholarship.

The penultimate figure that I discuss here is Olli Pyyhtinen, along with co-author Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen, whose work aims to remedy the philosophical-methodological gap identified by Wessely and Rammstedt. That is, they aspire to ground the social-scientific relevance of Simmel's work in his philosophy. To that end, they identify five constituent elements. First, the related concepts of 'third' and 'type'. Both represent particular ways of overcoming contradiction, or iterations of Simmel's dialectic à la Salz. Simply put, the third is a mediation between the subject in their contingent environment and absolute, 'objective' validity that culminates in a general, intersubjective – but not itself absolute – validity. The philosopher is a type which performs this interaction uniquely and is – for the authors' Simmel – why certain philosophers are worth reading. Through their interaction with contingent circumstances, successful philosophers achieve something tending towards objectivity in its usual sense, i.e., universal and univocal applicability. Second, philosophy grounds disciplinary knowledge and constitutes its 'lower bounds' and underlies the conditions of such knowledge.

Conversely, and thirdly, philosophy's orientation to a larger, even total picture of the world simultaneously situates it at the 'upper bounds' of disciplinary knowledge. Fourth, the necessity of seeing the world from a particular, narrow perspective that can elucidate the world by achieving 'typicality' or provisional totalities. Fifth and finally – as touched on by Salz – 'life' as the fundamental, metaphysical principle that drives the ceaseless objectification and dissolution of thought. Taken together, these constitute a schema of Simmel's method and thereby a source of his contemporary relevance – especially for social science – according to Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen.

The final theorist that I discuss below is Elizabeth Goodstein, who sketches similar themes to Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen. That is, when reading Simmel, one must keep his philosophical method to the fore and avoid interpreting his work through contemporary or siloed conceptions of disciplinarity. Goodstein achieves this by, first, critiquing the narrative of Simmel as sociologist whilst noting and later expanding on the connection between ostensibly sociological concepts – e.g., form – and his philosophy. Drawing on *PoM*, she then sketches an account of Simmel's 'upper' and 'lower' philosophy. Both aspects are non-empirical and are mediated by not one but many disciplinary knowledges, which operate between them. Thus, together with other disciplinary knowledges and both aspects of philosophy, a dialectical image of the analysand is created. For Goodstein, then, this is the method within which an analysis of Simmel's work must be situated and where Simmel's contemporary relevance – roughly, a model of integrative interdisciplinarity that reflects the complexity of the world better than siloed, over-specialised disciplinarity – is to be found. *PoM* is Simmel's first demonstration of this method through an analysis of money and is therefore particularly significant.

From the above I draw several conclusions. First, in agreeance with the third stage scholars and previous 'dissidents', Simmel ought not be read as unsystematic and in this foregrounding his philosophy is crucial. However, this is not the only source of his contemporary relevance; Simmel provides more than just a novel way of doing philosophy or social science, at least potentially. That is, *PoM* in particular, which has been seized upon by third-stage scholars primarily as the preeminent demonstration of his method, may have more to contribute to contemporary discourses on money, for example. Any such contribution, however, must be situated within the frame established by Pyyhtinen, Lehtonen, and Goodstein, i.e., the schema of Simmel's twin conceptions of

philosophy bounding disciplinary knowledge, the eye towards totality, and especially his notion of reciprocal causation. This thesis may be read as a propaedeutic for this aim. By showing how Poggi's analysis of *PoM* fails to meet these criteria, I demonstrate why a reconsideration of Simmel's thought continues to be necessary.

§1 Anglicising Simmel

Under the editorship of Albion Small, the *American Journal of Sociology* played a crucial role in introducing Simmel's work to the Anglophone world¹⁶⁴ (Smith 1988, pp. 2-4 & 75-76; Goodstein 2017, pp. 98-100). Having returned from studying under Gustav Schmoller and alongside Simmel in Berlin, Small would go on to foster a direct, "intellectual relationship" with the latter (Jaworski 1995, p. 391). Here, Small developed an appreciation for both "German *Wissenschaft*, the scholarly study of specialized subjects, and an esteem for German scholars as framers of social policy" (ibid, emphasis original). This appreciation led Small to becoming perhaps the most prolific contemporaneous translator of Simmel's works. These translations include: *The Problem of Sociology* (1985)¹⁶⁵, *Superiority and Subordination as Subject-matter of Sociology* (1896a), *Superiority and Subordination as Subject-matter of Sociology II* (1896b), *The Persistence of Social Groups* (1898), *The Persistence of Social Groups II* (1898b), *The Persistence of Social Groups III* (1898c), *A Chapter in the Philosophy of Value* (1900), *The Number of Members as Determining The Sociological Form of the Group I* (1902a), *The Number of Members as Determining The Sociological Form of the Group II* (1902b), *The Sociology of Conflict* (1904a), *The Sociology of Conflict II* (1904b), *The Sociology of Conflict III*¹⁶⁶ (1904c), *The Sociology of Secrecy and of Secret Societies* (1906), *The Problem of Sociology* (1909b), and *How is Society Possible?* (1910a).

A clear theme is discernible in these translations: all but *A Chapter in the Philosophy of Value* – a translation of the first edition of *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900a), chapter one – appear directly relevant to sociological themes, or are at least presented as such. Entirely absent, for example, are translations of *Einleitung in Die Moralwissenschaft: Eine Kritik der Ethischen Grundbegriffe* [Introduction to Moral

¹⁶⁴ For a full list of Simmel's works available in English as of 2012, see Kemple (2012).

¹⁶⁵ A shorter essay of *Soziologie*, chapter one published in 1908.

¹⁶⁶ It appears that Small did not finish the translation of this work.

Science: A critique of fundamental ethical concepts] (Simmel 1892; 1893¹⁶⁷) published around the same time as other works translated by Small¹⁶⁸. However, the guiding thread of Small's selectivity is hardly surprising when considering his explicit intentions upon his appointment to the University of Chicago. Namely, that "the academic work which I [Small] would do for the rest of my life, if perfectly free to select for myself, would be to organize such a department of Sociology as does not exist to my knowledge" (Small 1890, in Diner 1975, p. 517). That is, the intent for which Small aimed to use his position was to establish and justify sociology as an academic discipline (Smith 1988, pp. 74-75), and hence it is no surprise that he focused on Simmel's attempts to do the same.

In a similar vein, Simmel was to feature in Robert Park and Ernest Burgess' *Introduction to the Science of Sociology* (1921). This text, which included some original translations by Park, was to become "the most influential introduction to sociology in the United States in the 1920s and 1930s, playing a major role in the exposure of generations of sociology students to Simmel's writings" (Levine, Carter & Gorman 1976a, p. 817). Park and Burgess' veritable tome intensifies the selectivity exhibited by Small by allocating relatively few of its over 1000 pages to Simmel's work. To put this in perspective, however, when divided by author, only Park's work was allocated more space than Simmel's – namely, thirteen sections or approximately 70 pages¹⁶⁹. Simmel was afforded ten sections, approximately 45 pages. By comparison, Small was afforded four sections and Durkheim only two. Relatively speaking, then, Simmel was afforded some prominence in the sociology of the United States. However, the selectivity of Park and Burgess was not limited to Simmel: all those featured in *Introduction to the Science*

¹⁶⁷ That Simmel disavowed this text as the "philosophical sins of youth" may partially explain why this text was overlooked (Gassen and Landman (eds.), in Frisby 1981, p. 69). Yet, the same case could be made for the other works published around this time, some of which were translated into Russian, Polish, Danish, Dutch, French, Italian, and Spanish – see Gassen and Landmann (1958, pp. 338-334) for a comprehensive list of translated works as at the mid-20th century, and for a comprehensive bibliography of Simmel's books, essays, and lectures (pp. 313-336 & 345-349).

¹⁶⁸ That Simmel did not want this work republished (Rammstedt 2012, p. 303 & 310) is beside the point; had Small's interest been in Simmel's thoughts generally or his views on morality, for example, Small's translations may be entirely different.

¹⁶⁹ Whereas I have retained the full titles of Small's translations above to emphasise the selectivity of his approach, which is evident in the titles, I have removed footnoted page citations here to avoid excessive clutter and because they are less illustrative than the above titles. I nevertheless include them here in the interest of transparency. For specific reference, see Park and Burgess (1969, pp. 79-84, 138-141, 187-191, 252-254, 311-315, 315-317, 467-478, 619-626, 626-634, 712-718, 756-762, 829-833, 893-895) for Park's sections, (ibid, pp. 322-327, 348-356, 356-361, 553-554, 582-586, 586-594, 695-697, 697-703, 703-706, 706-708) for Simmel's sections, (ibid, pp. 198-200, 288-289, 451-454, 454-458) for Small's sections, and (ibid, pp. 195-198, 714-718) for Durkheim's sections. All page numbers refer to the third edition.

of *Sociology* suffered the necessity of selectivity given the volume of material it attempts to synthesise. The key factor shaping Simmel's reception, then, appears not to be selectivity as such but the lack of a subsequent, holistic study of his work from which others such as Weber and Durkheim have benefited. Such a study or body of scholarship would complement the "decontextualizing and reframing" of Simmel's ideas that is (perhaps) unavoidable in a broad, introductory work such as Park and Burgess's (Goodstein 2017, p. 100). Together, both the initial, perfectly legitimate selectivity of Simmel's 'sociological' works in conjunction with the lack of a follow-up, general study of his work in the Anglophone world, at least until many decades later, have contributed to the view of Simmel as a 'dilletante'.

Also contributing to the Anglophone view of Simmel's work – and at the University of Chicago – was George Herbert Mead¹⁷⁰ (Diner 1975, p. 544). Mead reviewed *PoM* rather positively, even if "[i]t is thought out with great and often wearisome effort" (1901, p. 619). Mead's primary interest in the text is, as he admits, relatively narrow, confined to the "psychological illustration" of the process of valuation as it emerges from exchange, rather than the "futile character of the psychological calculations of the utilitarians, on the one hand, and the Austrian school, on the other" (pp. 618 & 619). Of particular note, according to Mead, *PoM* provides a response to both abstract and individualist accounts of value; Simmel gives a theory of valuation that avoids such pitfalls. In Mead's words, however, the goal of *PoM* is ultimately "sociological" in that it theorises "the relation of the individual to the community" through the concept of money and its use, though its "standpoint" is philosophical¹⁷¹ (ibid, p. 619). Mead thus contributes to the generally selective approach to Simmel's work and the sociological hermeneutic in particular. In their works, however, both Mead and Simmel share a commitment to a rigorous philosophical basis for social research¹⁷², and a desire to overcome the gulf between the social and the individual, between

¹⁷⁰ And arguably John Dewey, though this link is less explicit and amounts to a more general impact on the sociology department at the University of Chicago.

¹⁷¹ From Simmel's perspective, the entirety of the work is philosophical in that it aims to establish concepts through which to think money and then establish their 'significance'.

¹⁷² Small's sociology was, for example, lacking in this department according to Mead: "[t]he grad students in Sociology are up in arms about the thin and valueless pabulum which Small gives them. Unfortunately the man has no philosophy and no psychology and his work is practically an application of both" (Mead 1901, in Diner 1975, p. 539).

subject and object in a manner arguably indebted to Hegel¹⁷³ (Kemple 2018, pp. 185-187; Aboulafia 2020).

From the beginning of Simmel's Anglophone reception, then, a particular analytical focus has guided interest in a relatively select portion of Simmel's works at the expense of others. My intent is not to disparage those 'responsible', but it is crucial to recognise their motives – particularly that of Small – and their effects on the linguistic accessibility and interpretation of Simmel's work. To the above works one might add Spykman's (1925) summary of the then available English translations of Simmel's 'sociological' works or the caustic criticism by Sorokin (e.g., 1928, pp. 495-507¹⁷⁴). Despite the justifiable aims of the above scholars, however, the "tension between recognition and misrecognition by admirers and foes alike remained characteristic of Simmel's reception more generally" (Goodstein 2017, p. 101). This is visible in the enthusiasm with which Small, Park, and Spykman embraced Simmel's work, if only for the questions it proposed rather than the solutions it provides. This tension is then replicated across Simmel's translated work – 'sociological' or not – and would re-emerge with later Anglophone interpretations of *PoM*, as is foreshadowed by Mead's review.

In conjunction with the limitations of available material, that "[North] American sociology has never abandoned its pragmatic orientation to focus on the sort of philosophical questions about society and culture that preoccupied Simmel" surely coloured interpretations of Simmel's works (ibid, p. 101). This is 'pragmatism' in the sense of instrumental – especially political – use, rather than in the philosophical sense of Mead and Dewey, i.e., the illumination "*of the world that is there*" (Aboulafia 2020, emphasis original). Again, given Small's admiration for the impact of German scholarship on public policy, it is unsurprising that North American sociology takes this trajectory. Simmel's position arguably straddles both positions. As explored throughout this thesis, Simmel views philosophy as essential for the starting point of disciplinary¹⁷⁵ knowledge and the interpretation of the significance of that knowledge. In *TPoS* (1909b) these

¹⁷³ To my knowledge relatively little has been made in the Anglophone world of Simmel's theoretical debt to Hegel outside of this brief mention by Goodstein (2017, e.g., p 175, 193) and Kemple (2018, p. 187). with the emphasis typically skewed towards Simmel's ostensibly (neo-)Kantian tendencies. As Kemple notes (ibid), this is in part due a lack of translation of Simmel's essay 'Vom Sein und vom Werden' [On Being and on Becoming], in which he explicitly discusses Hegel (1917, pp. 86-112).

¹⁷⁴ Sorokin includes Simmel with thinkers such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Leopold von Wiese, Park, and Burgess, under the banner of a 'Sociologistic School', which he critiques as a unit (1928, pp. 488-496) Simmel, however, "is most characteristic of this school", for Sorokin (ibid, p. 489). It is also worth noting that Sorokin relies on Spykman's work for this characterisation of Simmel (ibid, p. 489n2).

¹⁷⁵ My use of 'discipline' is somewhat anachronistic.

constitute the roles of philosophy as inquiry into the foundations of thought and of normative ‘significance’, respectively. At any rate, the instrumental approach thereby places less emphasis on translating the author’s general outlook and conceptions into an intelligible idiom – culturally, linguistically, or disciplinarily speaking – than on extracting that which is ‘useful’, especially politically. This appears to be one factor motivating the dissective and taxonomical approach to Simmel’s work in the contemporary Anglophone understanding¹⁷⁶.

A final word on Simmel’s initial Anglophone reception. The conspicuous absence of Simmel in Parsons’ *The Structure of Social Action* (1937) – another seminal text of early to mid-20th century sociology in the United States – arguably cemented his relative obscurity. Moreover, that Parsons deemed Simmel’s method too “pernicious” speaks to the extent the NoU pervaded Simmel scholarship (Yui 1998, in Goodstein 2017, p. 101n19). As was shown above, Parsons’ work and view of Simmel is critical to Poggi’s project of systematising Simmel. I also note that Parsons went some way to redressing this omission by including Simmel in an edited collection, *Theories of Society* (1961).

§2 Establishing Simmel in the Anglosphere

Despite Parsons’ silent warning, a subsequent generation of scholars would go on to develop a long-standing interest in Simmel and his work. Among the first substantial attempts to cohere Simmel’s work, outside of Spykman’s “uninspired” summary (Levine, Carter & Gorman 1976a, p. 817), was Kurt Wolff’s translation entitled *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (1950a). As the title suggests, Wolff attempts to provide a holistic picture of Simmel’s sociology. However, Wolff does not overlook the role of philosophy – Simmel was a “historian and philosopher of sociology, rather than a sociologist proper”, after all (1950b, p. xli). Thus, Wolff appears to broaden the scope of previous interpretations of Simmel’s work, particularly that of Park and Burgess. This broader interpretation does not purge Simmel’s work of contradiction but, for Wolff, deepens its tensions. The fundamental distinction of Simmel’s sociological method – form and content – “has yet to be specified in a satisfactory manner” and is not the aim of Wolff’s study (ibid, p. xxxix). Rather, Simmel’s philosophical pretensions for sociology ultimately lead to a “*non sequitur*” but may be understood as an attempt to “ennoble”

¹⁷⁶ One could also include Small’s previously cited translations which, although noting that some ‘essays’ are extracted from larger works, still has the effect of presenting Simmel in a stilted manner.

the discipline by raising to the status of epistemology (ibid, pp. xxxix & xl, emphasis original). And thus, one should not look for “a *logical* connection” in Simmel’s sociology so much as a “*psychological* connection” (ibid, p. xli, emphasis original)¹⁷⁷. With this pronouncement we appear to have the beginnings of what would become the ‘aesthetic’ interpretation of Simmel. Namely Simmel’s work is primarily unified by the positionality, personality, and style of the author, rather than any immanent logic or central problem.

