

## **Socialization and sociability**

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*Abstract.* This study does not seek to explain what is meant by the terms socialization and sociability, but, rather, by bringing leverage to bear on Durkheim's and Simmel's general assumptions (the former normative-structural, the latter cultural-relational) that of investigating the extent to which, the way in which, and if, these two categories are still capable of performing their strategic function of directing, facilitating and promoting, or conditioning, the behaviour and attitudes of social actors, at this historical-cultural moment in time. To this end, one might well ask, without ambition or claiming total comprehensiveness, whether socialization has almost definitively lost its normative role and if, today, it is not engaged rather in teaching how to communicate and enter into positive relations with others (as much of the literature on the topic suggests). Furthermore, one is inclined to ask whether instances of sociability have, in some way, been superimposed upon the classical socialization criteria through which ethical-institutional paradigms were acquired passively, and whether this superimposition may be better able to bring people to come to terms with the complex social reality, with sharing collective life-style models and, thanks to the creation of a positive relational atmosphere, with modifying traditional indicators of social distance.

*Keywords:* Socialization, Coercion, Sociability, Sociality.

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## Introduction

It is practically impossible to reflect on socialization without referring to Durkheim, the first to use the term in a non-generic manner, and to its subsequent systemisation by Parsons and, after him, by a long succession of scholars. Sociability, on the other hand, is one of the theoretical mainstays of Simmel's work.

The topic of socialization has been amply dealt with by the literature of socio-pedagogy in both its conditioning-integrationist versions and its interactionist-communicative reinterpretations; within the ambit of the educational-sociological debate, on the other hand, less specific attention has been paid to the concept of sociability; it is frequently cited, in general, when referring to Simmel.

In any case, irrespective of its diffusion among scholars and its heuristic declensions, traditionally by socialization is meant:

the non-spontaneous process, reiterated from generation to generation, by means of which individuals internalize norms, knowledge, information, symbols, beliefs, and behaviour shared by members of the group to which they belong (Curcio, 2005, p. 98).

Socialization aims at gradually transmitting to every new generation the hereditary values, the sets of rules, the life styles, knowledge and knowhow, as well as the psychological traits typical of the social group into which it is born (which Durkheim called *social type* or *social species*), with a view to guaranteeing the stability and continuity of relations between members within a given social system. In actual fact, it conjugates people's social and personality systems; therefore, it permits individuals to recognise themselves as fully-fledged members of a certain society, while, at the same time, and to equal measure, determining them as "moral beings" with a sense of identity capable of distinguishing themselves from others and entering into appropriate relations with them<sup>2</sup>.

The concept of sociability (in Latin *sociabilitas*, a characteristic of the social doctrines of the Christian churches) was presented in a new light by Simmel and in exclusively sociological terms, on the 19<sup>th</sup>. October 1910, in

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<sup>2</sup> See: Garelli, Palmonari & Sciolla, 2006; Maccarini, 2003; Ribolzi, 1998.

his opening speech to the first congress of the German Association of Sociology. In reality, on that occasion, he added this category to his paper on *sociality*, its “purest” and most ludic derivative (Simmel, 1917).

The term sociability – *Geselligkeit* – enjoys a distinct semantic weight of its own which distinguishes it decidedly from that of socialization, because it is devoid of any kind of judgemental, evaluative or prescriptive connotation; this term, expresses, in fact, the following concept:

both the generic ability of human beings to establish some kind of social relationship with others, which, depending on circumstance, may be spontaneous or organized, supportive or conflicting, instrumental or simply gratifying, and the manifold concrete forms this inclination assumes as groups, associations, communities, crowds, on the basis of certain types of needs and interests (Gallino, 1993, pp. 592-593).

In a nutshell, contrary to the *external* action of the social control proper to socialization, sociability indicates an *internal* tendency on the part of people. At the same time, this concept is also distinguishable from that of association, the one closest to it, because, being more comprehensive than the latter, it also includes the dynamics both of “approaches between subjects” and of “dissociation, separation and distance” (Gallino, 1993).

Furthermore, it is not possible to overlook the fact that, according to the thinking of Simmel, there is an inevitable closeness, an evident “affinity” nexus between sociability and religiosity, as the former founds society, which in his view is “the cultural product par excellence”, while the latter creates religion (Cipriani, 2009).

The rationale of these pages is not that of trying to explain what is meant by the terms socialization and sociability, but, rather, by bringing leverage to bear on Durkheim’s and Simmel’s general assumptions (the former normative-structural, the latter cultural-relational) that of investigating the extent to which, the way in which, and if, these two categories are still capable of performing their strategic function of directing, facilitating and promoting, or conditioning, the behaviour and attitudes of social actors, at this historical-cultural moment in time.

To this end, one might well ask, without ambition or claiming total comprehensiveness, whether socialization has almost definitively lost its normative role and if, today, it is not engaged rather in teaching how to communicate and enter into positive relations with others (as much of the

literature on the topic suggests). Furthermore, one is inclined to ask whether instances of sociability have, in some way, been superimposed upon the classical socialization criteria through which ethical-institutional paradigms were acquired passively, and whether this superimposition may be better able to bring people to come to terms with the complex social reality, with sharing collective life-style models and, thanks to the creation of a positive relational atmosphere, with modifying traditional indicators of social distance.

