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CHAPTER FOUR

What Durkheim could not have known: *Après* Durkheim

Several of the phenomena discussed in the previous section bore the imprint of globalization. An acute awareness of globalization as an ongoing reality-shaping and reshaping process is what sets our sociological imagination apart from that of Durkheim and his followers, who operated within the confines of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century nation-state and its social and institutional organization. Durkheim was, along with many of his disciples, a methodological nationalist whose sociology did accept change (indeed, as we have seen, coming to terms with social change was what prompted Durkheim to his intellectual efforts), but change within a sedentary system which was coincident with the nation-state. This is remarkable, for globalization was very much a reality in Durkheim's days. Colonization and an increasingly integrated world economy – Hobsbawm's '*Age of Empire*' – had brought the world to places such as Paris and London. But this world was seen through the spectre of one's country, the structures, needs and imagination of which depended, precisely and paradoxically, on its global reach.

The current phase of globalization is, on the one hand, qualitatively different from that of the Age of Empire, and this is to a very significant extent an effect of the internet – a technology that changed the world in the last decade of the twentieth century, allowing a tremendous increase in speed, volume and density of global flows and networks (see Castells 1996; Eriksen 2001). Due to this change, Hobsbawm (2008: 155) observes how ‘the Empire expands wider still and wider’: the global internet infrastructure and the pattern of traffic density mirrors, astonishingly, global information networks established in the late nineteenth century; persistent global inequalities are, in that sense, extended and expanded by the internet (see Read 1992; Blommaert 2016b). And such processes shape as well as occur in a new environment of communication and information, the details of which we are beginning to understand (cf. Seargeant and Tagg 2014; Varis and van Nuenen 2017). The point in all of this is that those who prefer to believe that there is nothing fundamentally new to the current stage of globalization are quite dramatically wrong. We are indeed witnessing a very, very profound qualitative change with momentous effects on the nature and circulation of knowledge and sociocultural norms, as well as on the structure of communities and social cohesion. More on this below.¹

But on the other hand, as said earlier: perhaps even more importantly, the present stage of globalization is accompanied by an *awareness* of it, an awareness that social processes nowadays operate at a variety of scales, of which the nation-state is just one and the global reach of the World Wide Web another. And this awareness is *revisionist* in nature, as it forces us to revisit and redirect a sociological imagination circumscribed and coloured by methodological nationalism. Both points – a qualitative difference and a different awareness of globalization – are things that did not belong to the worldview within which Durkheim and his successors such as Parsons operated.

In what follows, I shall explore the revisionist effects of this. And I shall do this by proposing a series of theories emerging from contemporary sociolinguistic work. I shall be using

a simple assumption: if interaction is what makes us social, theoretical insights into interaction must have wider relevance and can be used as a template for theorization at a higher level.² As noted at the very beginning, formulating theories is not exactly sociolinguists' bread and butter – but the editor of a recent volume on theoretical debates in sociolinguistics explicitly invites it (Coupland 2016). So let me try.

It goes without saying that much of what I shall present here cannot, strictly speaking, be called 'new' theory. Similar ideas have circulated throughout the twentieth century and have gained currency in the first decade of the twenty-first – echoes from Goffman, Giddens, Simmel and even Husserl will be heard, and I took my prompt to engage with these issues from Manuel Castells's (1996, 2010) and Arjun Appadurai's (1996) amazingly accurate (and continuously updated) late-twentieth-century predictions. What sociolinguistics contributes, however, is a set of empirical arguments that make such theoretical propositions compelling and inevitable; it also offers an empirically solid basis for *reformulations* of social theory. Note that while the previous chapter was largely retrospective, drawing on achievements from sociolinguistic research of the past decades, this chapter will be more prospective, drawing on current ongoing work, and therefore also programmatic in tone.

Since the discourse will change, it may not be a bad idea to specify what I understand by the term 'theory'. Theory is a particular kind of statement: a statement that tries to describe and define a *type* of phenomena out there, in such a way that research on individual tokens of these phenomena can be hypothetically generalized in a systematic way. Theories, then, are statements that enable a generalizable heuristics based on hypothesized type-token relationships. Such statements are, ideally and in the tradition of Anselm Strauss's 'Grounded Theory', already saturated with evidence – they are, to some extent, already proven: it is 'theory from data' (Glaser and Strauss 1999: 1; cf. Holton 2008). But even if a theory is already backed up by a serious amount of supporting evidence,

in each new piece of research it must operate as a *question* to be answered – or, to use a more familiar terminology, as a working hypothesis. The grounded theories I shall propose are conceptually relatively ‘light’, for they offer conceptual outlines of broad types of social phenomena to be ‘filled in’ with empirical detail in actual research.