Moreover, Wolff’s presentation engages in further selectivity of Simmel’s work, which is not immediately obvious. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* comprises three of Simmel’s works, namely original translations of *Grundfragen der Soziologie* [Fundamental Questions of Sociology] (1920) as an introduction and select chapters from *Soziologie* (1923) with excurses – those few that are included – placed in a separate chapter, and *The Metropolis and Mental Life* (n.d.¹⁷⁸) as the final word¹⁷⁹. Again, given the volume of material, some degree of selectivity is not surprising. The key shift, however, is that selectivity is no longer motivated by specific interests – i.e., the establishment of sociology as science present in Small and Park. Rather, Wolff appears motivated by more ‘intrinsic’ interests, and thus unsystematicity is located more explicitly within Simmel’s work, rather than in an external hermeneutic frame. Given its role as presenting *the* sociology of Simmel post-1945, one would be hard pressed to overstate the significance of this justificatory shift in Simmel scholarship.

A similar and perhaps more charitable attack was launched from a more explicitly philosophical angle. Weingarter’s *Experience and Culture: The philosophy of Georg Simmel* (1962) is the self-avowed attempt to show a unity of philosophical perspectives between two ostensibly distinct “phases” of Simmel’s work. Namely “*Kulturphilosophie* [philosophy of culture/culture-philosophy]” and “*Lebensphilosophie* [life-philosophy/philosophy of life]” (p. ix). The requisite knowledge, however,

“is not readily available by reference to Simmel’s writings alone[... given the] multiplicity of his interests, his brilliant but ambiguous style, and

¹⁷⁷ I note that Wolff’s description covers at best one aspect of Simmel’s philosophy, namely epistemology, and not its bifurcated metaphysical elements. Simmel’s conception of philosophy plays a key role in the unity of his work in contemporary Simmel scholarship, as will become evident below.

¹⁷⁸ See Wolff 1955, (p. lix) for precise reference. I have cited this as accurately as possible.

¹⁷⁹ For a sketch of the kind of issues with the specificities of Wolff’s rendering of Simmel, see Goodstein (2017, pp. 315-316).

above all his dislike of order and organization even when he is writing a systematic work in philosophy" (ibid).

Hence, for Weingartner, a degree of extraction and reconstruction from an array of Simmel's texts is required. Reconstruction of Simmel's work, then, cannot rely on "personal attitude" or "artistic style" as the unifying factor, valenced positively as a savant "gifted with insight" or negatively as dilettante (ibid, p. 10). That is, in response to Wolff – who exhibited an "extreme" version of the former valence (ibid) – and foreshadowing future interpretations of Simmel, Weingartner argues that a relatively consistent philosophical position underlies the apparent heterogeneity of Simmel's work. This position provides structure to Simmel's analyses and is most explicitly – but by no means completely – outlined in Simmel's final work, *Lebensanschauung* [*The View of Life* (2010)]. This structure, however, is not "a true philosophical 'system' in the strict sense of the word, that is, a synthesis that comprehends all that is real" (Jankélévitch 1952, in Weingartner 1962, p. 12).

In the end, "Simmel, then, is not a philosopher of the first rank", though neither is he unsuccessful (Weingartner 1962, p. 188). That is, for Weingartner, Simmel neither created a towering system in the vein of Kant or Hegel and nor did he develop "an original insight" to the level of Bishop Berkeley. However, Simmel avoided both the shallow brilliance of sheer originality and the excessive deference to tradition associated with becoming a "mere professor of philosophy" (ibid).

Weingartner's philosophical focus, however, is an outlier in the middle period of Simmel scholarship, perhaps most starkly contrasting with Coser's interpretation in *Georg Simmel* (1965a)¹⁸⁰. Though Coser acknowledges Simmel's "contribution to the philosophy and methodology of history, to ethics and general philosophy", his work is characterised by the skittishness of a "philosophical squirrel" or "a bright-eyed youngster in a garden who moves from discovery to discovery[...] filled with an ever-renewed curiosity" (ibid, pp. 3 & 4). That is, for Coser, Simmel lacked the "*esprit de système*" by virtue of either "impatience" or "inability to concentrate" (ibid, p. 3). Nevertheless, like Weingartner and Wolff before him, Coser concedes "a pattern beneath the apparent disorder" (ibid, p. 4). That is, a structure or recurring concern is present in Simmel, though not to the extent that would constitute a system.

¹⁸⁰ I note also that Wolff's translations (Simmel 1950; 1955) are frequently cited by Coser, testifying to Wolff's influence on subsequent Simmel scholarship.

As regards sociology, for Coser, the ‘pattern’ of Simmel’s analyses is their concern with the “forms” of interactions (ibid, p. 6), of which Coser provides a rather neat illustration¹⁸¹. The Simmelian “sociologist is not concerned with King *John* but, rather, *King John*” (ibid, p. 7, emphasis original). That is, Simmelian sociology does not investigate how John uniquely fulfils the role of ‘king’ – this is the role of history – but how the role of ‘king’ constrained the actions of John and others occupying this role. This role is a composite of several more fundamental types of interaction, which may include “conflict and cooperation”, “subordination and superordination” that themselves emerge from a “variety of interests”, i.e., the content of the forms (ibid, pp. 7 & 8). However, analysis is complicated by the fact that forms never present alone but always in “interference” with other forms (ibid, p. 9). Thus, for the purposes of explication, Simmel idealises relations that are never fully or singularly actualised, according to Coser, and serve as a “measuring rod” against which their degree of actualisation may be measured (ibid, p. 10)¹⁸². Ultimately, however, Coser charges Simmel with inconsistency in his application of the form-content distinction¹⁸³, suggesting that this inconsistency in conjunction with the “philosophical ballast” of the distinction implies that it ought to be replaced with more modern terminology (ibid, pp. 8-9).

This ascription of unsystematicity as regards sociology is extended by Coser to *PoM* in the following way. Despite being a “much neglected classic”, due to the lack of an English translation at the time of publication, *PoM* is for Coser “primarily a contribution to cultural sociology and to the analysis of the wider social implications of economic affairs” (1977, p. 193). Thus, although “it is indispensable for an understanding of his [Simmel’s] cultural analyses and his cultural criticisms”, insofar as it embodies Simmel’s sociology replete with form and content, it suffers the same criticisms. In sum, for Coser: “[d]espite the unsystematic and often wilfully paradoxical character of Simmel’s work, it is possible to sift and order it in such a way that a consistent approach

¹⁸¹ Though overly simplified and in a certain sense less clear than Simmel’s presentation of the concept because it minimises the necessary duality of interaction: interaction must, in the first instance, occur between multiple elements; Coser’s focus on the role ‘king’ risks essentialising, which is resolutely non-Simmelian. See Chapters Three through Five for a fuller explication of form as presented in *TPoS*.

¹⁸² I note here that Coser presents only one half of the equation. Simmel does not only aim to show that various contents underlie similar forms, but that similar forms emerge from various contents, i.e., homogeneous forms arise from heterogeneous content *and vice versa*.

¹⁸³ This distinction is a crucial one for Simmel, and therefore cannot be simply ‘given up’ without changing the metaphysical implications of his work.

to the field of sociology emerges” (ibid, p. 215). That is, one must purify Simmel’s work – including *PoM* – of its tensions and synthesise consistency from it; its structural unity resides more on the side of the interpreter of Simmel than in his work. Much like Wolff’s text, Coser’s volume and its presentation of Simmel had “an enduring impact on a generation of students” (Merton 1977, p. xii).

Coser shaped Levine’s presentation of Simmel in *Georg Simmel: On individuality and social forms* (1971a; 1971b) and Wolff would supply several of the translations (Simmel 1971a; 1971b; 1971c, 1971d; 1971e; 1971f; 1971g)¹⁸⁴. As Levine describes it, the “disjointed, seemingly haphazard manner in which he [Simmel] presented his ideas” (1971c, p. xi), was neither the result of “laziness, indifference to his audience, nor arbitrary wilfulness” (pp. xi & xii). Rather, the apparent fragmentation of Simmel’s works arises from his indefatigability “in exploring the labyrinths of complex analysis” (ibid, p. xii). This exploration “reflected the skill of the teacher, concerned more at times to engage and provoke his student[...] than with relentlessly pressing forwards a narrow train of thought” (ibid). That is, Simmel’s primary concern with “the *education of individuals*” (Simmel 1909, in Levine 1971c, p. xii, emphasis original) – and his non-deference to both established scholars and scholarly convention – help explain the peripatetic style of his work (Levine 1971c, pp. x-xi). In this light, then, that Simmel’s three broad concerns – namely “cultural forms”, “social forms”, and “the metaphysics of individuality” – were not “related in a coherent way” is, for Levine, forgivable on account of Simmel’s pedagogic aims (ibid, pp. xiii & xiv). Hence, though Simmel’s work is unsystematic this is justifiable as a product of his pedagogic, “philosophical conviction” (ibid, p. xiii). In essence, for Levine, educational praxis takes primacy over arcane system-building and systematic expression.

Moreover, with Levine (et al.) we see the first major study of Simmel’s reception in North America, a key site for the post-1945 re-emergence of Simmel scholarship (Levine, Carter & Gorman 1976a; 1976b). This study purports to show that the apparent unsystematicity of Simmel’s work is also a product of selective reading – itself partially resultant from limited translations – and poor interpretation, as well as the

¹⁸⁴ I note that the translation entitled *The Problem of Sociology* is truncated and those entitled *Conflict and Subordination* and *Personal Fulfilment* omit a significant number of intermediary pages (Simmel 1971b; 1971c; 1971e, respectively), thus making it more difficult for the Anglophone reader to determine whether the ‘skittishness’ of Simmel’s work is the function of editorial decisions, translational decisions, both, a feature of the work itself, or some combination of these.

aforementioned factors immanent to Simmel's work. Levine (et al.) divide the reception of Simmel up to the then present time into three stages. Namely: the introductory translations and "diffusion of Simmel's thought from a single center [i.e., the University of Chicago]" (1976a, p. 815); the "dispersal" of such sites, particularly to Robert Merton and his students at Colombia University and to the New School for Social Research, (ibid, pp. 815 & 819); and a "more critical exegesis" accompanied by an attempt to "more systematically" integrate Simmel into the "sociological tradition" (ibid, p. 815)¹⁸⁵.

Key to the first phase – writing and translating from 1895-1930 – are figures such as Small and Park, who focus on establishing the domain of sociology (ibid, pp. 815-818), as I have sketched above. Crucial to this phase, for Levine (et al.), are the misreadings present in the major secondary works on Simmel, namely Spykman's *The Social Theory of Georg Simmel* (1925), Sorokin's *Contemporary Sociological Theories* (1928), and Theodore Abel's *Systematic Sociology in Germany* (1929). Spykman's "dry" expositions obscured the "luminosity of Simmel's mind" and the "trenchancy of his sociological perceptions", whereas both "Sorokin and Abel misunderstood Simmel's distinction between form and content" (ibid, p. 818). Nevertheless, the presence of Simmel in their critiques, however flawed, is a testament to the importance of his work (ibid). The second phase was animated by two value-orientations importantly distinct from the first, i.e., the grounding of sociology (ibid, pp. 818-820). That is, from the early 1930s the so-called "dominant American ethic of instrumental activism" guided social research in tension with a minority "concerned chiefly with the quality of thought in intellectual work" (ibid). According to Levine (et al.), the latter orientation "sustained the limited interest in the works of Simmel through this period" – roughly 1930-1955 – via figures not mentioned here – e.g., Louis Wirth and Everett Hughes in Chicago, Alfred Schultz and Albert Salomon at the New School – and others that have been mentioned, namely Merton, Coser, and Wolff (ibid, pp. 818 & 819). Through these scholars' translations and exegeses, Simmel's position in the North American academy was well and truly established: the "missionary" work" was done (ibid, p. 820).

With the foundations of Simmel scholarship established, a critical reassessment of Simmel's work became increasingly necessary. This was the general aim of the third phase of Simmel scholarship, as defined by Levine, Carter and Gorman, characterising

¹⁸⁵ My schematisation is less chronologically rigid, conjoining and extending Levine, Carter, and Gorman's latter two stages, whilst also adding a stage from approximately the 1990s to the present.

this scholarship from approximately 1955 up to the then present, i.e., 1975 (1976a, pp. 814-822). That is, it became increasingly untenable to relegate Simmel's work to that of "a talented but archaic figure who could readily be dispensed with in any properly scientific view of the discipline [i.e., sociology]", despite its conspicuous omission from "the most prestigious synthesis of major 20th-century social theory, Parsons' *The Structure of Social Action*" (ibid, p. 820). As the primarily intellectual interest in Simmel of the previous stage coalesced with a more general reassessment of the "theoretical orientations" of sociology, a number of the same scholars sought to "mine" Simmel for the materials to fuel this reassessment (ibid).

The primary achievement of this period, according to Levine (et al.), was the entrenchment of Simmel's importance to sociology, even if at times he was "patently misrepresented" (ibid, p. 822). That is, Simmel's work as "classical" sociology received attention as an "intrinsically valuable object"; however, Simmel's work as a source generative of "further scientific inquiry is more problematic" (ibid). Of significance for this thesis, however, is a specific aspect of their conclusion¹⁸⁶. Namely, Simmel's unsystematicity is a product of: "the highly selective and often arbitrary way in which his [Simmel's] ideas have been incorporated", and the peripatetic nature of both the "Simmelian tradition in American sociology" and its translation of Simmel's work that "accentuated" this (Levine, Carter & Gorman 1976b, p. 1128). Equally, the parsing of "ambiguities, dualistic conceptions, and dialectical aspects of Simmel's thinking" through a lens of "univocality and one-dimensional metrics" prevalent in "those trained in American modes of thought" is often the cause for spurious analyses of Simmel's systematicity, according to Levine, Carter, and Gorman (ibid).

Thus, Levine (et al.) is indicative of an important turning point in Simmel scholarship¹⁸⁷: Simmel is neither fully unsystematic and nor is he fully systematic; the blame for the incoherence lies at the feet of *both* Simmel and Simmel scholars. The way forward, then, is twofold. One, identify and remedy selectivity within the scholarship. Two, develop Simmel's so-called principles into a coherent framework and 'mine' them for contemporary relevance. As I have indicated above, this extractive approach is not

¹⁸⁶ The other aspect deals with the nature of Simmel's contribution to sociology, namely: the general definition and orientation of a "*subject matter*" and an "*analytic perspective*", respectively, and the "articulation of a number of novel *topics and propositions*" (Levine Carter & Gorman 1976a, pp. 1127-1128, emphasis original).

¹⁸⁷ This is not to say that Levine is the first to hold this view. Rather, it is evident in each 'phase' of Anglophone scholarship to some in degree, arguably in Small and Tenbruck, or Coser.

without critics, who in broad terms characterise contemporary Simmel scholarship. Moreover, Levine, Carter, and Gorman explicitly entertain the possibility of further importance to be found in Simmel's work (ibid, p. 1129) – an invitation accepted by contemporary scholars. Nevertheless, one cannot provide an overview of Simmel scholarship, even in a sketch such as this, without first considering the work of David Frisby.

Frisby's *Sociological Impressionism: A reassessment of Georg Simmel's social theory* (1981), aims to review and rearticulate an analysis of Simmel's work in the vein of Levine (et al.'s) more general review of Simmel scholarship. Simmel is first and foremost an "aesthetic" thinker and a "sociological *flâneur*", two related but distinct descriptors (ibid, p. x). The precise meanings of these terms are difficult to consider separately from their justifications. Hence, I will present a sketch of each together with its justification. For Frisby, Simmel's foundation for sociology as presented in *How is Society Possible?* (1910a) – particularly the necessary phenomenological interrelation between social units¹⁸⁸ – does little more than describe an image of society as a transcendental, ontological presupposition¹⁸⁹ (Frisby 1981, pp. 65-67). Simmel does not, however, extract the consequences of this theoretical stance for praxis¹⁹⁰. Therefore, Simmel's conception of the social as a basis for "sociology remains [an] *aesthetic*" or an inert image (Schrader-Klebert 1968, in Frisby 1981, p. 67, Frisby's emphasis). Thus, the 'sociological aestheticism' of Simmel amounts to a rift between his conceptual edifice and its practical consequences. This rift occurs not because Simmel was unaware of the necessity of this relation but because "he does not work out the full implications" of his conceptualisation of society, which is therefore unable to regulate action (Frisby 1981, p. 67).