All told, because of recent, on-going socio-cultural transformation, which has altered the nature of education, organization, belonging, coexistence and inter-personal relations, it appears opportune to begin a partial semantic redefinition of these two categories of sociological analysis in order to be better able to interpret contemporary forms of integration and interaction (Cesareo, 2008). Furthermore, sociology, according to the intentions of some of its most illustrious exponents, beginning with Simmel, should, by vocation, keep variations in the meanings of some of its “canonical” concepts in mind, “on the basis of changes to reality” (Simmel, 1976, p. LXXVII).

### **Durkheim: socialization as a social fact**

The issue of *change* may be considered the foremost concern of all classical sociologists and, therefore, of Durkheim and Simmel alike. It is actually the character of *perpetual change*, assumed by modern society as a result of the historic revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century and the desire to study the forms of social life, submitted to the inexorable flow of economic-political-cultural change, that accounts for the birth of sociology, which came to be institutionalised, in its deterministic form, above all, during the period between 1890 and 1910 (Jedloski, 2003).

Back then, however, if, on the one hand, a positivist view was taken of scientific progress and the achievement of the values of liberty and equality, on the other and contrariwise, some sociologists assumed an equivocal approach to the process of rationalisation typical of modernity, because they saw in the tumultuous transformations under way a threat to social order, a “dissolution of authentic social bonds” and of “the hierarchical relationships consolidated by tradition” (Cavalli, 2001, pp. 19-20).

Of the scholars who, astride the end of the 1800's and the beginning of the 1900s, appeared perplexed when confronted with the social reality that was taking shape, Durkheim, perhaps more than others, was intellectually "pained" by his tension-ridden epoch, and therefore took upon himself the challenging practical-theoretical task of correcting some of modernity's *defects*, "putting an end to revolution" and providing the France of the Third Republic with moral guidance. It is by no mere chance that his thinking, though influenced by British and German authors like Tönnies<sup>3</sup>, undoubtedly felt the impact of the French climate of the time (Cesareo, 1983; Durkheim, 1895a).

With a view to contrasting the *trend* he felt was disaggregating the structure of society, and which he saw as the constituent element of the "pathology" of modernisation, he intended to create "a scientifically-grounded sociological system" capable of legitimising a precise class and work-organization stratification of society so as to fortify two social necessities: integration and regulation (Cavalli, 1970; Wallace and Wolf, 1980).

The intellectual challenge he took upon himself involved understanding the root causes of social unrest and anomie, in its twofold acute and chronic manifestations, in order, as a result, to impact upon the forces that determined "the constitution of a stable normative set-up or its failure" (Durkheim, 1895a; Coser, 1971).

Durkheim postulated, as the main theoretical principle of his speculation, the absolute supremacy of society over individuals, because he was convinced that only it could emancipate people from their basic instincts and permit them to accede to "humanity". Therefore, he emphasised the fact that society was an idiosyncratic reality capable of eliciting:

new phenomena, different from those found in solitary consciences, one must admit that these specific facts reside actually in the society that produces them, and are not already present in its constituent parts, that is, its members (Durkheim, 1895b, p. 14).

According to Raimond Aron, Durkheim went a step further when he attributed "consecrating" (a term he used with devotional respect)

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<sup>3</sup> Sabino Acquaviva, in his introduction to a text by Durkheim (in the Italian translation), underlines the evident similarity between Durkheimian mechanical and organic solidarity and Tönnies's *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, even if Durkheim always rejected this conceptual analogy and never referred to that theory; see Durkheim, 1895a.

prerogatives to society, to the extent that he even came to posit, drawing on a thesis of Kant's, that, when all came to all, human beings had only one option: "that of choosing between God and society", because the social reality was "the source of all man's values", the only informant of disinterest and, like God for believers, the only reference capable of making morality intelligible and of curbing the boundlessness of human desire<sup>4</sup>.

Within the ambit of this stance one can understand the importance he attributed to *social facts*, by which he meant both the object of sociological analysis and the "moral, juridical, behavioural norms capable of generating obligations" and wielding social control. The Durkheimian school has, besides, bestowed considerable impetus on the social-control strand of studies, although the various authors who favour this approach are in disagreement on many issues, beginning with terminology (Gurvitch, 1947).

For Durkheim, who never underestimated the unbreakable link existing between society and the individual, social facts seemed to embody, when presented to the individual conscience "as rules", a sacred, "omnipotent" and (a term Benedetto Croce censured) "metaphysical" quality (Bruno, 1975). In his opinion, they could not be ignored because, like "moulds", they impressed a predetermined form, from without, on people's "indeterminate" will, to the extent that "acting, in its flow, they encounter, as it were, an obstinate resistance"<sup>5</sup>.