Finally, I must return to what I said about theory in the preface: theory is not definitive and is made from and for research. I find no better statement to summarize this view than this one:

In my reading of science, theories arise from the study of events: They vary in scope and abstractness; they are provisional, incomplete, require verification and qualification; they have a life of potential usefulness but having contributed to the movement of a science they vanish or become incorporated in newer theories. (Strauss 1993: 1)

What follows is nothing more than that, and nothing less.

4.1 Preliminary: Vernacular globalization

As I said, I took my prompt from Castells and Appadurai, and I will use a particular notion developed by the latter as a general frame, a ‘folder’, so to speak, for the theories I shall propose below.

There has been no shortage of globalization theories over the past couple of decades, and some of them are good. But sociolinguistics brings something exceptional to the field of globalization studies: a perspective in which the ‘big’ movements in globalization (often called ‘flows’: Appadurai 1996) need to be constantly checked by the minutiae of on-the-ground communicative practices in which such global forces are being enacted and turned into locally performed meaning (see e.g. Pennycook 2007, 2010) – something for which

Appadurai coined the term 'vernacular globalization' (1996: 10). Observe that, for Appadurai, vernacular globalization is more than just a descriptive term, it is a gloss for the general condition of contemporary modernity:³

The megarhetoric of developmental modernization ... in many countries is still with us. But it is often punctuated, interrogated, and domesticated by the micronarratives of film, television, music and other expressive forms, which allow modernization to be rewritten more as vernacular globalization and less as a concession to large-scale national and international policies. (Appadurai 1996: 10)

To be sure, the dialectic of global and local forces in the experiential life-world of human beings (in other words, of vernacularization) is perhaps the most complicated descriptive and methodological issue in the study of globalization processes, and the introduction of a new generation of electronic media has certainly complicated matters. This was noticed early enough. Appadurai (1996: 194) noted 'new forms of disjuncture between spatial and virtual neighborhoods' as an effect of the globalization of new electronic media, seriously complicating the actual meaning of a term such as 'local practice'; he also saw the emerging of 'diasporic public spheres' revealing new horizons for political and social action, previously imagined within the confines of the nation-state (1996: 22).⁴ Manuel Castells (1996), in turn, described the massive effect of new information technologies on economic and political processes, on the organization of labour, on identity work and on social organization. Castells predicted the development of a new type of social formation which he called 'network' and which was not contained by the traditional boundaries of social groups. Both (and many more) saw a complex new sociocultural, political and economic order in the making, and invited others to join them in describing and theorizing these changes. Some of those who felt addressed by this call were sociolinguists.

It is my thesis that contemporary sociolinguistics has almost comprehensively theorized vernacular globalization as a condition of everyday life, the outlines of which can be sketched by the keywords *polycentricity*, *mobility* and *complexity*, which also count as its ontological assumptions.

Polycentricity stands for the fact that in every environment for social action, multiple sets of norms will be simultaneously present, although they might not be of the same order – they are scaled, stratified, and in that sense never ideologically neutral even if represented as such (Carr and Lempert 2016: 3). Polycentricity defines the intrinsic *indeterminacy* of social actions and processes, and their *non-unified character*: social change involves parts of society developing faster than others, creating anachronistic gaps.

Mobility is shorthand for the assumption that social life, even if ‘local’ in so many senses of the word, is never sedentary but always moving from one set of chronotopes into another one, across scales and centres of normative focus (cf. Blommaert 2015d). Mobility defines the intrinsic *instability* of social action and processes.

Complexity makes us aware of the fact that, even if every form of social activity evolves within a *system* of such activities, that system is always unfinished, dynamic and nonlinear or stochastic in the sense that outcomes may not be predicted from initial conditions (cf. Blommaert 2016c). Complexity defines the intrinsic *tentativeness* and potential *redefinability* of social action and processes.

This is, of course, a mere sketch of a theory framework, which in essence represents a cumulative and generalized result of a wide variety of different more precise sociolinguistic theorizations. This theory of vernacular globalization, therefore, requires several other more specific theories, providing more clarity to the keywords. I shall now turn to these more specific theories.