Relatedly, Simmel as Frisby's '*flâneur*' emerges from an effort to recuse himself from his works – or at least create this illusion – and his concomitantly "anti-systematic approach" (ibid, p. 69,). That is, Simmel sought to challenge the supposed "fetishism" of

¹⁸⁸ This is in conjunction with the a priori that each element of the social group, roughly the individual, is simultaneously not part of the social group, i.e., non-social.

¹⁸⁹ This criticism is ungenerous. *TPoS* and *How is Society Possible?* appear more as exercise in grounding a concept – i.e., lower philosophy – which can adequately consider questions of praxis (see Chapter 5). In short, an image of society is necessary to inform praxis.

¹⁹⁰ I note that precisely this concern is addressed – if only in passing – in the body of that chapter, namely – in English – *TPoS*. These 'consequences' can only be drawn from an adequate conception of society, which Simmel aims to provide through his sociology (see Chapter 5); only then can such questions be answered.

an overemphasis on methodology. Frisby locates this tendency in Simmel's "conscious essayism", manifest in his preference for the essay as a form of philosophical communication. Even Simmel's major books – *Soziologie and PoM*¹⁹¹ – are constituted by essays and are structured "by myriad analogies and meandering enlightenments" rather than a "central argument", according to Frisby (ibid). Unlike a systematic treatise, the essay can achieve an "aesthetic autonomy" (Adorno 1958, in Frisby 1981, p. 70). To create the illusion of a free-floating, ahistorical work replete with aesthetic autonomy, *PoM* largely eschews contemporaneous references; the absence of "historical sequence" in its apparent historicity¹⁹² serves to obscure its theoretical positions (ibid, p. 71). That is, Simmel enacts a "pathos of distance" from which almost all markers of Simmel's authorship are purged, leaving only a self-justifying edifice (Frischeisen-Köhler 1920, in Frisby 1981, p. 71).

Moreover, for Frisby, the strong affinity between Simmel's essays and the essay form as analysed by Adorno and Lukàcs is "illuminating" (Frisby 1981, p. 71). Like *PoM*, Simmel's essays – and essays in general – share in a 'pathos of distance' from which they can avoid "the petty completeness of scientific exactitude or impressionistic freshness" and circumvent "organized science's and theory's rules" (Lukàcs 1974, in Frisby 1981, p. 71; Adorno 1958, in Frisby 1981, p. 71, respectively). According to Frisby, Simmel's essays – and essayistic works, too – aim to transcend or mediate the pedantry of absolute precision and superficial novelty. However, with the shifting valence of concepts and their meanings concomitant with the essay form, any firm identifier of the author and their perspective is lost in this incessant movement. This creates Simmel's "perspectivism" – the "illusion that Simmel himself in his essays [and essayistic works] has no standpoint at all" (Frisby 1981, pp. 71 & 72). That is, Simmel for the most part avoids casting judgment on the phenomena he analyses or at least creates this illusion, according to Frisby. It seems, then, that the 'aestheticism' of Simmel's sociology bleeds into other areas of his work. The aim of such analyses is not the "pronouncing with

¹⁹¹ *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, Simmel's only 'systematic' treatise, is discounted as an outlier by Frisby on the grounds that Simmel considered it the "philosophical sins of youth" (Gassen & Landmann (ed.) 1958, in Frisby 1981, p. 69).

¹⁹² I think a partial response can be found to Frisby's ahistorical interpretation of Simmel in my analysis of *The Problem of Sociology*: history, for Simmel, is in an important sense bound up in a given moment such that it is simultaneously, dialectically, 'in' the present insofar as it is necessarily accessed from the position: 'now'. The nature of the present moment, e.g., an analysis of money, determines the valence of historical events not according to a linear 'sequence', but according to their ability to render the present intelligible; linearity is but a causal form of intelligibility.

infinite certainty upon good and evil, beauty and ugliness, the true and the false” (Kracauer 1920, in Frisby 1981, p. 72) – which would imply tangible consequences – so much as producing an image of the phenomenon in question. This image is deliberately abstracted from such consequences through means of few contemporaneous theoretical references and ahistorical methods¹⁹³. The *‘flâneur’* observes but does not intervene.

Thus, Simmel’s supposed aestheticism and status as a *‘flâneur’* ultimately led Frisby to conclude that “no systematic method exists” in his work and that “the notion of approach or stance vis-à-vis social reality – perhaps, even, Simmel’s ‘attitude’ – is more appropriate”¹⁹⁴ (Frisby 1981, p. 101). Like Coser and Weingartner, Frisby sees a pattern of sorts in Simmel’s works but not one that would constitute systematic discourse. Namely, he sees a generalised distance in Simmel’s work that is both the source of his insight and his “response to the reification of objective culture” (Frisby 1981, p. 88). Reification, here, is constituted by “radical opposition between subjective and objective culture, between individual creativity and reified social forms” (ibid). For Frisby, however, given the “aestheticisation of reality” and ascetic disengagement ostensibly implied by this response and any sociology founded upon it, Simmel’s thought remains entrapped by its very distance from its analysand (ibid, p. 166). Simmel’s social theory can elucidate the world but is ultimately limited in its capacity to change it¹⁹⁵.

¹⁹³ As Frisby notes, this aestheticism is not always achieved: “[i]n his brief articles for newspapers and journals, Simmel sometimes lets slip his incognito but in his major works this is seldom the case” (Frisby 1981, p. 73).

¹⁹⁴ This is obviously a simplification of Frisby’s analysis. Though this is true of all the scholars I discuss here, I feel that this is particularly true of Frisby, hence I emphasise it. Whilst I consider my rendering here fair, given the present constraints, I encourage anyone interested in Simmel to read Frisby’s work. This is not to say that it is beyond criticism. For example, it seems that Frisby overemphasises the fragmentariness of Simmel work and obscures the nature of totality or unity in it. For example, when stressing Simmel’s “methodological pluralism” (Lukács 1958, in Frisby 1981, p. 93), Frisby arguably conflates the focus on each methodological perspective and Simmel’s supposed emphasis on the social particulars as overlooking the “totality itself” (Frisby 1981, p. 93). However, in line with Simmel’s later works in particular (Simmel 2010, pp. 1-17), that which distinguishes one thing from another also binds them together: the boundary simultaneously divides and connects, that abstract sense in which all fragments are *fragments*, i.e. one or part of *one* totality; the totally is accessible only through the fragment. Moreover, following Kracauer Frisby takes the absence of the ‘sequence’ of history as a source of “vagueness and imprecision of location and definition” in Simmel’s work (ibid, p. 97). However, as I state in the footnote above, Simmel is perhaps not as ahistorical as Frisby takes him to be, thus Simmel is perhaps not so ‘vague’ or ‘imprecise’ as suggested.

¹⁹⁵ Frisby seems to overlook the dialectic of value that is arguably discernible in discussion of general and economic value in *PoM* (Simmel 2011, e.g., pp. 65-82), and perhaps elsewhere: to instrumentalise a discipline (e.g., sociology) already invokes an absolute or “an end in itself” and is therefore on Frisby’s analysis aesthetic and vice versa (“recent commentator”, n.d., in Frisby 1981, p. 166).

Frisby's later publications arguably present Simmel in a similar albeit more introductory manner (1984; 2002), and his subsequent article presents more or less the same argument as *Sociological Impressionism* in an abbreviated form (1985). These works, too, present Simmel as ultimately an unsystematic figure, but one who made vital contributions to sociology and the analysis of modernity.

Aside from his analyses of Simmel's work, Frisby along with Tom Bottomore and the oft-neglected Kaethe Mengelberg made another major contribution to Simmel scholarship: a comprehensive translation of Simmel's revised edition of *Philosophie des Geldes* (1907). First published as *The Philosophy of Money* (1978), this translation began to remedy the relative lack of Simmel's works available in English by making arguably his most important work more accessible to the Anglophone world¹⁹⁶. As is evident from the above, relatively few direct translations of Simmel's works were available in English¹⁹⁷; most that were available focused on 'sociological' themes. A crucial exception is Small's translation of an earlier version of *PoM*, *A Chapter in the Philosophy of Value* (1900). However, this translation was based on the first edition of *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900) that Simmel went on to heavily revise for the second edition (1907), particularly the first chapter which was the subject of Small's translation. At any rate, Frisby and his co-translators cemented the position and expanded the scope of Simmel scholarship beyond that of his sociological works, even though some theorists, for example Coser, deemed *PoM* largely sociological insofar as its contemporary relevance is concerned.

I reiterate that the above characterisation is far from exhaustive. Not all theorists agreed with the common thread of the preceding interpretations of Simmel's work that I have outlined here. At best, the foregoing constitutes a sketch of some of the key figures to which contemporary Simmel scholarship aims to respond. Here, a considerable degree of comprehensiveness is required to understand contemporary interpretations

¹⁹⁶ Though this translation was first published before Frisby's analyses of Simmel's work, one should still read this translation in light of Frisby's subsequent position on Simmel's work, particularly its supposedly unsystematic nature. This view arguably informs Frisby's editorial decisions, such as the insertion of "the detailed listing of contents into the text at the appropriate point" and at times breaking "down paragraphs to a more accessible length" (Frisby 2011, p. xviii – add to BIB). One can only speculate as to the Simmel's reasoning behind not including these subtitles into the text proper. However, even according to the impressionist interpretation Frisby advocates, one cannot but wonder whether these attempts at 'improving accessibility' simultaneously obscure a central part of Simmel's thought: the interconnectedness of the phenomena discussed within each chapter. The insertion of subtitles arguably creates more rigid distinction between these discussions (e.g. being-value, subject-object, etc.) than is intended.

¹⁹⁷ Relatively few are available today. Further reasons for this will be discussed below.

of Simmel's work, though not to the degree of Jarworski (1997), Goodstein (2017), or Pyyhtinen (2018). What is clear, however, and what my sketch emphasises is that a sociological hermeneutic, often with an interest in one or two aspects of Simmel's thought, dominated Simmel scholarship from the mid-20th century onwards (Goodstein 2017, pp. 96-104). Those discussed here are largely positive, at least ostensibly, and often praise Simmel's contribution to the formation of sociology as a respectable discipline and scintillating insights, yet they lament his 'unsystematic' style. This is not to say that less favourable or even outright hostile views do not exist. Here one could cite Werner Start and Anthony Giddens, who denounced Simmel for intellectual ineptitude, especially in contrast to his peers such as Weber (Kaern 1990, pp. 3-4). Conversely, other relatively early theorists have challenged a central claim of the above thinkers, i.e., the unsystematic nature of Simmel's work. I now turn to two such thinkers, namely Tenbruck and Salz.

Already in the late 1950s – in a collection edited by Wolff (1959), no less – Tenbruck took umbrage with the critique invoked and, by extension, the ostensible praise levelled at the putative unsystematicity of Simmel's sociology. For him, two related problems lie behind this critique. First, a narrow interpretation of Simmel's sociology, which transmutes it from a lively and generative "program of formal sociology" to a tedious "formalistic" or "classificatory" enterprise (Tenbruck 1959, p. 61). Second, a discrepancy between the latter interpretation and the liveliness of Simmel's "analysis of concrete situations" (ibid). Crucially, these criticisms feed on another, creating a "vicious circle" (ibid, p. 62). That is, this excessively narrow understanding of Simmel's sociological contours belies his analyses of particular phenomena. These analyses supposedly stray well beyond Simmel's sociological contours, thereby proving his unsystematicity and obviating the need to investigate into said contours further. However, an incredulous Tenbruck writes: "the very crudeness and continuance of the alleged transgressions should have cautioned against the formalistic interpretation. Was it not at least possible that Simmel's program was misunderstood?" (ibid). In short, criticisms by the likes of Abel and Sorokin, for example, are uncharitable in the extreme; did they really fail to question why Simmel, an apparently intelligent and accomplished scholar, would engage in such a crass contradiction? Perhaps this contradiction resides in the realm of the interpretation of Simmel's work rather than in his work itself.

Or perhaps, in a concession to these and other interpreters, Simmel's work is both constantly shifting and unsystematic on the level of "procedure" in such a way that lends itself to "formalistic misinterpretation", according to Tenbruck (ibid). Moreover, Simmel's mode of sociology would be eclipsed by Weber's "*verstehende* sociology", and what remained would be interpreted through the work of Leopold von Wiese rather than on its own terms (ibid, emphasis original). In conjunction, the "available translations were mostly early drafts of his essays" rather than finished pieces¹⁹⁸ (ibid). Finally, for Tenbruck, and perhaps most novel from the viewpoint of this appendix, from the beginning formal sociology had the misfortune of being bound up in the debate between sociology as "general" versus "special" science (ibid, p. 63). Though largely relegated to a footnote, this distinction is crucial. In a sense, Simmel advocates for a sociology that is both general and special. However, 'generality' here does not confer to sociology a status as a master science into which "the findings of all "cultural" studies"¹⁹⁹ may be integrated, and nor is it confined to 'special' social phenomena (ibid, p. 93). For Tenbruck's Simmel, the 'generality' of sociology resides in its applicability to "what is *social* in all social phenomena", and its 'specialness' or particularity is located in its unique abstraction "from certain material aspects[...] studied by the other social sciences"²⁰⁰ (ibid). Thus, Simmel's sociology is in a very specific sense universal to all social phenomena and limited to the social aspect of them, thereby implying that social phenomena, broadly speaking, are not univalent and are bound up with other kinds of phenomena²⁰¹.

Many scholars' introduction to Simmel's sociology via *TPoS* (1909b) fails to recognise the intended generality and particularity of it, as, for Tenbruck, "Small found it difficult to understand[...] as may be seen from the comments with which he accompanied his translation of Simmel's essay [i.e., *The Problem of Sociology*]" (ibid). Hence, Tenbruck corrects the perceived misreading by partially undertaking a project first proposed by Wolff; namely, to analyse Simmel's concept of forms as it appears "in

¹⁹⁸ Contrary to Frisby, Tenbruck emphasises the provisional nature of the essays whereas Frisby implies that Simmel cobbled the essays together to fit the structure of a book.

¹⁹⁹ I note that the quotation marks bookending 'cultural' seem to function more like inverted commas, that is to denote a specific or unusual usage, in this instance, likely referring to the *Kulturwissenschaften* or 'cultural sciences' with which Simmel would have been acquainted.

²⁰⁰ This aligns with my analysis (see Chapters 3 & 4).

²⁰¹ This is the crux of the distinction for Simmel between society in general and the social elements in society. Their relation gets more complex as, for Simmel, the social element is only accessible through the other phenomena bound up with it, namely the historical and psychological (philosophical?) elements. Again, this will become clearer in the following chapter.

all of the passages in which Simmel employs the term” (Wolff 1950, in Tenbruck 1959, p. 63). Tenbruck proceeds to develop an analysis of form via reference to *The Problem of Sociology*, explicating the “fundamental idea programmatically”, an end that Simmel himself was putatively “unable to articulate” (Tenbruck 1959, p. 65). For Tenbruck, then, perhaps due to the lack of a developed conceptual apparatus of sociological concepts and various misinterpretations resulting from limited accessibility, Simmel is neither unsystematic and nor is he systematic. A system of sorts is nascent in Simmel’s work and must be wrested from a position of relative “progress in conceptualization and methodology” to comprehend his work better than the scientific ‘progress’ of his time allowed²⁰² (ibid p. 63).