When discussing how social systems do not derive from the individual, Parsons explicitly made this Durkheimian criterion his own; he held, in fact, that: "If the properties of interaction were derivable from those units of action, social systems would have an epiphenomenal character, as held by a large part of individualist social theories. Our position is openly opposed to this statement" (Parsons, 1971, pp. 20-21). Mannheim too believed that an ideal, in order to achieve its moralizing purpose, needed to be promoted by "cooperation" between individuals and crystallised within a social structure, because only "the action of social structure poses the categorical essence of duty" (Mannheim, 1957, p. 55). Pareto, on his part, held a view decidedly contrary to Durkheim's theories, as he believed it unreal to conceive "society as an abstract entity, separate from the individuals that comprised it" (Mongardini, 1973, p. 49).

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<sup>4</sup> See: Aron, 1965; Durkheim, 1895b; Poggi, 2003.

<sup>5</sup> See: Durkheim, 1895b; Ferrarotti, 1971; Poggi, 2003.

The entire Durkheimian anti-psychological (or counter- psychological), sociological approach, was based, therefore on the normative impact that social facts, even if present in single consciences, brought to bear, from without, on individuals. He insisted, in particular and with the greatest emphasis, on the contribution made by education, one of the social facts *par excellence*, towards his particular version of “rationalist” and rationalising “morality”, which he considered *functional* (though unaffected by “deplorable finalism”) to eliciting subjects to adhere to the needs of society and safeguard, without undue de-compensation, instances of homogeneity and diversity (Durkheim, 1895b).

It needs to be said that Durkheim intended the term “education” as meaning both socialization and education tout court; some contemporary sociologists have the same habit of not making distinctions between the two concepts although some make quite a clear distinction between them (Maccarini, 2003).

Furthermore, as far as terminological habits are concerned, Durkheim used *habitus* when explaining how educational action needed to be brought to bear on that “general disposition of the spirit and will” which determines unity of consciences and on which Christianity has a strong influence, because it “represents a certain inclination of the soul” (Durkheim, 1966, p. 37).

At this stage, as an aside, a point needs to be made concerning ways in which the term *habitus*, an ancient Greek and Scholastic expression, is used. In sociology, all told, it is declined in a rather more restrictive manner than in Scholasticism and Catholic teaching. In actual fact, in the Durkheimian educational approach and in Bourdieu’s more complex one which followed it, the unifying principle of *habitus* clearly justifies the way in which the “evaluative schemata” of individuals depend on social structure and class, though it fails to account, plausibly, for how people may, when making autonomous choices, exempt themselves from the unconscious mechanisms of socialization (Bourdieu 1979; Dubar, 2000). The theological-magisterial version of *habitus*, on the contrary, concedes that “the constant disposition of the spirit” towards the faith provide ample room for aware individual determination<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> In the encyclical *Spes salvi*, referring to the concept of *habitus* and referring back to Thomas Aquinas, Joseph Ratzinger states that faith is “a constant disposition of the spirit”, but he also emphasises the fact that this self-same subjective disposition urges the intellect

Leaving semantic digressions to one side, we can say that Durkheim, in his sociological endeavour, or his attempt to forge a “scientific morality” (something he undertook with almost “missionary” or “prophetic” zeal) emphasised the existence of a close bond between education, morality and society and how the first of these, necessary for the social integration of subjects, needed to be mandatory and imposed, that is, imposed through *coercion* (Aron, 1965).

It was, perhaps, from the notion of coercion that Durkheim’s prescriptive paradigm of socialization (aimed at staunching the risk of anomie, at educating individuals to “dedication to the national group” and preparing them to transcend themselves) stems. All of this, he maintained, might take place only thanks to the moralizing action set in motion by the educational process, which, according to him, not only complied with a sort of “programme of social control”, but also allowed individuals to gain access to true freedom and a balanced accommodation of certain psychic states of mind<sup>7</sup>. In actual fact, among others, contrary to what Simmel held, for Durkheim certain composite psychic states, for example, “religious or fatherly love”, far from being inclinations typical of human nature or generators of the socio-institutional structure, derived from collective organization (Durkheim, 1895b).

Durkheim placed this kind of secular ethos, unshackled by “ultra mundane” expectations, at the centre of socialization and assigned a double task to it: on the one hand, that of inhibiting the disgregating tendency of subjects, on the other, of absorbing “the distortions and anomalies created individual level”; in short, it was expected to bridge the gap between the socially *sacred* and individualistically *profane* (Durkheim, 1897; Ferrarotti, 1983).

All told, his “social order-guaranteeing” theoretical approach drew impetus from subjective realities which ought to have “rendered individual and social interests compatible” (Filoramo, 1985; Ribolzi, 1998).

Parsons, like Durkheim, believed that socialization performed the important role of implementing the homeostatic maintenance of social stability, reproducing behavioural patterns and traditional value paradigms, but, as he was influenced also by Freudian theories, he added dynamic conditioning factors of his own, that is, the “psycho-social mechanisms that bind

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to enlarge the scope of its own knowledge, and that by believing a person, while aided by Grace, exercises his/her *freedom* and *will* considerably, cf. Benedict XVI, 2007.