The final ‘dissident’ derives his view of Simmel from a more personal connection. A Bohemian²⁰³ graduate “from the Gymnasium of a provincial town”, Salz eschewed the practical and “usual path” of study at a national university to enrol at the University of Berlin in 1900 (1959, p. 233) – incidentally, the year *PoM* was first published. Unknowing of Simmel or his work prior to arriving in Berlin and “by lucky chance”, Salz came across an essay on the “then practically unknown” poet, Stefan George (ibid, p. 234). This would impel Salz to attend several of Simmel’s lectures before enrolling as a regular student. Simmel’s impact was profound; Salz writes:

“[...]no other teacher has had a stronger and more enduring influence in forming my outlook on life. Why was Simmel’s exposition a unique experience for a youth in a formative stage of development? Perhaps it was because he who was exposed to him felt himself witnessing a true teacher’s soliloquy. Although Simmel seemed to be speaking to himself, his audience was held in suspense. At the end of a lecture, everybody asked himself how the story would go on, what would come next. By this pedagogical method, Simmel crystallized what may be called his idea of dialectic, which differs from the dialectic of Aristotle and Hegel” (ibid, p. 235).

²⁰² The implication of my rendering of this point, particularly inserting ‘progress’ between inverted commas and implying that Tenbruck relies on a certain notion of scientific progress, borrows something from Goodstein’s critique of Tenbruck (2017, p. 76) and foreshadows something of modern Simmel scholarship more generally: perhaps it is an intrinsic aspect of Simmel’s ‘system’ or methodology that requires “performative demonstration” (ibid). Reminiscent of Hegel’s ‘impossible preface’ to *The Phenomenology of Spirit* (2018, pp. 9-46), methodology is immanent to the system and developed in it, not in some a priori realm prior to it.

²⁰³ In the geographic sense.

That is, for Salz, the source of this impact was seemingly “in the way he [Simmel] presented his material” and this presentation is bound up in a unique conception of dialectics (ibid). As manifest in his lectures, this crystallisation took the outward form of improvisation; that is, Simmel in his lectures “appeared to be improvising”, resulting in the experience of “finding the truth *statu nascendi*” on behalf of the audience (ibid, emphasis original). Despite this appearance, the audience was – through Simmel – being guided by “Ariadne’s thread” through labyrinthine conditions, with the ‘improvisation’ serving to render plausible each potential pathway out of the labyrinth (ibid, p. 236). The necessity to render *each* conceptual thread plausible conveys the sense that “dialectics is the air in which we live and breathe” (ibid, p. 235). In other words, only by *performing*²⁰⁴ the inherent possibility and even necessity of fundamentally incompatible perspectives can Simmel persuade us of his central thesis. In Salz’s formulation, this thesis is the following: “[w]e must[...] get used to realizing that the coexistence of logical incompatibilities is a law of life” (ibid). A cold, ‘scientific’, ‘scholarly’, ‘systematic’ discourse cannot convey this without appearing wanting of intellect at worst and hopelessly unsystematic at best.

Performance, rhetoric, style, form, and presentation are part and parcel of Simmel’s essential argument. Arguably – as I will sketch further in relation to contemporary scholars below – he aims to show the mutual plausibility of variegated lines of inquiry that must remain to a certain extent discrete while nevertheless being synthesisable into a kind of whole. Structurally, one may find similarities in, for example, the writing in Søren Kierkegaard’s *Either/Or* (1992), which – to put it simplistically – aims to show the mutual plausibility of the aesthetic and the ethical worldview. Kierkegaard imbues both sections with a kind of plausibility at least partially grounded in various forms of rhetoric: rhapsodic and incisive on the one hand, calculated and rational on the other. The apparent necessity of each viewpoint heightens the thrust of his argument. Neither aesthetic nor ethical principles will decide the matter for you; you must choose unaided by the crutch of such certainties. Unlike Kierkegaard, Simmel does not appear to emphasise proto-existentialist choice, but a “dialectic” or synthesis of various conceptual threads (Salz 1959, p. 235), each fundamental and irreducible to the other that can nevertheless be made intelligible to one another. Despite or even because of his insistence on the necessity of this sort of plurality, Salz stresses that Simmel is “no

²⁰⁴ This has become crucial in contemporary Simmel scholarship.

relativist who wavered and talked with his tongue in his cheek” (ibid, p. 236). Although Simmel was “[t]olerant of the most diverse views”, it is not the case that ‘everything goes’ so much as truth is conditioned and multivalent, or a product of multiple viewpoints (ibid).

As regards his sociology, Simmel is ultimately an aesthete of sorts, according to Salz. Simmel’s use of form is suggestive of “seeing things in perspective, being prepared for the unexpected so that it can be taken in stride” (ibid). That is, for Salz, Simmel appears less concerned with changing society than with comprehending it. Thereby, Simmel creates a distance from the powers of society which in turn allows for deeper comprehension, so to speak²⁰⁵. One may wonder whether comprehension – in this sense – is a prerequisite for ‘change’. Similarly, his “philosophy of life was not vitalism^[206], much less biologism” (ibid). That is, Simmel was not interested in conceptualising a ‘life force’ or reducing the complexities of experience to genetics, but to “make the polarity of phenomena both plausible and bearable” (ibid). As with his sociology, then, Simmel does not aim to sublimate the contradictions and complexities – through choice (à la Kierkegaard) or otherwise – but to show us how such necessary limits are constitutive of human experience and how we might live with them. Or, in Salz’s late Goethean terms, Simmel took it to heart that: “all things are transitory but as symbols are sent”²⁰⁷ (Goethe 1913, in Salz 1959, p. 326)²⁰⁸.

Only at the third stage of Simmel scholarship would the secondary Simmelian canon be roundly critiqued at length. However, there is another figure worth mentioning here, whose work represents this transition, namely Anna Wessely. Her work could also have been included in the following section, though by placing it here I emphasise the transitional role of this and similar work. After providing a brief biographical sketch and

²⁰⁵ See the discussion of ‘externalising’ problems as reducing their power over us in *PoM* (Simmel 2011, pp. 73-75).

²⁰⁶ Roughly the view that ‘life’ is a fundamental element or force irreducible to, for example, biological or chemical mechanisms (Weber 2018).

²⁰⁷ The full verse, which arguably renders the meaning more clearly, reads as follows:

“All things transitory
But as symbols are sent:
Earth’s insufficiency
Here grows to Event:
The Indescribable,
Here it is done:
The Woman-Soul leadeth us
Upward and on!” (Goethe 1913, p. 314).

²⁰⁸ Note: Salz does not provide bibliographic details for his quotation of *Faust*. I included the bibliographic details of the English version here in the interest of transparency.

stating the dominance of the 'sociological' Simmel, Wessely emphasises Simmel's self-ascription as a philosopher and his unorthodox mode of philosophy. For Wessely, Simmel's philosophising represents a shift from a "well-defined discipline with well-defined problems and accepted strategies for posing and solving them" (1990, p. 375). It is this shift in the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy that the sociological Simmel overlooks or renders inert. On this point Wessely is worth quoting at some length. She writes:

"[n]eutralizing techniques can always be found. Simmel's praise as a marvellous, insightful writer of essays, deservedly a favourite with the educated public, is a euphemistic way of saying that as a philosopher he is hopelessly unsystematic. An even more ingenious tactic puts him outside the pale of philosophy altogether. Declared a perfect embodiment of his age, Georg Simmel is made into an object of social and cultural history, thus relieving critics from the burden of considering the strength or weakness of his arguments. Depending on the point an author wants to make, Simmel is regarded as a philosopher of impressionism [think: Frisby or Lukács], a theoretician of modernity, an ancestor of cultural bolshevism, or the ideologue of imperialist rentier parasitism [think: Lukács]. In addition, Simmel's uncanny mixture of discourse-types finds success with sociologists who decree him a founding father of their suspect discipline. If anything is left from his work after all these operations, it can be easily tucked away in an obscure corner of a box, conveniently labelled "philosophy of life"" (ibid, pp. 375-376).

In Wessely's rather damning assessment, the 'sociological' Simmel with its narrow focus skirts the central element of Simmel's work, namely the nature of its conceptual, metaphysical continuity that she asserts is present from "*On Social Differentiation* to the final essays in the volume *Lebensanschauung*" (ibid p. 376, emphasis original)²⁰⁹. That is, in discourses lacking apparent logical connection, "Simmel will always speak of interactions and objectifications, of worlds and thresholds", which may lead one to

²⁰⁹ The first text, *Über soziale Differenzierung: Soziologische und psychologische Untersuchungen*, was first published in 1890, and the second, *Lebensanschauung: Vier metaphysische Kapitel*, was first published a few months after Simmel's death in 1918b. Hence, Wessely is arguing that Simmel was largely consistent, theoretically speaking, for about 28 years, i.e., most of his scholarly life given that he died at 60.

conclude that these categories serve to aestheticise the objects in question à la Frisby's Simmel (ibid).

For Wessely, however, the aesthetic view ignores "the driving ethical impulse which overruled his [Simmel's] aesthetic inclinations" (ibid). This ethical impulse did not take the form of "unequivocal principles" as would have satisfied his peers, but rather of a "combination of metaphysical values with pragmatic reflection on contingencies", a "'third' category" (ibid pp. 376 & 377). Or in terms that emphasise his Hegelian influence, Simmel aims to sublimate the "systems of binary oppositions" with which "philosophical language[...] distorts the essence of human essence and experience" by showing how opposing or contradictory forces do not cancel each other out, as it were, but create possibilities for overcoming their contradiction, or "forms", in their interaction (ibid, p, 376).

Wessely goes on to provide a sketch of Simmel's "philosophical anthropology", purportedly showing his justification for the need to overcome rigid philosophical dualisms (ibid). In brief, the human is essentially an "open system" that through "interactions with the environment" constantly revises its boundaries (ibid). This constant revision leads to an awareness of the contingent nature of specific boundaries and "an awareness of the as yet unknown beyond them", therefore overcoming that very boundary (ibid). That within the boundary – the "known" – that beyond it – the "unknown" – and the "permanent process of self-transcendence" is the act that links the apparent contradiction between the former two and constitutes the philosophical-Anthropos (ibid).

Another brief note before I continue to the third 'stage', i.e., contemporary Simmel scholarship. Gianfranco Poggi is also a key figure in the scholarship as the author of one of only two book-length studies of *PoM* (1993). However, as a reconstruction of his analytical frame and Simmelian response was the subject of the thesis proper, I have refrained from duplicating a sketch of his argument here. Suffice to say that Poggi falls well within the second stage of Simmel scholarship. That is, following the likes of Parsons and Durkheim, Poggi takes Simmel as an essentially unsystematic thinker whose 'method' can therefore be discounted. Poggi then parses his analysis of *PoM* through this frame. For both Poggi and the second 'stage' more broadly, however, Simmel remains elusive and is largely a secondary figure in sociology compared to Karl Marx, Weber, and Durkheim (Goodstein 2017, pp. 104-105).

Rather than discuss these views of Simmel in more depth, I have opted to present a broader overview of Simmel scholarship. This strategy will better furnish the reader with a sense of the context underlying the thesis proper, should it be required. It is with these figures – Small, Park, Wolff, Weingartner, Coser, Levine, and Frisby, to name a few – that one must contend if one wishes to revisit Simmel’s work. Alternatively, if we agree more with Tenbruck or Salz’s characterisation – which I and many contemporary scholars do – it is incumbent on us to find Ariadne’s thread to guide us through and beyond Simmel’s works. That is, when considering whether Simmel’s thought is systematic or not, one cannot presume the latter. Such approaches invoke analytical lenses that destroy any possibility of finding systematicity in Simmel’s work – as is the subject of the thesis proper. However, nor can we beg the question and assume that it is there. The work of Tenbruck and Salz in particular, and that of all but the harshest critics (e.g., Sorokin, early Parsons, etc.) to varying degrees provides some basis for the search of a Simmelian system. One ‘through line’ in contemporary Simmel scholarship is arguably the justification of the search for and the explication of such a system, whereas another might be the development of this system for contemporary analytical purposes.

§3 Rethinking Simmel

Ottthein Rammstedt (2012) has offered a relatively recent overview of Simmel’s work that highlights the interplay between the Anglophone and the Teutophone literature, thereby providing a reference point against which to discuss contemporary Simmel scholarship. Specifically, Rammstedt details the arduous process of creating a German-language collected edition of Simmel’s work, a process only completed within the last decade. Rammstedt, too, divides his overview into three stages.

The first stage – precipitated by a “new interest” after World War I – emphasises the oft-neglected role of two women in Simmel’s life: his wife, Gertrud Simmel, and “his pupil and friend”²¹⁰, Gertrud Kantorowicz (ibid, p. 303). This renewal of interest,

²¹⁰ Another source cites a closer relationship between Simmel and Kantorowicz:

“Drawn to the intellectual life, Kantorowicz was one of the first German women to obtain a PhD in the Humanities, in art history. While studying in Berlin she fell under the spell of Georg Simmel. Openly, she was a disciple and assistant; clandestinely, she was his mistress. In 1907 she bore Simmel a daughter, a fact that was hidden from all until after Simmel’s death in 1918” (Lerner 2011, pp. 56-57).

This may explain why she was entrusted to publish Simmel’s manuscripts after his death, as I will outline shortly.

murmurs of which were “registered” by Simmel “in the face of his looming death”, “obligated” him to expedite the completion of his final work – published in English as *The View of Life* (2010) – and the publication of other works (ibid). Those unpublished works categorised under “Philosophy of Art” and “Metaphysics” were entrusted by Simmel to Kantorowicz, whereas those under the title “Freedom” were entrusted to another colleague, Otto Baensch (ibid). Gertrud Simmel would “act as manager of Simmel’s intellectual legacy”, ensuring that texts deemed “theoretically obsolete or no longer relevant” by Simmel would not be republished (ibid). Tellingly, the omissions included at least *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft* [Introduction to Moral Science] (1892; 1893) and *Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen* [The War and Spiritual Decisions] (1917a) (Rammstedt 2012, pp. 303 & 310). She would also entrust Simmel’s lectures on ‘school pedagogy’ to Karl Hauter, which would become *Schulpädagogik* (1922). However, the plans for publication of the works entrusted to Kantorowicz would be thwarted by the theft of “large parts of Simmel’s manuscripts” (Rammstedt 2012, p. 303). Although Gertrud Simmel attempted to publish the remaining works, “the implications of rising inflation” meant that publishers would only agree to a “slim volume” (ibid, p. 304). Economic constraints soon became more ideo-political with the “Nationalist Socialist takeover of power in Germany” (ibid, p. 305). Deemed “non-Aryan”, none of Simmel’s works were republished, nor were any “monographs” written; his existing texts were fuel for the fires burning in May 1933 (ibid). The only exceptions were two doctoral dissertations started before the rise of National Socialism (ibid, p. 313).

Only after World War II could the effort to recover Simmel’s work begin. Despite having the “greatest contemporary influence in Germany” of all his peers (Dunkman 1931, in Rammstedt 2012, p. 305), Simmel had almost disappeared in the Teutophone world. Only through the work of Michael Landmann and Kurt Gassen – the editors of *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel* (1958), a celebration of Simmel’s work a century after his birth – would interest be reignited. This work contained both an “[i]ntellectual” and a “German-language” bibliography authored by the editors, respectively (Rammstedt 2012, p. 306). These contributions, in addition to Horst Müller’s “Plan for a Collected Works” (Müller n.d., in Rammstedt 2012, p. 306), represented the nascent collected edition of Simmel’s works. However, no amenable publisher could be found for a new

collection. At best, publisher Duncker & Humboldt would issue new editions of *Philosophy des Geldes* (1958) and *Soziologie* (1968). For all intents and purposes, “[t]he enterprise had failed” (Rammstedt 2012, p. 307).

In the early 1980s, Rammstedt would restart this project. This announcement at the conference entitled “The Relevance of Georg Simmel”, with “experts[...] from the German Federal Republic, France, Italy, Scotland, Israel and the USA” catalysed the collected edition (ibid). The “impact” of the conference, particularly the “impetus coming from sociology”, was significant (ibid). Rammstedt stresses:

“[a]fter the Second World War Simmel as philosopher, whether labelled as Neo-Kantian or *Lebenphilosoph* [philosopher of life], seemed to merit only a footnote in the history of philosophy, whereas Simmel’s sociological ideas had initiated a plethora of new approaches in [North] American sociology that in turn demonstrated Simmel’s relevance to German sociology” (ibid, emphasis original).

It seems, then, that a North-Americanised, sociological Simmel influenced the return of his ideas to Germany. This was not the only impetus for a resuscitation of Simmel’s work, however. In addition, the “search for validation of the social sciences in times of crisis” prompted a return of sorts to “the classics of sociology” (ibid). As a “Collected Works of Marx and Engels” would be to the “institutes of [both] the Marxist-Leninism of the Communist Party in the USSR and the Central Committee of the Socialist Party of the German Democratic Republic”, respectively; or how a “Collected Works of Max Weber” would be to contemporary sociology, so would a collected edition of Simmel’s be to the crisis of social science (ibid). Various funding difficulties would see the collected edition take three decades to complete, with the final volume being released in 2013 (ibid, p. 309). Nevertheless, the emergence of this collection, gradual as it was, served as an invaluable resource for Simmel scholarship.

As Rammstedt explicitly states and from my overview here, the ‘sociological’ has taken precedence for the Anglicised Simmel. That is, the North-Americanised Simmel scholarship has in turn shaped the Teutophone scholarship. The Anglophone and Teutophone spheres of Simmel scholarship are not discrete silos of thought, as is evident in the above. Indeed, historical circumstances necessitated that Simmel’s work be sheltered in geographical, cultural, and linguistic spaces outside of 20th century Berlin. Given the relative lack of translations of many of Simmel’s works, many pioneers have

had to engage almost entirely with Teutophone literature, at least initially – e.g., Small, Park – and from these engagements, new spheres of scholarship emerged. If these foundations are unable to be critically examined due to, say, language barriers, then interpreting a thinker without recourse to secondary scholarship – mediated as it is through the interests of that scholarship – can be difficult. Much of the contemporary scholarship can be viewed as an attempt to critically rethink Simmel by remedying the perceived ‘philosophical gap’ in the secondary literature, thereby providing an avenue of response to the interpretations of unsystematicity, valenced positively or otherwise²¹¹. The work of Wessely and Rammstedt fit within and contribute to the basic premise of the ‘third stage’ as I outline it (i.e., a broader reconceptualisation of Simmel’s work). However, both create the necessary conditions for the ‘third stage’ – through critique and collation of material – rather than conduct it per se.

The beginnings of a more thoroughgoing reconceptualisation can be traced to a renewed mediation between the Teutophone and the Anglophone spheres via the work of Olli Pyyhtinen and Turo-Kimmo Lehtonen (2008). Using Hacking’s *Historical Ontology* (2002) and its distinction between philosophy as “*primarily* interested in problem solving” and “the birth of philosophical problems in relation to the history of scientific research” as a point of departure, the authors position Simmel’s philosophy as existing outside this distinction (Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 302, emphasis original). For Hacking, the former arose in the “Anglo-American world” at the beginning of the 20th century (ibid), and on its face is broadly consistent with the ‘instrumental activism’ identified by Levine, Carter, and Gorman in North American social science. For Pyyhtinen and Lehtonen, though Simmel was concerned with philosophical ‘problems’, this was not to “solve them or to show possible direction to possible solutions” (ibid). Rather, they write: “[a]s Michael Landmann^[212] has asserted, for Simmel, the elucidation of problems and the sharp and thorough experience of them are at least as important as finding answers to them” (ibid)²¹³. Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen note also that Simmel’s philosophy “underwent profound changes over the years”²¹⁴ (ibid, p. 303). However, “at least since

²¹¹ This is also not to say that other figures could not be included here (e.g., Featherstone). I have chosen what are, in my judgment and commensurate to the limitations of this thesis, the most crucial and incisive works.

²¹² This is the same Landmann involved with the collection edition of Simmel’s works, as outlined above.

²¹³ Or, one might think that this and ‘solving’ a problem are two sides of the same coin.

²¹⁴ It is not relevant here, but the ‘early’ Simmel’s philosophy was “influenced by positivism” and “a pre-stage, a preliminary science” (Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 303).

the publication of *Philosophie des Geldes*[...] in 1900", they write, Simmel advanced a relatively consistent conception of philosophy (ibid).

Insofar as they are philosophical, Simmel's elucidation of such problems is constituted by five elements. First is the concept of the "third" and the closely related concept of "type", which the authors illustrate through Simmel's analysis of other philosophers' work (Levine 1971, in Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 305; Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 306, respectively). That is, Simmel is neither concerned with a "systematic presentation" of other philosophers' views nor with a "historical" account of their emergence (ibid, p. 305). Rather, he is concerned with the problems faced – and moulded – by a given philosopher, who develops a response extending beyond their specific circumstance. For example, "a problem is not important simply because Plato or Hegel have discussed it, but rather Plato and Hegel are important because they have discussed the problem" (ibid, p. 304). The 'third' is located between the individual and their development of an issue, and its importance over and above them. It is neither entirely objective – because it is structured by the idiosyncrasies of the individual – nor is it subjective – because of its intersubjective relevance.

Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen present the "third" as an indicative or "general characterisation of Simmel's approach" (ibid, p. 305). Drawing on Mike Featherstone's work²¹⁵, they elucidate Simmel's third as:

"play with paradoxes, dualisms, and ambiguities, not only by intertwining opposites and culminating their tensions, or by dissolving apparently monolithic unities into the interaction of opposing forces^[216], but by trying to find some common ground or some "underlying coherence"" (ibid).

It appears, then, that the putative contradictions in Simmel's approach are not indicative of a lack of systematicity. Rather, they articulate the simultaneous validity of diverse lines of inquiry and the problems this poses (i.e., paradox, ambiguity), and an attempt to provide a higher order unity 'in-between' these

²¹⁵ Featherstone's paper, *Georg Simmel: An introduction* (1991), is the source of the citations within the immediately preceding citation of Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen (2008) and could be included under the 'dissidents' category of the third stage of Simmel. I omit it for three reasons, namely: brevity concerns, that Wessely (1990) performs a similar function by emphasising the role of 'thirds' (1990), and that Featherstone is implicitly included in Pyyhtinen & Lehtonen (2008).

²¹⁶ This mode of the third is particularly important for Simmel's concept of society and his argument as to why society cannot be presupposed. Though Simmel does not use this term as extensively in *TPoS*, see Chapters 3 and 4).

lines of inquiry, so to speak. One can also see in this characterisation Simmel's method and aversion to reified, excessively broad concepts (i.e., monolithic unities)²¹⁷.

The closely related concept of "type" is used by Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen to home in more specifically on Simmel's conception of "the philosopher" (ibid, p. 306). For the authors, Simmel's philosopher is a "type" or 'third' that mediates between the subjective and the objective in a specific way (ibid). This type is not subjective because it is not fully determined by the whims of a subject or their responses to their environment, as Simmel takes the relative "scarcity of [philosophical] themes" to show (ibid). That is, the relative consistency of philosophical themes and concepts attests to their independence from individual circumstance. Neither is this type purely objective because their works are conditioned by the necessity of taking their "limited worldview as a starting point", and nor is the philosopher concerned with "the objects as such" (ibid, p. 307). Nevertheless, this does not preclude a kind of generality that takes it beyond mere subjectivity. Generality or 'typicality' of this sort is what:

"still makes Plato, St. Thomas Aquinas or Spinoza not only worth reading but also objects of identification. They have advanced a type of thinking and developed it into a particularly interesting form, and this type still coincides with the way others experience the world today" (ibid).

This is not to say that Plato, Aquinas, Spinoza, or any other philosophers express universally or completely valid edifices of thought, but that they nevertheless resonate with contemporary experience in important ways.

For Simmel, the goal of interpreting philosophers' work, then, is to explicate this resonance, which may involve both 'historical' and 'objective' interpretations but culminates in neither alone²¹⁸. Crucially, for Simmel, though the philosopher as "type" is a product "of interaction between the personal and the contingent environment", transcendence of these particularities constitutes the type as such (ibid, p. 308). The interaction between the individual and their environment is in this sense singular – i.e., only possible within or in response to a particular circumstance. Thus, it is not possible "to map some kind of gallery of transcendental archetypes" because the circumstances within which and against which interaction is counterposed shifts: the philosopher

²¹⁷ This particularly relevant to Simmel's conception of society (see Chapter 3).

²¹⁸ Of particular note for this thesis is that Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen draw on *Soziologie* and *Philosophie des Geldes* for this insight into Simmel's philosophy (2008, p. 308).

“creates this type” (ibid, emphasis original)²¹⁹. The mark of typ(e)-ical philosophy is one of praise for Simmel that lauds the ability of the philosopher to transcend their particular conditions, not by avoiding them, but by articulating a response to them with resonance beyond those conditions.

If the foregoing sketch of ‘type’ can be read as a *prima facie* articulation of the nature of philosophy, for Simmel, then the proceeding can be read as its four central elements. In the first instance, philosophy is the attempt to “think without preconditions” (Simmel 1996, in Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 308). That is, philosophy is unique because it is “characterized by the striving to go beyond” all preconditions, and the extent to which thinkers ostensibly located in other disciplines query their own principles is the extent to which they act as philosophers (ibid, p. 309). As Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen astutely point out, this simultaneously implies that “Simmel does not understand philosophy only in a narrow sense of designating a discipline or profession” (ibid); all thinkers and indeed all people who consider the preconditions of thought or fundamental principles are to that extent philosophising, implicitly or explicitly, for better or for worse. For Simmel, the preconditions of thought are not to be found in the “structures of *pure consciousness*”, as the above ascriptions of neo-Kantianism might suggest, but in the “[pre]conditions and forms of our *cultural* relation to the world and its objects” (ibid, emphasis original). ‘Going beyond’ these cultural relations, then, involves a kind of deconstruction, so to speak, that “manifests itself typically as a bid to *study* them” (ibid, emphasis original). Citing *PoM* as an example²²⁰ (Simmel 2004, in Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 309), the structure of consciousness certainly plays a role for Simmel, though the understanding of consciousness is mediated through and with “social relationships” (ibid) and the metaphysical structure of being and value (Simmel 2011, pp. 61-302, esp. 61-138).

²¹⁹ This would also undermine to the critique of Simmel’s sociological forms as leading to a “sterile” classificatory exercise (Parsons 1988, p. 28).

²²⁰ The full quote from *PoM* is as follows: “[an aim of *PoM* is to] present the pre-conditions that, situated in mental states, in social relations and in the logical structure of reality and values, give money its meaning and practical position” (Simmel 2004, p. 54; Simmel 2004, in Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 309). One aspect of the authors’ analysis of this statement is rather odd, namely that Simmel sees “profound valuations, and even metaphysical realities” as the conditions that must be studied (Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 309). However, even in their own citation, it seems clear that *an* intention of Simmel’s is to elucidate the *structure* of value and valuation – alongside that of both consciousness and reality, and social relations – and not merely valuations of a specific or a ‘profound’ kind. As cited above, the entire analytic section can be said to deal with these preconditions, though the first chapter deals with being and particularly value most explicitly. And I stress *an* intention because this concerns the ‘lower’ element of Simmel’s philosophy, which will become evident shortly.

Moreover, in questioning the conditions of disciplinary knowledge, philosophy exhibits a unique independence. That is, philosophy has the capability to pose questions that “physics or linguistics, for instance, [cannot] because it is not determined by any empirical object” (Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 310). Rather, in posing a question either one must rely on foundational conditions, or one implies preconditions in the question posed. Thus, “the inner autonomy of a thinking process” (Simmel 1996, in Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 310) – the sense in which philosophy is a “problem” to itself and is thereby open to radical reconceptualisation, without losing its essence as philosophy (Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 310) – distinguishes it from other disciplinary knowledges, for Simmel. Further, therefore, the mark of a philosophy is determined both by the questions it poses and the ‘answers’ it provides.

If thinking without the kinds of preconditions necessary for other disciplinary knowledges represents the ‘lower bounds’ of philosophy, then the attempt to think beyond the opposite pole of these lines of thought – “the totality of existence” – represents its ‘upper bounds’, according to Simmel (*ibid*). That is, disciplinary knowledge “is oriented to recognizing and exactly knowing the particular contents of the world” (*ibid*). However, given their preconditions, disciplinary knowledges inevitably result in (a) “more or less narrow perspective[s]” (*ibid*). Therefore, philosophy must synthesise these perspectives, “with the help of abstract concepts”, into a unified picture of the world (*ibid*). Referring again to *PoM*, the authors analyse ‘lower philosophy’ as constituted by the task of developing the conceptual means through which to ‘see’, identify, or co-create objects in the world (e.g., money or society), and ‘upper philosophy’ as the task of synthesising the results of these lines of inquiry (*ibid*). According to Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen, this synthesis takes one of two forms²²¹. One must either unify “the disconnected and disparate facts” or situate them in “metaphysical purpose, meaning, and the value of existence itself” (*ibid*). Ultimately, both lead to the philosophical, a place “where it is not reasonable to expect definite answers, contrary to[...] other disciplines” (*ibid*).

²²¹ Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen only partially address this point and suggest that Simmel’s synthesis as concerning *either* the degree of knowledge *or* metaphysical questions of value. However, both are metaphysical for Simmel: the first represents ‘completing’ or extending disciplinary inquiries according to their immanent logic beyond what is empirically possible in the discipline, i.e., speculatively; the second involves the metaphysical questions of the value of these inquiries. Given the ‘narrow’ remit of disciplinary knowledge, the first can only lead to a fragmented worldview analogous to tangential lines that will never intersect. For Simmel, only the latter can ultimately provide a comprehensive picture of the world, i.e., a worldview proper (see also Chapter 5).

However, the philosopher is not unique in their ability to totalise, nor do they necessarily speak about totality explicitly. That is, as Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen phrase it, Simmel “shows how this fragmentariness [of the modern world] is controlled by provisional totalities with perceptions and interactions in daily life” (ibid). These always-penultimate totalities include scientific disciplines or socio-political communities, structured wholes that orient their parts within their respective domains. Yet, to say that modern life is ‘fragmented’ or atomised presupposes a sense of unity. How is ‘modern life’ as a singular category comprised of fragments; that is, in what sense do ‘fragments’ arise from a singular world and partake in the same conceptual definition? For the Simmelian philosopher, what are the *totalities* of which our experience is a fragment and how do we understand the *totality* of fragments as instances of the same? Despite these ostensible paradoxes, the fragment is the *only* means through which one may arrive at a general worldview because “the totality of existence is accessible to no one and can act upon no one” (Simmel 1996, in Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 311). A parsing of the fundamentally unified experience is the necessary first step to transcend particularity and achieve a relevance beyond it – i.e., to achieve “typicality”²²² (Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 311).

To achieve ‘typicality’, the philosopher must generalise “something that is not general in itself”, namely a fragment (ibid). This can be read in multiple senses. The philosopher experiences limits in the form of their individuality within structuring socio-historical circumstance, and through specific concepts and their relations necessary to articulate – if indirectly – the totality. Hence, a rift between the totality and the particular opens. That is, the principle underlying a valid “description of the totality” (e.g., pure reason or thought) may not accord with “a specific case” (ibid). For Simmel, this is because lines of inquiry or “perspectives” such as “practical life, science, art, religion, philosophy, or politics” (ibid, p. 312) are each “worlds” or discrete, valid provisional totalities (Simmel 1999, Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 311). Though philosophy is unique in its scope – operating ‘below’ and ‘above’ other worlds – its conceptions do not override those within worlds and vice versa. *PoM*, for example, is not intended to replace or critique a political-economic understanding of money, but to offer a new, equally valid understanding from a new perspective. Namely and in brief,

²²² See Chapter 3 for this division in the context of *TPoS*.

PoM elucidates modern society – itself a ‘provisional totality’ of sorts – according to an analytic of money.

On account of its ‘lower’ – i.e., thought below preconditions – and ‘upper’ roles – i.e., speculative extension of disciplinary logic beyond the empirical and incorporating lines of inquiry into a broader worldview – and the orientation towards totality through fragments, philosophy is not determined by a specific content. Rather, philosophy in general is constituted “by a form of questioning” implied by the above (ibid, p. 312). As if to pre-emptively summarise the thrust of this third stage of Simmel scholarship, Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen write of Simmel’s philosophy:

“[i]f thinking is examined emphasizing its ends and contents, then no common denominator will be found for the different schools of philosophy. And the lack of common denominator with respect to content applies not only to the history of philosophy and its present state, *but also to Simmel’s oeuvre too*” (ibid, emphasis added).