<sup>7</sup> See: Cavalli, 1970; Maccarini, 2003; Poggi, 2003.

individual personalities and the culture of a society". Piaget, on his part, assumed the Durkheimian definition of education as "methodical socialization of the younger generation", but criticised the idea of transmission through coercion, because he held, to the contrary, that education occurred actively and interactively<sup>8</sup>.

To some degree, thanks to these educational posits of his, Durkheim anticipated what was destined later to be known as the *paradigm of conditioning*, which left very little room within the educational process for bi-directional dialectics and aimed at contributing towards the creation of a basic, "modal" personality.

It is true, however, that, at a later stage, Durkheim mitigated his theory of rigid mandatory control over the norms of subjective conduct, by adding an element of will, because he realized that ethical rules could achieve appropriate influence only "insofar as they, while continuing to be endowed with an existence independent of individuals, were interiorised by them in their single consciences" (Coser, 1971).

Therefore, while he remained convinced that collective representations had to be imposed on the individual through necessarily authoritarian pressure, he was equally aware that the modern educational process was obliged to favour, alongside the safeguard of integration, the autonomous thinking of individual personalities (Aron, 1965). Because the fact that hetero-directed imposition produced widespread unrest in single individuals did not escape him, he held that the aim of a general theory of society consisted also, therefore, in solving the problems this provoked in the lives of single subjects.

To this regard, Durkheim's overall theoretical view, his thinking on education, in particular, cannot be truly understood if one fails to pay proper attention to the clear distinction he makes between fact and value, between normal and pathological phenomena, but, above all and upstream of this, to his ideas of science and the role he sought to assign it; better still, to the function he expected his experimental-sociological method to perform when dealing with social morality; a method characterised by a series of issues about which he interrogated himself when referring to the purpose of scientific knowledge:

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<sup>8</sup> See: Bettin Lattes & Raffini, 2011; Dubar, 2000; Sciolla, 2002.

Does science avail of the means by which to define the distinction between normal and pathological? Why must we strive to know reality if the knowledge we acquire is of no avail to us in life? If science cannot help us to make the best choice, how can it teach us the best way to reach it? (Durkheim, 1895b, p. 59).

At the same time, when winding up the list of interrogatives concerning the purpose of science, for which he had a passion, if not a downright ideological veneration, veined with a kind of religious-fideistic transport, he surprised the reader with a second-hand, poetic-sounding statement by writing:

science may tell us, to some extent, how causes produce effects but not how aims should be pursued. In order to no longer know what is, but to know what is desirable, we must have recourse to the suggestions of the unconscious, whether designated as sentiment, instinct, vital thrust and so on. Science may indeed throw light upon the world, but it leaves night in our hearts; the heart must find its own light (Durkheim, 1895b, p. 59).

Beyond all doubt, in any case, as he himself put it unequivocally in black and white in the preface to the first edition of his *The Rules of Sociological Method*, the aim of science is to make discoveries, explain “things differently from how they appear to the *masses*” (my italics) and, above all, strive towards “knowledge through action” (Cavalli, 1970; Durkheim, 1895b).

*He often emphasised the profound distinction existing between sociology and common sense*, and, in a certain sense, perhaps, the different speculative, even moral, quality, he believed existed between scientific thought and that of the “masses” (the rather excessively “prejudicial” expression he used to define common sense) may best clarify the authority he allowed the former to exercise over the latter, also in terms of socialization; he stated, in fact, that:

We believe that the moment has come for sociology to renounce mundane successes and assume the exoteric character that behoves every science. It will thus gain in dignity and authority what it may lose in popularity. As long it is content to elaborate on common ideas with greater logic than that of the *masses* (my italics), and does not intend having any specific

competence, it has no right to speak somewhat loudly to silence passion and prejudice (Durkheim, 1895b, p. 133).

In short, Durkheim's intention was that of being "a pure scientist" (so much so that already as a student at the *École normale* in Paris he privileged systematic research and had little time or regard for certain kinds of speculative "originality"), but this aim of his did not bring him to consider his sociological endeavour in a neutral way, nor did it prevent him from believing that the "effort" was well worth while for the sole purpose of improving society (Coser, 1971).

Weber too, in a manner quite similar to that of Durkheim, questioned himself regarding the nature of scientific knowledge and the characteristics that certain knowledge required in order to be considered scientific. With regards to this issue, his view was that science could only answer the question of "how to dominate the world technically", while it remained silent as to "whether it was right or wrong to do so" (Jedlowski, 2003; Weber, 1919). It is important to point out that for Weber, as for Simmel, scientific knowledge had no ethical, let alone educational, power; furthermore, for both these German sociologists, there was a real possibility that rationalization might well be accompanied by the "weakness" of the claims of science and "a greater obscurity of *knowledge*" (Simmel, 1903; Weber, 1919).