This highlights more precisely where systematicity is to be found in Simmel’s work, if not philosophy more broadly, namely in the way it constructs its ‘world’ through the elements already discussed. However, philosophy cannot remain content with studying itself, that is, with studying its forms. To do so would “be like someone who constantly polishes his knife and fork and studies their usability but does not eat a thing” (Simmel 2001, in Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 312). Moreover, philosophy for Simmel is constituted by the specific process or “*movement*” outlined thus far (Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 312, emphasis original). Alternatively put, the predisposition towards such questions represents a “philosophical culture”, applicable to many aspects of life (Simmel 1996, in Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 313). Across its multiplicity of uses, ‘philosophical culture’ is one, according to Simmel.

The final element of Simmel’s philosophy as outlined by Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen is Simmel’s concept of “life” or “spiritual life” (2008, pp. 313 & 314). In the vein of Salz, the authors do not consider this a biological concept. Rather, ‘life’ is Simmel’s “lyrical notion”, a way of conveying the “processuality of things and the world” (ibid, p. 314). Most important for our purposes here is that this concept marks Simmel’s “liberation” from foundational Kantian concerns with epistemology (ibid): we are no longer “an epistemological problem”, at least foundationally (Simmel 2001, in Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 314). Instead, through engagement with Johann Goethe, Arthur

Schopenhauer, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Henri Bergson, Simmel develops his concept as that which is always counterposed to itself in “objective forms” and attempts to overcome them (Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 314). That is, ‘spiritual life’ aims to synthesise the fixity and autonomy of what is, “being”, with the movement or freedom to overcome it, “becoming” (ibid, p. 315). Put another way, Simmel’s ‘life’ aims to unify the immediate with the mediate, or the particular with the universal. This is what the objective ‘forms’ created by subjects – e.g., social organisation, the various spheres of disciplinary knowledge, or language – attempt to do: overcome subjective particularity and attain an intersubjective understanding of the world. The first step in this process is the establishment of a fixed point, i.e., “a *form*” (ibid, emphasis original).

Language, for example, is particularly instructive. Without some degree of fixity, the ability of words to denote things in the world ceases. Yet, the moment these forms attain fixity, they risk stultifying that very expression and undermining the subjectivities that created them; language must always remain open to reshaping and conveying new experiences. Hence, though Simmel’s life necessitates fixity or an objectivity of sorts, it also requires the recognition that any given form is by definition limited. Simmel’s solution lies in the very notion of a limitation or a “boundary” itself (Simmel 1999, in Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 315). As Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen put it: “[for Simmel,] form is a necessary element of life and at the same time a boundary, even though its sole purpose is to be overcome” (2008, p. 315). That is, in the recognition of our limitedness – i.e., that we are “beings” that are predicated on a limitation or bracketing of the totality – we already transcend these limits because the limit itself borders, as it were, *both* the particular and the totality. Just as geographical borders mark the separation of spaces, it also ‘joins’ them in this act of separation; the border that separates us from the totality, objective forms, also simultaneously connects us to it and allow us to comprehend it, according to Simmel.

The moment that life’s tension between the necessity of forms and the necessity of overcoming them is dissolved²²³, either by ceasing the attempt to overcome existing forms or by retreating from them altogether, then so does the movement that constitutes life cease. Strictly speaking, this is impossible, given the necessity of form. The only ‘true’ overcoming of form, for Simmel, is the struggle against present forms

²²³ I note the similarities between this and Nietzsche’s Apollo-Dionysus dialectic, especially as formulated in *The Birth of Tragedy* (2008).

that must be revived anew. This is where “[p]hilosophy becomes the emblem of a living moment”, a formal representation of the concept of life in tension with itself, “especially[...] as thinking without preconditions” (ibid, p. 316). In engaging with and attempting to overcome preconditions, philosophy not only *describes* the life in conceptual, ‘objective-formal’ terms, but *enacts* the “purest expression[...] of thought and the world it studies” (ibid); for Simmel, philosophy represents the synthesis of an analysis of thought with thought itself.

This ability of Simmel’s conception of philosophy is, for Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen, the source of Simmel’s emerging contemporary relevance, especially for social science. First, the ability not to sublimate and destroy, but to combine contradictory lines of thought “together such that they reciprocally illuminate each other” (ibid). Conceptually, this is the role of the “third”; as a matter of “type”, this is the role of the philosopher (ibid, p. 317). This can be seen in his analyses of other philosophers, *Kant and Goethe* (Simmel 2007) and *Schopenhauer and Nietzsche* (Simmel 1991; Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 317). However, to achieve this reciprocal illumination, there must first be a tension of some kind; the ‘third’ “manifests itself only in the relation between opposites[...]: Simmel’s thinking constantly moves in a pendulum between monism and dualism” (ibid). Hence, contradiction, tension, juxtaposition, or whatever one wishes to call it, is essential to Simmel’s thought and to attempt to purge these elements destroys at least part of their meaning. To ‘systematise’ Simmel, therefore, on account of its apparent contradictoriness is to dissolve many of the insights and contemporary relevancies his work may possess. Nor does Simmel remain with disorganised contradiction. Rather, for the want of a better term, it is the ‘illuminating’ contradictions that must be tolerated because they provide insight where linear, contradiction-free inquiry cannot go. Complex phenomena, particularly social and fundamental ones, cannot be resolved into neatly partitioned elements and interactions.

Moreover, the ability to move from “particularities to the larger whole” in a “suprahistorical” way is also contemporarily useful, according to Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen (ibid), alongside drawing upon multiple particularities to generate a variegated whole. Although philosophy aims at a “totalizing whole”, it may not achieve this by expanding any ‘fragment’ or by shunting particularities into a ‘system’ wherein they fit awkwardly or not at all (ibid, p. 318). Rather, philosophy must find a way to allow objects to present themselves “subject to their own immediate laws”, which, for

Simmel, already entails interactivity with other objects (ibid). That is, all objects are subject to interaction as a metaphysical principle. Encountering and understanding this principle is, Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen conclude, the purpose of philosophy for Simmel and, by extension, another source of its contemporary relevance. Paraphrasing from *Philosophische Kultur* (Simmel 1911b), they write:

“the aim [of philosophy] is not to find solutions to problems; instead, the answers are present in the activity of seeking. Simmel quotes an old fable about a peasant who on his deathbed reveals to his descendants that there is a treasure hidden on the family’s lands. The children, of course, eagerly dig through the soil and find nothing. However, the next year the field that had been turned upside down yields an excellent harvest” (Lehtonen & Pyyhtinen 2008, p. 318).

The manner of searching will determine what is found, what one ‘sees’ in the world. The philosophical search will “inevitably” show the “fundamental interrelatedness” of all things (ibid). Yet, if we begin from this premise, it remains a glib abstraction. Only when it is reached through engagement with specific philosophical problems – only when the field is turned over – does the metaphysical principle attain its power. Only after we treat specific problems as, in the first instance, specific, only then and thereby to encounter their generality can Simmel’s conception of the ‘boundary’ and the process of ‘life’ emerge. That is, only in the cyclical movement of thought between particular to universal can thought explicitly encounter and enact its fundamental nature.

To this pivotal contribution one might add Pyyhtinen’s *Simmel and ‘the Social’* (2010), which expands on some of themes sketched above (esp. pp. 49-67), through emphasising the ‘social’ and the relation of the philosophical to it. As Pyyhtinen’s remit is much broader, money features relatively obliquely, primarily as something Simmel uses to elucidate social relations. On the one hand this is not surprising, considering the need to emphasise the role of Simmel’s philosophy in his ‘sociological’ work and that, for Simmel, the particular is the prerequisite of the universal. I note, however, relatively little is made of the development of money and value as concepts, i.e., much of *PoM*, chapter one (2011, pp. 61-138). Thus, although Pyyhtinen certainly gives the philosophical a prominent place in his analysis of Simmel, he ultimately appears to continue the story of the ‘sociological’ Simmel, albeit with a significant emphasis on its philosophical underpinnings. This is not to dispute the value of this approach, but to

highlight that there remains a gap in this kind of analysis: Simmel's concept of money and the development of it remains understated so long as it is merely a conduit of social relations. Pyyhtinen's most recent work, *The Simmelian Legacy* (2018), goes some way to addressing this gap by providing a broader overview of Simmel's thought. However, this too remains at a relatively general and introductory level. Again, this is not a criticism because, arguably, such broad rethinking of and reintroduction to Simmel's thought is pressing and timely. Nevertheless, there remain underutilised aspects of Simmel's work, which may point to new contemporary relevancies – especially regarding the theorisation of money.

The final thinker I use to illustrate contemporary Simmel scholarship is Elizabeth Goodstein. In her work we see a more legato formulation of the themes circulating in Lehtonen and particularly Pyyhtinen's work on Simmel, albeit with a different emphasis. The title of her paper, *Thinking at the Boundaries: Georg Simmel's Phenomenology of Disciplinarity* (2019), provides a good starting point. Like Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen above, Goodstein takes 'thinking' that occurs at 'boundaries' as central to Simmel's thought. Liminal thinking positions disciplines as pieces of an intertwined mosaic, not discrete lenses through which the world is studied, let alone directly accessed in any positivist sense. Goodstein attributes this performative analysis of disciplinarity, "its failure to conform to the emergent disciplinary ordering of knowledge" (ibid, p. 176), as both the central argument of *PoM* and the source of its largely unrecognised contemporary relevance. The lack of recognition is due in part to the 'sociological' interpretations of Simmel, insofar as it invokes "habits and assumptions proper to a disciplinary imaginary that he did not share" (ibid).

The starkest example of these assumptions is the designation of *PoM* as a sociological text, particularly Coser deeming it "mainly a contribution to cultural sociology" (1971, in Goodstein 2019, p. 176²²⁴). For Goodstein, the "Anglophone" analysis of *PoM* in particular "has largely proceeded along these lines" (Goodstein 2019, p. 167n6). Moreover, Simmel's oeuvre in general has been interpreted through this lens both in the Anglophone and Teutophone worlds (ibid, p. 176n2), as is evident in the selectivity of Small and Parks to the social-theoretical interpretation of *PoM* by Poggi. The philosophical elements of Simmel's work have been "reframed into the idiom of social theory" (ibid, p. 177n6 cont.).

²²⁴ See also my brief sketch above.

That is, the general appropriation of Simmel as sociologist has transformed these more philosophically sensitive contributions largely into resources for social-theoretical analysis – a much narrower, more specialised contribution than intended by Simmel. The third stage of Simmel scholarship – according to my division – can therefore be expressed as the attempt to reimbue Simmel’s work with the philosophical. Why is this necessary? For Goodstein, the social-theoretical lens obscures the “methodological ambitions” of *PoM*; namely, that “money makes visible human culture”, and the demonstration of “a new mode of theorizing oriented to the flux of modern life” (ibid, p. 177). Hence, Simmel’s relevance extends “both in[to] and beyond the social sciences today” (ibid).

The first step in Goodstein’s ‘re-philosophisation’ of Simmel’s work involves deconstructing the narrative of Simmel as sociologist. In the oft-cited letter in favour of this characterisation, Simmel writes in 1894 that “I am devoting myself entirely to sociological studies” (2005, in Goodstein 2019, p. 178). Half a decade later, Simmel would lament that his “life’s vocation in philosophy” would be overlooked in favour of his “sideline” pursuits (ibid), particularly in the widespread translations of the early version of *The Problem of Sociology*²²⁵ (in English: Simmel 1895; Goodstein 2019, p. 178). Though Simmel begins with sociology and, indeed, “psychology”²²⁶, his conception of both sociology and philosophy would soon find themselves at odds with “the rapidly institutionalizing discipline” of the former and the “increasing professionalized disciplinary formation” of the latter (ibid)²²⁷. Insofar as *PoM* is concerned, its anti- or rather multi-disciplinarity is the demonstration of this fact. That is, even as philosophy *PoM* does not “cease to be a contribution to sociology” (ibid, p. 179). Though its driving idea – the “concept of reciprocal causation [*Wechselwirkungs-begriff*]” – evolved from a concept developed for sociological analysis – i.e., “forms of association [*Formen der*

²²⁵ I stress the early version because the latter version (in English: Simmel 1909b) is heavily philosophical in the ‘lower’ sense. This also informs why I chose the opening chapter of *Soziologie*, which is also titled ‘Das Problem der Soziologie’: it highlights the ways in which Simmel’s philosophy is intertwined with his sociological investigations.

²²⁶ This is, as Goodstein stresses, in “the encompassing sense given to it by Moritz Lazarus and Heyman Steintahl’s culturalist *Völkerpsychologie* [‘folk psychology’ or ‘psychology of a folk’]” (2019, p. 178, emphasis original).

²²⁷ For a more in-depth view of Simmel’s relationship with sociology around the publication of *PoM*, see Goodstein (2017, esp. pp. 91-95 & 138-42).

Vergesellschaftung]" – it soon extended beyond this original purpose (Simmel 2004, in Goodstein 2019, p. 179, emphasis original²²⁸)²²⁹.

²²⁸ Square parentheses in both citations are Goodstein's and denote the original German terms. This also reiterates the implications of this thesis, which are not limited to sociology or its methodology. Rather, my analysis of *TPOS* is more concerned with elucidating Simmel's fundamental concepts and their relations – interaction (reciprocal causation) and the emergence of 'form' key among them.

²²⁹ Given the centrality of reciprocal causation to Simmel's work, it is worth tarrying with it for a moment. As Goodstein states, form is a constellation of several moving parts. In its formulation for sociological purposes, Simmel groups these into three categories. In no particular order – because they overlap with one another – these elements are: content, the 'interests' of individuals involved; situated form, a formulation of the interaction of individuals within a specific set of circumstances; history, or an analysis of present and prior material factors. The function of these factors constitutes the more general concept of 'form' and Simmel's *provisional* way of doing sociology.

That is, roughly speaking, form is constituted by certain 'inner' factors – motivations, needs, desire, etc. – and Simmel's use of psychology here denotes a method of arriving at these factors through what is accessible 'externally', i.e., the outward expressions or symptoms of desires particular to the case under investigation. Simplistically put, the announcement by executive management of La Trobe University of a restructure expresses a desire to alter the number and nature of its employees, whereas the signing of an open letter in arguing against the proposal expresses the desire to overturn or at least mitigate the potential effects thereof, for example. Moreover, these desires and those of the representatives of the institutions are mediated or brought together in certain ways. The desires of executive management are expressed through various forums where those against it may, in principle, voice their views; that is, formal negation may ostensibly occur. Finally, one must consider the present and historical material factors affecting the above considerations. For example, due to COVID-19 these forums are conducted online, federal funding arrangements incentivise a reliance on international student enrolments, a general 'business ontology' or austerity-minded conception of fiscal responsibility, the general understandings of the role of the university in society and that of La Trobe specifically, etc. Crucially, each element bleeds into the others. The material factor of federal funding arrangements can impact how the 'desire to oppose' the restructure manifests. For example, one may engage with formal and private processes, force these processes into a public space, or both. Funding arrangements also impact whether the 'desire to oppose' is acted upon – perhaps through despair – or even if this desire presents at all. Conversely, the desires of individuals and federal government funding bodies shape the material conditions in which universities operate. Hence, funding arrangements shape desires and desires shape federal funding arrangement.

However, Simmel's form aims to go beyond the particulars and discern what a specific situation can reveal about sociality in general. 'Sociality' refers to how we interact with one another or the sense in which I respond to and cause a response in you, and vice versa. A simple 'formal' analysis of the above, then, might run as follows. Where a social group is subjected to internal turmoil as a result of a specific *response* to material conditions – not the conditions per se – there is likely to be a constriction of individuality possible within this social group in accordance with their perceived contribution to the material state of the social group. That is, where the possibility of belonging to an institution such as a university is predicated on short-term fiscal 'responsibility', anyone or any subgroup perceived detrimental to this goal is less accommodatable in this social sphere; the range of individuality possible along this axis therefore shrinks or ceases. Conversely, the range of individuality for those ostensibly amenable to short-term fiscal concerns may increase. If, however, the proportion of those ostensibly 'bringing in the money', so to speak, increases and this becomes the primary desire of everyone comprising the institution, this precludes certain kinds of activity whose value may not be immediately present, quantifiable, or immediately monetisable.

Hence, such a social group is vulnerable to a critique exposing these limitations and tendencies, though this would take us beyond Simmel's concept of form as it is sociologically formulated. Rather, form appears in the first instance as a diagnostic tool designed to elucidate immanent structures social groups, and thereby their possible permutations and limitations. Any argument pertaining to the normative value of the sociological form – beyond what is implied in the analysis – and strays into more philosophical territory, specifically its 'upper' realm above disciplinary knowledge. This realm takes the content of disciplinary knowledge – in this case the analysis of a specific social group – and subjects it to a new kind of analysis that is, therefore, neither entirely sociological nor philosophical, but an amalgam of the two. This involves questions as to desirability or value of certain forms and their connections to a broader

The relationship between disciplinary knowledge and the operation of philosophy takes us back to Goodstein's explications of Simmel's philosophy and *PoM*, which she stresses like Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen above. As such, I emphasise only some of the distinctions and nuances between the two views. Goodstein situates her analysis more squarely in *PoM*. This text, she argues, demonstrates a "modernist phenomenology in which dialectics parts way with system-building to trace the complex relations between surface and depth, materiality and ideality, contingency and ultimate values without seeking univocal answers or final resolution" (Goodstein 2019, p. 179). That is, with a more holistic intention than the first-stage scholars and in contrast to an imposed aesthetic unity proposed in second-stage scholars – i.e., a unity of form in Simmel's work – broadly speaking, Goodstein is proposing that Simmel's work is methodologically unified. As above, the task of philosophy is split into "epistemological and logical questions and on the foundations and logics of particular forms of inquiry", or 'lower' philosophy; and "contemplating the meaning, purpose, limits, and value of all human undertakings, including scientific inquiry itself", or 'upper' philosophy (ibid, p. 180). Both areas are "categorically different from empirical ways of knowing" and, hence, cannot be usurped by scientific knowledge (ibid, p. 181).

Here, Goodstein's Simmel takes a more explicitly anti-positivist turn. Given its bifurcated role, *PoM* and philosophy in general ought "not be confused" with disciplinary tasks that investigate material "origins or historical evolution" (ibid). That is, the sections of *PoM* which involve the "investigation of the possibility of money as a spiritual-cultural formation" – i.e., the 'Analytic Part' (Simmel, 2011, pp. 61-302); and the normative questions concerning money and what it elucidates of society, i.e., the 'Synthetic Part' (ibid, pp. 305-556). In other words, each section is an example of 'lower' and 'upper' philosophy, respectively. Of particular interest is Goodstein's emphasis on Simmel's "post-Nietzschean expansion of dialectics" and the relation of his method to "artistic creation", in part because it diverts from the usual emphasis on Simmel's Kantianism (ibid, p. 182). As above, Simmel does not aim at a system that generates a singular answer to the question of money – or any other such question. Rather, "the work of art becomes the model" by showing the universal significance of the particular. Thus, aesthetic method, in this sense, takes on a metaphysical tone as a model or

worldview. Given the complexity of this type of sociological analysis alone, however, one can understand why *Soziologie* runs to almost 900 pages.

analogy of Simmel's general method²³⁰. However, the aims of art and philosophy are importantly distinct. For Simmel, art is "narrowly defined every time" and every generalisation beyond this is "an enrichment, a gift, an underserved benefit", whereas the problem of philosophy "is nothing less than the totality of being" (2011, p. 56). That is, art tends to overachieve – to convey more than it is "obliged to offer" – when it conveys a general insight (ibid). Conversely, philosophy tends to underachieve because it aims at totality; thus, philosophy has more opportunity to fail. Each line of inquiry (i.e., each particular) is encompassed by the "vertical" boundaries of disciplinarity, the "foundations and limits of disciplinary knowledge practices", below and above which philosophy operates in the 'lower' and 'upper' senses, respectively (Goodstein 2019, p. 182).

Simmel does not stop at one particular: the whole can only be grasped through integration of *multiple* perspectives. Whereas the "vertical[...] establishes the horizon[s]" of disciplinary knowledge, the integration of multiple perspectives constitutes its "horizontal" element (ibid). This is because an object, occurrence, institution, etc. can legitimately be considered from multiple points of view; "the implicit logic of disciplines", to the extent they consider their viewpoint as final, "is both methodologically and metaphysically flawed" (ibid). Hence, it is not the particular of money *as an economic* object that is to be generalised, in *PoM*, but money as a particular object open to a plurality of perspectives – legal, philosophical (in its multiple senses), historical, etc. However, even "qua economic fact", money can be considered philosophically in both its "non-economic conceptual and empirical preconditions" (ibid, pp. 182 & 183), and its "consequences for non-economic values and connections" (Simmel 1989, in Goodstein 2019, p. 182; see Simmel 2011, p. 55 for English edition).

The "disciplinary division of labor", underway in Simmel's time and seemingly entrenched today, "embodies and reinforces a restricted economy of interpretation" (Goodstein 2019, p. 182). For Goodstein, the demonstrative deconstruction of this paradigm is the key element of Simmel's *PoM*. Through subjecting money to his philosophical 'method' – i.e., 'upper' and 'lower'; dialectics of boundaries; totality; form and its outgrowth, reciprocal causality; and life – Simmel provides a response to the "instrumental logic[...] deeply embedded in modern knowledge practices" (ibid, p. 183).

²³⁰ In this "perspectivism" and aversion to abstract systems one can see the influence of Nietzsche – see Anderson (2017, esp. §6.2).

That is, Simmel shows how the instrumental object par excellence – money – is entangled with non-instrumental logics. And by implication, if money is entangled with absolute value, then so is every ostensibly instrumental pursuit, from scientific advancement to gainful employment. Simmel demonstrates the entanglement of money in absolute value by exposing its “historical-cultural conditions of possibility” on the one hand, its “ethical and metaphysical implications” on the other – i.e., ‘lower’ and ‘upper’ philosophy, respectively (ibid). Money thereby becomes a means to “reconsider facts and values as such” through a lens that highlights the relation between apparent oppositions (ibid), such as being and value subjectivity and objectivity, absolute and instrumental value (Simmel 2011, esp. pp. 62-107).

Unlike the “abstract” system-builders, Simmel articulates the linkages of his totality through oppositional concepts, chief among them absolute and instrumental value, in the particular and the ostensibly mundane (Simmel 1989, in Goodstein 2019, p. 183; see Simmel 2011, p. 55, for the English edition). This “synecdochic movement”, as Goodstein neatly terms it, expresses not only the interlinking of oppositional concepts, but their imbrication into everyday life (2019, p. 183). The repeated movement from “part to whole, local to global” shows that even from “dialectically opposed and prismatically shifting perspectives”, this sort of movement is possible from a broad array of perspectives (ibid). Moreover, in Salz’s terms once again, it demonstrates that this movement acts as “Ariadne’s thread” (1959, p. 236), where the labyrinth is a modern “world in flux” and theorisation of grand narratives seems impossible (Goodstein 2019, p. 183). Crucially, Simmel does not achieve this by generalising one perspective. Rather, Simmel presents a general foundation from which disciplinary perspectives can emerge – i.e., ‘lower’ philosophy: epistemology, logic – and an ultimate horizon towards which disciplinary knowledge can tend – ‘upper’ philosophy: the normative implications of what is revealed in disciplinary knowledge. Thus, Simmel maintains the legitimacy of disciplinary knowledges while creating spaces to think and theorise beyond them.

Money and “exchange” – its correlative form – provide a good foundation for “thinking lived experience anew” because “processes of exchange, in the widest sense”, ultimately ground the experience of meaning (ibid, p. 184)²³¹. That is, if the exchange

²³¹ This may seem like a bizarre statement and one Goodstein only partially addresses in the remainder of her paper – likely due to brevity concerns. In a sense, the entire ‘Analytic’ section of *PoM* is an exposition of ‘exchange’, which may be understood as the name for the process of reciprocal valuations. One can see the section ‘Exchange as a form of life’ for special reference to the significance of exchange (Simmel 2011,

process, in Simmel's analysis, provides insight into the way values are formed, then an analysis of the central element of modern exchange (i.e., money) will provide insight into value formation. The basis and implication of any insight, however, must be open to critical "reflection"; "epistemic assumptions and metaphysical implications" necessarily guide our understanding but risk obsolescence of all previous attempts at grand, totalising theorisation (ibid). Given that philosophy is oriented towards totality, for Simmel, it cannot skirt the challenge of comprehensiveness, yet it also cannot tackle it directly. By dissolving the totality into ever-penultimate foundations and horizons with disciplinary knowledge in between, Simmel demonstrates a "perspectivist knowledge praxis" (ibid, p. 185). The result is that the unity of *PoM* is ultimately an experiential one of human consciousness "attempting and repeatedly failing to understand [the world/totality] from partial perspectives". For Simmel, philosophy is "an experience[...] ever in becoming" (ibid).

Thus, for Goodstein, the unity of Simmel's work is not found in its pages *per se*. Rather, in line with Simmel's 'artistic' method, the "reader comes to grasp the interdependency" of its content (ibid). Money is shown to have many legitimate, yet "disparate particular phenomena" associated with it. Simmel thereby reveals money to be unanalysable – comprehensively speaking – from a singular analytic viewpoint, let alone an economic one. At best, every such viewpoint is an incomplete and incompletable totalisation. The demonstration of unity of *PoM*, therefore, lies in its performativity. By showing the dialectical linkages between divergent lines of inquiry – that is, how they each legitimately relate to and explicate the analysans despite their contradictory viewpoints, which is difficult if not impossible to summarise – Simmel communicates a higher order unity over and above the propositions in the text. That is, in conveying the experience of philosophising a fragmented reality, we should not look for systematicity in the usual sense or in the usual places²³². Instead, "attempting to do justice to the fragmentation, multiplicity, and uncertainty of the world of experience[...] without belying the lived imperative to make sense of it "requires the performance of

pp. 86-95), which is "not the mere addition of two processes of giving and receiving, but a new third phenomenon in which each of the two processes is simultaneously cause and effect" (ibid, p. 95). I would caution against reading this section in isolation of prior discussion of being and value, subject and object (ibid, pp. 62-86). I also reemphasise that the division into subsections is an addition to English editions (Frisby 2004, p. xiii).

²³² The experiential quality of Simmel's work poses challenges for its analysis and necessitates close readings of texts that can make it unwieldy in modern academic circumstances, such as word-limited theses.

both “fragmentation [etc.]” and unity (ibid). Simmel is attempting to enact the experience of grasping a fragmented, shifting reality in his writing. This cannot be articulated in neat logical progression. Here, it appears that Simmel is enacting his later-developed concept of life, always in tension with and binding together the imposed order.

The penultimate point of Goodstein’s that I will discuss here is the relation of form and “*Vergesellschaftung* (becoming-social, or, more simply, association)” and the expansion of this principle into metaphysics (ibid). ‘Becoming-social’ is arguably Simmel’s first example of moving “beyond subject philosophy” (ibid). That is, the *process* of ‘becoming-social’ is “the most immediate illustration of relativity in the material of humanity: society is the super-singular configuration[...] that is not abstract” (Simmel 1989, in Goodstein 2019, p. 185); in other words, society is simultaneously “universal” and “concretely alive” (Simmel 2011, p. 107)²³³. In *PoM*, realisation of the non-abstract universality of ‘being together’ in the form of exchange elucidates Simmel’s relativism. That is, from the non-abstract universality of society and sociological forms

“arises the unique significance that exchange, as the economic-historical realization of the relativity of things, has for society; exchange raises the specific object and its significance for the individual above its singularity, not into the sphere of abstraction, but into that of lively interaction which is the substance of economic value” (ibid).

This is developed from previous analysis and development of being and value, subject and object, distance, objectification, utility and scarcity, price, and exchange that I cannot explicate further here. Suffice to say that to adequately understand *PoM*, one must comprehend exchange as a form, which is in turn part of a more general category of ‘being-together’. As Goodstein argues here and elsewhere, understanding exchange as a form in this sense is key to a broader understanding of *PoM* (2019, p. 186; 2017, pp. 66-78 & 181-185).

The thrust of this piece and Goodstein’s much larger study (2017, esp. pp. 137-245) is that Simmel’s method first and most comprehensively expressed in *PoM* is the primary source of its contemporary relevance. The sociological interpretations of Simmel’s work – which “are not without their justifications” – interpreted what were, for

²³³ I opt for Frisby (et al.’s) translation here because Goodstein’s rendering, “concrete vitality” (Simmel 1989, in Goodstein 2019, p. 185), makes the link with life less explicit.

Simmel, “philosophical questions and problems” (Goodstein 2019, p. 186). Alongside “selective” reading and translation, this interpretation “obscured the complexity and richness, but also the metaphysical depths and high methodological stakes, of the *Philosophy of Money*” (ibid). That is, for Goodstein, Simmel’s “phenomenology of disciplinarity” constitutes his contemporary relevance (ibid p. 187). This phenomenology is demonstrated through “the example of money”, which reveals the necessity to transcend any specific discipline and “the boundaries of disciplinarity as such” – i.e., the need to enter the realm of philosophy (ibid). Thus, Simmel provides a method for “overcoming the binaries that still haunt western thought” which remains critical without the need for “ultimate foundations” or “final answers” (ibid). As for Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen above, Goodstein stresses that Simmel’s work “intensifies the awareness of difference” and thus best captures the “flux of experiential reality” (ibid). Hence, “there is much to be learned from the methods of *The Philosophy of Money*”, namely the limitations of “every special (disciplinary) mode of inquiry” (ibid, emphasis original). The *experience* of such limitations as demonstrated in *PoM* reveals, for Goodstein, “that it may be necessary to rethink fundamental assumptions about what we know as we re-examine how we understand its meaning and its value” (ibid).

Concluding Remarks

In sum, I have provided a sketch of Simmel scholarship from its introduction to the Anglophone world by the likes of Small and Parks in Chicago, to its development within sociological contours by the likes of Wolff, Coser, Levine, and Frisby. Broadly, Simmel was viewed as an unsystematic thinker until relatively recently, with a few exceptions in the work of Tenbruck and Salz. Whilst previous scholars attempted to justify Simmel’s unsystematicity in pedagogical concerns or even aesthetic terms, only with the likes of Wessely and, even more, Lehtonen, Pyyhtinen and Goodstein do we see a wholesale rejection of this premise. For them, previous scholarship has largely failed to see this structure because of its sociological focus. Simmel’s philosophy is overlooked, and his work thereby translated into a foreign disciplinary edifice, distorting its meaning and its unity. This could be seen as a development of the ‘aesthetic’ unity of Simmel’s work, which unifies it according to the style of his expression and its themes. Other thinkers (e.g., Kemple 2018; Featherstone 1991) with similar emphases on Simmel’s philosophical methodology or ‘system’ could have been included, though I have omitted further

inclusions given the length of this appendix. The need for further works of this kind, however, is not questioned here. Given the specific, sociologically motivated intentions of Small, Parks, and Coser in particular, and the variations on the theme of Simmel's unsystematicity of many first- and second-stage scholars – excepting Tenbruck and Salz – it is not surprising the contemporary scholarship focuses on a response to these tendencies. That is, Wessely, Lehtonen, Pyyhtinen, and Goodstein seek to demonstrate the inherent connections of Simmel's philosophy to his sociology and how this can provide coherence to his work. The latter two perhaps more so than the former two locate Simmel's contemporary relevance precisely in the method that unifies his philosophy and sociology, and can, they argue, be applied to contemporary forms of multidisciplinary praxis.

To reiterate, the significance of understanding Simmel as a philosophical and methodical thinker is not only an exercise in reconsidering historical interpretations, although this may be intrinsically valuable. Simmel's work provides a potential avenue for thinking an increasingly complex world and moving beyond mere unintegrated interdisciplinarity (Goodstein 2017, pp. 46-50). By responding to the flux of his historical moment, Simmel proposes a way to theorise flux as such. In Simmel's terms, then, he achieves 'typicality' which manifests as *prima facie* contemporary relevance. Goodstein develops this relevance in terms of disciplinarity and multidisciplinary, broadly speaking, whereas Pyyhtinen seems to develop it as a resource for contemporary social science.