Finally, it must be remembered that Durkheim, regardless of his academic prestige, was not spared objections to his "ingenuity" when, for example, he confounded morality with sociology (and, therefore, education with having to be). Of the various critical accusations brought to his door, one may refer to that of disciplinary imprecision brought against him by Benedetto Croce, the same objection that the Neapolitan philosopher made against Simmel too. Croce entered into polemics with both of them, because he held that their "empirical historical observations or spiritual laws" tended to lose themselves in "vague and empty generalizations", preventing them, therefore, from "enouncing one single specifically sociological law" and, he went on to accuse them of improperly mixing sociology with other disciplines such as the law, logics and aesthetics (Bruno, 1975; Croce, 1946).

To tell the truth, Durkheim had preventively answered similar negative observations, when he wrote that "sociology is no appendix of any other science but a distinct and autonomous science [...] When a science is being

born it is obliged to refer to models that already exist, that is, to already consolidated sciences” (Durkheim, 1895b, p. 132).

### **Simmel: sociability as subjective disposition towards interaction**

Like Durkheim, Simmel paid great attention to the compelling, inexhaustible pace of modern social evolution, though he demonstrated a “curious” rather than alarmed attitude towards it, while nonetheless acknowledging its intrinsically permanently critical nature. At the same time, like Weber, he tended to surpass the unilateral Marxist conception of society; one might actually say that his theoretical aims went beyond mere “reaction” against historical materialism (Simmel, 1996).

Simmel, loathe to reify or be dogmatic, did not assign any thaumaturgical properties to science, because he did not believe that any scholar had the obligation to *criticise* disharmony and conflict; he saw the latter, in fact, as something belonging, as it were, to the genetic code of social reality. Therefore, he showed a bent towards a scientific sociology of *having to be*; even less did he imagine his discipline might be expected to act as an ethical-practical tool capable of dialectically solving the problems of the collective community or bestowing order on society.

For Simmel, sociology was simply “a new view of already known facts”; furthermore it was not to be conceived as a once-and-for-all “given” science, but a form of knowledge forever “open to experimentation” and to continuous historicizing of its “object” (Dal Lago, 1994; Wallace and Wolf, 1980).

His theoretical approach, stigmatized from time to time as a-systematic, impressionist, expressionist or as “a knowledge of the particular”, diverged substantially from that of Durkheim as far as the specific object of sociology was concerned and which he believed to consist in interaction, seen, in the broadest sense, as the “effect of reciprocity”. In short, Simmel held that every event, action or other entity might “be defined only in terms of its relationship and network of relationships with other phenomena”; thus, the essence of things did not belong “to the things in themselves but to relations of interdependence” existing between all the elements of a social system in an infinite mesh of causation (Simmel, 1900).

In his opinions, it was the weave of relations that actually built up the social structure, which assumed the fragmentary and complex form of

metropolitan modernity, in that the term society was “simply a name indicating a set of individuals, linked together by interactive relationships” (Frisby, 1984). In brief, society, with its institutions, “created to answer the needs of individuals and of various single social subjects”, derived from the inclination, *sociability*, at times conflictual, that made individuals stick together and come to terms with paradoxical feelings like “conflict and harmony, love and hatred” (Cipriani, 2009).

It is well worth our while to recall here that Benedetto Croce punctually criticised Simmel concerning his concept of sociability (which he defined, in more Kantian terms as sociality); in fact, he wrote that social relations and, therefore, “sociality is not essential to the individual [...] The only Essential is relations with the Reality or the Spirit” (Croce, 1945, p. 308).

In short, for Simmel, society was a product of sociability and existed only as a crystallization of the multiple relationships between individuals, which through contrast too achieved integration in any case; it was, therefore, born also of the most disparate of subjective impulses:

erotic, religious or simply sociable impulses, motivated by reasons of defence or attack, play, acquisition, help and teaching, as well as by numerous others purposes, mean that people enter into co-existence, into acting with one another, against one another, in a correlative weave of situations, whether they have an affect on or be affected by others. These reciprocal actions mean that single bearers of random impulses and aims produce a unit, that is, society (Simmel, 1908, p. 9).

Besides not attributing a hegemonic role to society over the individual, he considered “complex units fictional” and, therefore, in conformity with his intellectual inspiration, half-way between the empirical and the “metaphysical of life”, he saw the individual as a “vital unit”, even if, as Coser pointed out, the Simmelian position regarding the socialized individual was somewhat ambivalent (Coser, 1971).

As far as the contradictory configuration of the individual is concerned, there is a certain speculative similarity between Durkheim and Simmel; the former, in fact, believed that the subject alternated between “his/her individual or profane nature and his/her social or sacred nature”; the latter held that the individual was determined and modelled by society, though at the same time he/she was determining and capable of self-realization (Coser, 1971; Durkheim, 1897). In short, as he pointed out at a later stage,

the rapport between “the subject who produces and the social world produced”, should always be seen as a dialectical relationship (Berger & Luckmann, 1966).

In any case, for Simmel the subject was not an abstract being, but:

a *being in a situation and in a relationship*, stratified and modified by the spatio-temporal context in which he/she operated and above all by his/her relations with other subjects, who are just as original as the Ego and no mere representation of the subject (Vozza, 2003, p. 13).

In any case, although he was particularly interested in the events of individuals as the greatest possible expression of life, he managed, through reflection, to correlate within the dimension of sociability, the “sharing of elements”, those which “the single individual has in common with other” individuals, with subjective diversity, as “shared elements do not cease to be such because expressed, in a singular manner, within the unique configuration of personality” (Simmel, 1913).

Simmel, far from sacralising the so-called “social fact” (certainly not attributed that name by him), cared about life’s profoundest course and, from a speculative point of view, dwelt on the clash between the vital life flow and “form”. Furthermore, according to this viewpoint, education should favour the correct conjugation “between form and life”, a vital synthesis between the objective and subjective dimension or, better still, a “vital dynamism that produces forms and does not refuse them”. In this sense, there are aspects of his reflections which should permit us to read into present-day systems of interactive education with greater clarity, because his request for greater harmony between “form and life” might well lead to the creation of a virtuous circle between relativism and forms of dogmatism, “between values, concepts and relatively stable and regular objective contents, and a dynamics by means of which said values may be grasped, interiorized, experienced, discusses and put to the test” (Maccarini, 2003, pp. 88-89).

In short, beginning with his concept of sociability, Simmel had, to some extent, foreseen the present *paradigm of interaction*, which envisages a less mechanical-mandatory kind of socializing action, one more inclined to favour symmetrical relationships and the creation of an individual personality “connected to the systems of social interaction” (Pulcini, 2005; Sciolla, 2002).

In brief, if for Durkheim the main problem to be solved was that of guaranteeing a type of social integration and regulation capable of keeping the “instincts” of the individual under control, Simmel, on the contrary, aimed at creating a balance between the effort put into the subjective realization of “uniqueness” (life) and the social whole (form), the latter seen as the stable sedimentation of the various kinds of interactive relations existing between people.

Their theoretical-methodological approaches were so different that, when referring to their concepts of socialization and sociability, in order to underline the vast distance between the stances of these two scholars, one might be obliged to refer to the “non contemporaneity of the contemporaneous” theory to explain why, although from a chronological point of view they lived during the same historical period, they seem to belong to different moments in time and to have experienced a “different qualitative perception” of their age. (Mannheim, 2008).

### **Socialization and sociability in or “for” advanced modernity**

Different models of socialization corresponding to the “educational system of the whole of the society” that expresses them, have been conceived over time; it was Durkheim, actually, who emphasised the historical relativism of forms of education. Later, Weber went into this non-universalist thesis of his in greater depth and pointed out that education was not established by the whole of society, but by the prevailing economic-political power-structure (Cesareo, 1977; Ribolzi, 1998).

During the previous cultural phase (above all, on the basis of Durkheim’s point of view, whereby “society began where instinct ended”) linear socialization, which took place step by step and according to a pre-established order, was bent on creating a *social being* with a cohesive personality and maintaining the common ethical-symbolic heritage and normative apparatus almost intact, from one generation to the next<sup>9</sup>.

Today, to the contrary, socialization is no longer believed to be the outcome of a sole integration process, but, rather, the sum of a set of “pathways” which grant the single conscience, also due to new *psychic*

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<sup>9</sup> See: Benadusi, Censi & Fabrietti, 2004; Boudon, 2002; Franchi & Schianchi, 2011; Poggi, 2003.

*mobility*, the possibility of self-directing redefinitions of the rules, information, the meanings transmitted by the agencies of education, when all comes to all, “as social relations” (Ghisleni and Moscati, 2003; Maccarini, 2003). Today, the educational experience has lost its traditional normative character and assumed a dialectical, adapting and interactive attitude; it now appears as a “shared building-up” of tendentially provisional and renegotiable knowledge and know-how, and, in keeping with this new cultural climate, may begin to be considered “quite relational” (Donati and Colozzi, 2006).

Naturally, this refurbishment of the classical “educational project” is the result of a variety of different factors, among which, we may mention, by way of example, de-institutionalization, the de-legitimization of univocal sources of meaning, the influence of informal agencies, like peer groups and the *mass media*<sup>10</sup>, new social relations, connections, made possible by contemporary, globalized and globalizing technologies, which give rise, above all, thanks to the *social networks*, to a “virtual” representation of the self and a model of long-distance dialogue.

When all comes to all, some of the criteria and aims of present-day socialization have changed; at present, this process aims, rather than at conditioning behaviour, at preparing the new social actors for sensible engagement “with the social, material and temporal world” and for access to the languages required to communicate; furthermore, the informal agencies do not seek to build up a strictly defined individual identity, but rather to mediate the inclination subjects feel to structure their personalities in a “fluid” way based on the relationships, the experiences and contexts in which they find themselves from time to time (Franchi and Schianchi, 2011; Maccarini, 2003; Scanagatta 2002).