The *development* of Simmel's work, not simple appropriation of it, is key. That is, it is not clear whether Simmel's 'methodology' can be directly appropriated because the nature of Simmel's theoretical object is different to our own; the nature of flux has changed in the intervening century. Instead, analysis of Simmel's work can yield a theoretical framework able to intelligibly capture the flux of a given historical moment. That is, Simmel's 'relativism' or 'perspectivism' can help elucidate unity in contemporary life. Derived from the contemporary Simmel scholarship discussed above, this framework embodies at least the following essential characteristics. The Simmelian framework is asymptotic; it has a logic or direction, though it is never sublimated or finished, which is most evident in Simmel's concept of 'life'. This framework is refractory; it holds various perspectives together despite their contradictions. That is, a 'methodological perspectivism' acknowledges that complex phenomena are multivalent,

and thus require analysis from multiple viewpoints. Finally, this framework is ultimately philosophical. Only philosophy has the conceptual tools to ground perspectives and overcome inter-perspectival contradiction – that is, to embody and express the dissolution of absolutes, thereby performatively articulating fragmentary processes of modernity according to which all absolutes evaporate (Pyyhtinen 2010, pp. 2-6).

Excursus: A Case for (Re)Introducing *PoM* into Contemporary Discourses on Money

Both Goodstein (2017 & 2019), and Lehtonen and Pyyhtinen (2008) use *PoM* as their definitive case study of Simmel's philosophy. Again, this is not surprising given their desire to rehabilitate Simmel's work. To supplement these analyses, however, one might consider how *PoM* may intervene in contemporary discourses on money. 'Uses' of Simmel's work in this context tend to be brief – often by necessity – limited to high-level overview and contrast, or a concept or two (e.g., Beilharz 1996; Deutschmann 1996; Dodd 2017; Deflem 2003; Singh 2016; Chainiyom & Giordano 2019). I suspect that *PoM* may offer much more to this discourse if considered in the vein of Goodstein and Pyyhtinen's work. That is, a crucial starting point for this intervention is in-depth analyses of Simmel's fundamental concepts and their interconnections – i.e., a Simmelian framework, not just his concepts. The thesis proper can be read as a propaedeutic to that end; a deconstruction of one prominent NoU-type analysis of *PoM* which misunderstands Simmel's concepts and method. What follows is a *prima facie* case for an intervention in contemporary discourses on money predicated on an in-depth, holistic understanding of *PoM*.

Money is an inescapable centre of modern life in a way that it was not previously. Mersault expresses this in practical-existential terms in Albert Camus' *The Happy Death* (1995); money structures modern life in its conspicuous absence and inconspicuous presence. In its absence, money presents itself as a universal means to the material conditions upon which higher pursuits are predicated. In its presence, money is a deceptively complex but necessary tool, directly or indirectly, for the acquisition of these higher pursuits. For Mersault, money is a constituent and structuring principle of possibility itself, a claim that appears valid today. Money or its derivatives are cited as the key reasons for undertaking – or not – a given action; education is a means to a job²³⁴, societies cannot 'afford' to provide all members with a decent life,

²³⁴ See recent changes to higher education as one example (DESE 2020).

preventing the annihilation of the planet is argued for in economic terms. For Fyodor Dostoevsky's Alexei Ivanovich, it is a means to a thrill and a chance at redemption (2016).

Money clothes itself in various guises and there are many ways to think it. Perhaps the most obvious place to look for a formal definition is in the institution that regulates monetary policy, i.e. – in the case of Australia – the Reserve Bank of Australia (RBA). According to the RBA, money is constituted by three characteristics, namely it must be a: “widely accepted means of payment”, a “unit of account”, and a “store of value” (n.d.). From this perspective, money is little over and above its functions except for the specifics of producing its physical or digital form and regulating the Australian form of money, which we call the Australian dollar. Broadly ‘functionalist’ perspectives of this sort can be found from ancient Greece (Aristotle 2009, p. 89) to contemporary economics 101 (e.g., Curtis & Irvine 2021, pp. 195-201), from freedom-touting ‘self-help’ guides (Robins 2014, pp. 3-4) to popular history (Harari 2018, esp. pp. 1-22).

Such understandings of money are altogether unsurprising for at least two reasons. First, many different currencies and increasingly digital forms of ‘money’ – e.g., cryptocurrency – seemingly meet the above criteria. Thus, it is not a stretch to imagine that many different objects or even other virtual objects could meet these criteria. Second, contemporary, functionalist accounts of money hearken back to old victories in debates surrounding its theorisation. Namely, the ‘Methodenstreit’²³⁵ of the 1880s between the so-called Austrian School and the German Historical School profoundly shaped modern social theory – both analytical and critical traditions – and its influence remains visible today (Bostaph 2013). This is especially the case for the development of a theory of money (Ingham 2004, pp. 6-8). The putative Austrian School advocated a method modelled on the natural sciences emphasising the individual, deductive reasoning from abstract principles, and relatively rigid disciplinary specialisation (Ingham 1998, pp. 4-5). The ontology of money was considered within the domain of economics and was ultimately conceptualised as a neutral facilitator of transactions – like the RBA’s definition above. Conversely, the so-called German Historical School developed and advocated methodology that included the social as a site of analysis and emphasised theory derived inductively from empirical experience. Theories of money inspired by this emergent mode of thought conceptualised money as a multifaceted phenomenon

²³⁵ Literally, ‘dispute over methods’ or ‘methodological dispute’, my translation.

situated within social institutions – e.g., Georg Knapp’s statist theory (Knapp, 1905 in Ingham 2004, pp. 47-49). The latter theorisations of money were on the decline for the better part of the 20th century, dying out with Georg Simmel and Max Weber (Ingham 2004, pp. 60-61; 1998, pp. 4-8)²³⁶.

The demise of Simmel’s work on money can, in part, be attributed to active suppression and selective appropriation (see Appendix, §2-3). Secondary literature on Weber tends to neglect money in favour of the religious component of his analysis of capitalism, most famously Protestantism (Ingham 2004, pp. 66- 68). With this demise, contemporary sociology of money has largely accepted the neutral, functionalist characterisation, especially via Talcott Parsons (Ingham 1998, pp. 5-6). Here, money is conceived as a neutral intermediary of social interaction but not as a social action in itself.

Insofar as the philosophical discourse on money can be distinguished from the sociological and economic discourses, it respects analogous disciplinary boundaries. From Aristotle to Marx, through Adam Smith and David Hume, money is largely viewed in line with the classical forms of economic discourse (whether Aristotelian, Physiocratic, Mercantilist, Smithian, Ricardian, or neo-classical), namely as a special kind of commodity (Vooyo & Dick 2019, p. 7). That is, money is a neutral instrument aimed at remedying the inefficiencies of a barter system (de Bruin et. al. 2018). This characterisation underlies analyses in which the ontology of money is secondary, e.g., the moral use of money or money as a paradigmatic example of a social institution (e.g., de Bruin et. al. 2018; Vooyo & Dick 2019, p. 6, respectively), with narrow exceptions. When money is considered in such a manner, it is conceptualised in terms of abstract functionality and relative positionality (Guala 2016, pp. xxii-xxviii & 33-42; Smit, Buekens & Du Plessis 2016, respectively)²³⁷. All discourses – sociological, orthodox economic, and philosophical – appear to simplify the nature of money. Money creates the possibility of the underlying network of relations and is therefore constitutive of these relations and increasingly socio-political possibility writ large, a comprehensive theory of which is sorely needed (Goodchild 2010, pp. 31-34).

²³⁶ There are undertones of the German Historical School in Keynes, though he was unable to fully break with the orthodoxy (Ingham 2004, pp. 50-52).

²³⁷ It could be argued that Searle’s account attempts to incorporate the subjective element of money through his social ontology approach, i.e., through intentionality (1995, pp. 31-58; Vooyo & Dick 2019, pp. 3-4)

Part of the reason, then, that I propose a critical return to Simmel's work is because it represents – prima facie – an attempt to overcome the divide of the Methodenstreit and the monetary gap in critical theory, the significance and success of which has not yet been determined. This thesis cannot complete such a task in isolation; its contribution lies in beginning this task.

Turning now to contemporary discourses on money, the functionalist victory over social-historical methods was not a complete one; something of the German Historical School-type analysis remains. Analyses of money and other concepts in its orbit of the latter sort can be found in David Graeber's *Debt* (2011), Nigel Dodd's *The Sociology of Money* (1994), or Geoffrey Ingham's *The Nature of Money* (2004). For Graeber, the analysis of money is essentially a quantification of a more primordial phenomenon: debt (2011, esp. pp. 42-72). The only reference to Simmel's *PoM* here is to highlight his putative invocation of the "historical sequence from barter to money to credit" (ibid, p. 395n14), which – Graeber claims – is derived from the work of Carl Bücher (1907) and Bruno Hildebrand (1864)²³⁸. Nothing is mentioned about how Simmel invokes this sequence or its centrality to his overall argument; on the latter, I suspect this sequence is not central to his overall argument, though I do not have space to pursue it here²³⁹.

Of these examples, Ingham draws most on *PoM* – excluding those with exegetical aims such as Gianfranco Poggi's *Money and the Modern Mind* (1993) or Natàlia Cantó Milà's *A Sociological Theory of Value* (2005). Ingham traces the emergence of theories of money as a special commodity – from the philosophy of Aristotle to the economics of Milton Friedman (2004, pp. 15-37) – and as credit – nascent in the theology of Bishop Berkeley and incorporated into the work of John Maynard Keynes (ibid, pp. 38-58). Ingham locates Simmel (and Weber) within the latter, credit theories, specifically under the German Historical School's state theories of money. For Ingham, sociology had

²³⁸ Hildebrand is also relevant for Ingham's criticism of Simmel. Also, Graeber claims this sequence is implicit in Marx.

²³⁹ In brief, Simmel claims aims to show the logical development of money in an idealised way to show that his preconditions 'work', and is the case whether these conditions (e.g., barter historically obtained or not. This is captured by the distinction between money "according to its concept" and its 'embodiment' (Simmel 2011, pp. 127-139). That is, any 'pure' instantiation of money always interacts with the material conditions in which emerges – e.g., social mores, custom, etc. Simmel's analysis aims to capture money in both senses – 'pure' and 'impure', so to speak – and their interrelation. Hence, he does not rely on a specific historical sequence for the development of money. Moreover, when discussing barter, here, Simmel phrases it in conditional terms: "[i]f money has its origin in barter[...]" (ibid, p. 135).

largely taken the former, commodity theory of money as the basis of its symbolic characterisation of money as manifest in the work of Talcott Parsons and Karl Marx (ibid, pp. 60-63). Both Simmel and Weber challenged this view by identifying money as a social institution, not simply a symbolisation of social processes (ibid, pp. 63-68). Thus, Ingham seeks to incorporate their work into his reconceptualisation of money.

However, for Ingham, Simmel's analysis is ultimately "fragmented" and "confused" (ibid, pp. 63 & 65). The 'fragmentedness' of Simmel's work is presented as self-evident, although it is telling that Ingham includes his brief exposition of *PoM* in a chapter entitled 'Money in Sociological Theory' (ibid, pp. 59-68). Sociologists have often sought to leverage Simmel's work for inspiration regarding specific problems – e.g., the grounding of sociology (see Appendix, §1-2). In part, for Ingham, such confusion lies in Simmel putatively presenting a credit theory of money and yet relying on Bücher and Hildebrand's historical sequence outlining the development of money – "barter" to "commodity-money" to "credit" – which is therefore circular (ibid, p. 66). Again, I cannot pursue a rejoinder here beyond saying that it is incredibly uncharitable to suggest that Simmel would make such an elementary error. Rather, as noted above, the way in which this sequence is invoked by Simmel is key. Moreover, it is not immediately obvious that Simmel develops a 'credit' theory of money, let alone one that would make his use of the sequence circular. Rather, it appears that he develops a concept of money intended to identify the 'moneyiness' of objects that have performed this function, irrespective of the historical veracity of each case²⁴⁰. Whether Simmel identifies something that is not present in these cases – considered historically or hypothetically – is another question.

A similar thread regarding the need to better comprehend the complexity of money – as more than a neutral mediator of interaction – exists outside academia, too. Eric Lonergan, a hedge fund manager, asks in the austere titled *Money*: "how do money, banking and the prices of financial instruments have the potential to threaten social stability" (2014, p. 11)? A definition of money that might answer such a question has, for Lonergan, "four philosophical properties" (ibid, p. 13). These conditions can be schematised as follows. First and most important, "[i]nterdependence" is the sense in which money is the social institution par excellence and its implications – e.g., necessary

²⁴⁰ This is captured by the distinction between money "according to its concept" and its 'embodiment' (Simmel 2011, pp. 127-139). That is, any 'pure' instantiation of money always interacts with the material conditions in which emerges – e.g., social mores, custom, etc. That is: "[m]oney performs its services best when it is not simply money (ibid, p. 176; see also ibid, pp. 172-179).

reliance on others (ibid, pp. 13-14, 27-53, 130-152, emphasis original). Second, “*control of the future*” – i.e., a means to control uncertainty and to enliven it through, for example, “leveraged gambling” (ibid, pp. 15 & 54-96, emphasis original). Third and straightforwardly, “*measurement*”, which allows for the necessary quantification of transactions but increasingly oversteps its bounds – e.g., by attempting to measure “the value of human endeavour” (ibid, pp. 15 & 97-114, emphasis original). Finally, “*allure*” or the desirability that money achieves that is both dependent on its use-value and distinct from it (ibid, pp. 15-16 & pp. 115-129, emphasis original). Together, these constitute an understanding of money that can, for Lonergan, contribute an answer to the original question. Simmel’s “otherwise exhaustive” *PoM* is found lacking in relation to the second condition – control over the future – because it “barely mentions “time”” and for a pithy remark sketching the links between different modes of money and social status (ibid, pp. 60 & 62, respectively). The only other reference to *PoM* is regarding the fourth condition, allure, and then only to stress the abstract or ‘negative’ element of money, its ability to transform itself through exchange into near-infinite other objects, as constitutive of its desirability²⁴¹.

However, there are many ways in which Lonergan’s eminently readable book may have benefitted from deeper engagement with *PoM*. The most general concerns the nature of philosophy and its relation to an analysis of money. Despite citing a wealth of philosophers – and psychologists, economists, other fund managers – in his further reading suggestions – such as Jurgen Habermas (1992, in Lonergan 2014, pp. 175-176), and Derek Parfait (1984, in Lonergan 1984, p. 176) – it is not obvious what Lonergan means by ‘philosophical’ qua his conditions. That is, in what sense are they philosophical conditions? Is this simply non-empirical, presuppositional, speculative, ontological, metaphysical, or any of the myriad interpretations of these ‘types’ of philosophical inquiry? This is not a question of disciplinary purity. Rather, it is a question of clarity. Simmel, for his part, is clearer on this point: a philosophy of money must articulate it through the structure of reality and value, psychological, and social preconditions and its normative significances for individuals and for society (Simmel 2011, pp. 53-55). At any

²⁴¹ Incidentally, Lonergan’s discussion of humans being “instinctively aware of the value of scarce things” (2014, p. 116) may have benefitted from Simmel’s discussion of scarcity in *PoM* and of exchange: it is not because things are scarce per se that they are valuable; other conditions must be met in accordance with the structure of this ‘awareness of value’ – or, for Simmel, “desire” (2011, pp. 95-100). For example, the unattainable object often does not trigger this ‘awareness’; conversely, the always attainable and therefore unnoticed object – e.g., air in most circumstances – often does not trigger it, either.

rate, I suspect that Lonergan does not have in mind something like Ole Bjerg's (2014) Lacanian-Žižekian philosophy in mind, which presents commodity, chartalist, and credit theories of money as co-constituting each other according to the real, the symbolic, and the imaginary.

What is common amongst these approaches is that they all argue for an understanding of money beyond the deflationary economic definition. However, as I have sketched above, Simmel's potential contributions to this conversation remain largely untapped. Where *PoM* is cited, it tends to be the latter, 'Synthetic Part' which concerns impacts or "significance" of money for individuals and for society. The development of the concept of money from fundamentals, the first, 'Analytic Part', is rarely considered and almost never at length. However, determining more precisely what Simmel's contribution might be is rendered more complex on account of the available scholarship, as has been made evident above. That is, in seeking to determine what Simmel's theory of money as a *philosophy* of money can contribute to a more comprehensive theorisation of it is not straightforward. What is becoming clear, however, is that Simmel's work – replete with its immanent structure – potentially offers new contributions to both contemporary theorisations of money and other contemporary problems.

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