Furthermore, as Simmel held, one might add that identity “is build up socially by means of the countless actions of reciprocal determination between individuals” (Simmel, 1996, p. 31). Taking a closer look, it appears that, way ahead of his time, he had outlined a sort of decomposition of the individual conscience caused by the broadening of

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<sup>10</sup> With reference to the incisive influence of the *mass media*, Newman had pre figured the subtle fascination exercised by the information channels – in his day high-impact popular periodicals, today, the *new media*, above all – on the educational process and on “the imagination of the human masses” due to their ability to enchant it “not only directly and explicitly, but also in an indirect and implicit fashion”, see Newman, 2008, pp. LXXXII, CX.

social horizons, which, the wider they become, the more they oblige single subjects to yield “a part of the self to relations with others, as the Ego enters into diverse ambits of interest and belonging”. (Dal Lago, 1994; Frisby, 1984).

It is by no chance that, in order to try to explain the experiential changeableness of the new identity model and manifold life choices people make, many sociologists have decided to use travel metaphors like pilgrim, tourist or vagabond<sup>11</sup>. The “the notion of choice” is in no way exclusive to the contemporary era; due to the weight of uncertainty it involves, it has always been a typical attribute of human action (Remotti, 2010)

On the whole, however, the “light socialization” and “decentred identity” types which are establishing themselves both as an educational paradigm and as the vocation of individuals, imply a positive broadening of the expressive, affective-aesthetic subjective sphere and a more deeply- and keenly-felt need for relationships (Donati, 2010; Martelli, 1999).

In this sense, while the type of socialization envisaged by Durkheim is becoming increasingly rarer, Simmel’s theories appear quite up-to-date, above all as regards issues like “fluid identity”, existential wandering, aspiration towards subjective “radical self-expression” and the inversely proportionate importance assumed today by relational exchanges. Not only, but, rather than Durkeimian consensus and moral command, phenomena like common sense and Simmel’s subjective ethically differentiated action (even more so his sociability, intended as the “disposition” felt by subjects to establish reciprocal relations) seem to provide, in many ways, a valuable access code by which to interpret present-day instances of individual interaction and expression (Dal Lago, 1994; Garelli, 2006).

At the end of the day, thanks to these prophet intuitions of his, Simmel historicized his sociability category in a particular manner.

## **Conclusion**

In a general terms, to sum up and conclude, the reflections set down in this article may be said to have addressed, by referring, in particular, to a

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<sup>11</sup> Many scholars are at present addressing the issue of the “uncertainty” and “fluidity” of individual identity, see Bauman, 2000; Crespi, 2004; Hervieu-Léger, 1993; Montuschi & Palmonari, 2006; Siri, 2001.

number of empirical research investigations carried out, some of the dynamics of sociability (or of “sociation”, as Simmel preferred to call it), which emerged transversally from the data drawn from phenomena one might consider alien to the issue itself: the perception of social distance and pilgrimage, which data, in various different ways allowed us to discover, at times reading between the lines, how many contemporary declinations of this concept of Simmel’s there are.

For example, in the light of investigations into social distance carried out in Italy, in particular in Rome, it emerged that, to grasp degrees of relational closure and openness existing between members of different social milieus, it was no longer useful to dwell primarily, as in the past, on indicators of prestige, power and income. The data gathered during these research projects revealed that in order to decode the position of subjects within their physical-symbolic social space and the central or marginal spatial perception that individuals have of each other, information regarding lifestyle, religious and consumer choices as well as relational variety, is much more useful (Cesareo, 2008).

Sociability, emotive exchanges between individuals, one’s own and others’ modes of being and expression, emancipated in part from external socio-normative codes, have assumed considerable sociological relevance and seem to be positively correlated with the formulation (which nonetheless contains its own “ambiguity”) of the actors engaged in interaction, that involves feelings of formality/informality, closeness/distance regarding others. This may mean that “positional factors”, such as *status* and the economic attributes of the subjects, are not the only determiners of difference, but that to these objective variables one needs to add, without over-emphasizing the psychological angle, the subjective factors that contribute to the creation of certain levels of proximity /distance within social relations<sup>12</sup>.

In particular, the research project *La distanza sociale a Roma* [Social Distance in Rome], which involved administering an interview and questionnaire to three hundred subjects, yielded data which highlighted the scarce relevance attributed by the interviewees to exogenous and pre-established parameters of socio-economic distance, while, on paper, at least, they granted greater importance to interpersonal relations.

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<sup>12</sup> See: Cesareo, 2008; D’Amato, 2009; Sciolla, 2004.

In brief, without annulling all the traditional structural variables regarding collocation of individuals on the hierarchical social scale, the Roman sample revealed an inclination to privilege the inter-personal links that are created, often in virtue of a common frequentation of the great “cathedrals” of consumerism, rather than by any other form of determinism or to the fact of belonging to a territorial, religious, local or neighbourhood context. In short, definitions of the social or individual self, of modes of public recognition, do not depend strictly on ascriptive principles, but are established through “self-confirmation”, through narrative, emotional, dialogic exchanges, shared with others<sup>13</sup>.

In the case of pilgrimage, on the other hand, it emerged that the devotional atmosphere experienced makes all classes and conditions temporarily equal; it “produces a kind of homologation”, because “those who knew each other discover they are different, those who did not accept one another”, not only thanks to a commonly shared desire to experience the “transcendent”, but also due to the intense relationship established among the participants (Dupront, 1987; Ferrarotti, 1991). In this liminal situation, marking “transition from the everyday to the festive, from the humdrum to the extraordinary”, people are elicited to experience a type of interaction which impacts on “their own sense of identity” and their perception of others; in actual fact, there is a tendency to suspend all formal reference to social or educational inequality, because of the special emotive-cognitive proximity that springs up among them<sup>14</sup>.

One might say, by way of hypothesis, that in the particular circumstance of pilgrimage, dynamic relations, not only intrinsic to sociability, but rather akin to those of *sociality*, are produced; even if, one may be forcing the latter issue somewhat by adapting it to popular piety, in that it was Simmel’s intention to use the term to account for the climate of relational reciprocity found among those who frequented the intellectual salons between the end of the 1800’s and the beginning of the 1900’s.

The divergence between the conditions specific to sociality of salons and the relational experiences of pilgrims derives from the fact that, as originally conceived, the former involved members of the same class, excluding *a priori* (as in a game) all personal and objective traits associable

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<sup>13</sup> See: Giaccardi & Magatti, 2005; Mongardini, 1988; Taylor, 1991.

<sup>14</sup> See: Canta, 2004; Canta, Cipriani & Turchini, 1999; Cipolla & Cipriani, 2002; Cipriani, 1997; Cipriani, 2003; Cipriani, 2012.

with social position, while the latter, as a manifestation of faith, does not recognize any social boundaries whatsoever, though it does not cancel the wide range of individual emotional registers expressed, especially as far as the sacred is concerned.

It is, probably, more plausible to make associations between pilgrimage and forms of sociality (which for Simmel was “the time and the place” where what individuals commonly shared prevailed “over utilitarian aims”) if one takes into consideration what actually brings pilgrims together, although quite unlike the reasons underlying the “bourgeois literary-mundane salon”, and considers pilgrimage as a situation where people put aside, at least in part, the “possessions that give them objective importance”, and neutralize the schemata imposed on them by society, in order to enter into a free unconditioned relationship (Simmel, 1917). However, taking into account the fact that sociality expresses “social order *sui generis*”, and that although the instances of common afflatus and relational involvement typical of pilgrimage have reasons and qualities quite unlike those underlying “playful forms of sociality”, there is a correspondence nonetheless, because, immaterial reasons prevail, in a similar way, over the material ones and the participants find the relational exchange, within the same temporal-spatial context, reassuring (Goffman, 1983; Simmel, 1917).

In this particular situation, it is possible, therefore, to imagine the emergence (as in the case of the salons) of sociality, of conditions, between and among the participants, of equality, “inter-individuality and super-individuality”, which, although transitory, predispose the subjects towards the establishment of relations and a will to share<sup>15</sup>, even towards “an act of reciprocal self-revelation” (Sennett, 1974).

When all comes to all, without forgetting traditional conceptions of social distance and pilgrimage, but by bringing leverage to bear on the components of these two phenomena, one might suppose that by focussing analytically on the *internal* subjective disposition of *sociability* (if not, at times on sociality) used to establish links with different people, in particular circumstances, or to “overcome” canonically traditional

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<sup>15</sup> Sharing, a term that recurs frequently today, is also the basic condition for entry into the *social networks*: it is, in actual fact, this mode of exchange and “a certain kind of living-world communality” that, beyond the bounds of prevailing interests, permits the creation of a vast web of dialogue involving a broad range of interlocutors, see: Franchi & Schianchi, 2011.

classifications of social symmetry-asymmetry, it is possible to throw light on more general factors, beginning with the possible retreat of the “positional” in favour of the “relational” approach. Or, better still, in view of the “grand” sociological “narrations” (à la Durkheim), as suggested by Donati, “critical and relational realism” might prove best suited to provide “the epistemological, methodological and applicative basis” required to penetrate the essence of contemporary society (Donati & Colozzi, 2006).

All told, Simmel’s concept of sociability seems to possess a semantic weight that has, to date, remained largely unexplored and transversal. A thorough investigation of this notion might favour new theoretical views of education (within the field of which a continuous reconsideration of processes of socialization is noticeable); it might also provide keys capable of permitting us to interpret a number of religious expressions or present-day perceptions of social distance, in a new light. To these we might add a number of sociological areas where this concept might be applied, including the socio-individual dynamics of exponential recourse to *social networking*, a place where all, though inter-linked and without experiencing true “relationships”, seem to be unanimously involved in a “reciprocal effect”.

Sociology has, most likely, paid ample attention to socialization, though, and again most likely, it has not explored the manifold possible declensions of sociability sufficiently.

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