4.2 An indexical-polynomic theory of social norms

Let us recall the insistence, throughout the Durkheimian tradition of sociology, on norms as the key to defining and understanding the social fact, and let us now return to the discussion in Section 3.1 on ordered indexicality. In that earlier discussion, I explained how norms, in contemporary sociolinguistics, need to be seen as nonrandomly organized patterns of indexical order, and I stressed the collective and dialogical character of such sociolinguistic norms as a decisive argument against Rational Choice.

This is an ontological statement, and I believe we can broaden its scope from interaction and its ordered indexicals to social behaviour in general. Seen from that angle, social norms are, in actual fact, *ordered sets of interactionally ratified behavioural details* which we can call *behavioural scripts*. Note, once more,

- 1 that whatever is normative in social life is socially co-constructed in the process of interactional meaning-making, subject to continuous ratification by others, and therefore *tentative* in character, and
- 2 that there is nothing abstract to norms (or ‘values’) other than the terms we use to describe them. In real social life, norms take on a variety of *concrete behavioural shapes*.⁵

But that is not all there is to be said on this, certainly when we consider globalization and its sociolinguistic impact. In order to establish that, let us have a look at some research.

In a truly brilliant study, Sabrina Billings (2014) examined beauty pageants in Tanzania – an outlier, so to speak, in the world of English and of global mediascapes in Appadurai’s (1996: 33) terms. Billings focused on how the selection of the most appropriate candidate for Miss Tanzania (through

a scaled procedure starting locally, then regionally, then nationally) invoked and deployed sociolinguistic hierarchies in which ‘good English’ – fluent performance in a variety of English judged to be not-too-local – was the pinnacle of eligibility, even when, officially, candidates could produce public discourse in both Swahili (the national language) and English. Why is ‘good English’ so important? Because it serves as a crucial indexical suggesting superiority on at least two levels: (1) nationally and due to the particular sociolinguistic history of Tanzania, English is the prestige code associated with the status of being ‘educated’ (Billings 2014: 38–53); (2) internationally, because national pageant organizers operate within the Miss World format (Billings 2014: 61) and the Tanzanian winner will proceed to the global competition – where ‘good English’, once again, is a powerful diacritic.

‘Good English’, as a diacritic in the pageant, is of course not sufficient. The young women competing for the title of Miss Tanzania must also be judged to be physically beautiful, elegant and intelligent (Billings 2014: 92–6). We see a behavioural script emerge here, in which discursive normativity – speaking ‘good English’ – is an element of the total order of indexicality that rules the pageant. But while it is not sufficient, ‘good English’ is *decisive*. In several examples, quite painful to read, Billings shows how even top contenders can be mercilessly sanctioned by the critical audience when their on-stage discursive performance in English is judged to be inadequate. Describing audience reactions in one such case, Billings writes:

The pageant-savvy audience sees through her flimsy effort to insert a memorized response to a different question into the answer slot. In attempting to present herself as a fluent speaker of standard English, the contestant has instead, through her inability to answer spontaneously, indexed herself as a linguistic phony. (Billings 2014: 107)

The candidate’s discursive performance, in other words, was judged to be dishonest, and therefore a betrayal of the

behavioural script she tried to produce – that of someone who is educated and smart (hence using ‘good English’) and worthy of proceeding to the Miss World election. Her discursive performance exposed her, in short, as a liar, and this was grounds for exclusion. Norms, we can see once more, have effective power effects.

Note two important points here.

- 1 We see that the ratification of the failed behavioural script is a judgement of the entire person, and the judgement is moral in tone and character: the candidate is dismissed because her sociolinguistic features were judged to be ‘untrue’, not authentic, not honest. We see that, in actual practice, the social norms of the Durkheimian world are *moralized behavioural scripts*. Note that the moral, pace Durkheim, is entirely concrete and empirical here, operating on a range of very concrete behavioural features.
- 2 We also see how such judgements are *scaled*, with at last three different sets of criteria playing into each other in a mutually reinforcing way. There are the national and international indexical orders already mentioned above, and there is the order of the situated, actual moment of performance. The candidate stumbled over words, tried to start again, manifestly repeated an earlier statement and produced a distinct local accent in one expression – and all of this provoked cruel laughter from the audience. Into the perceived violation of local rules of performance, the national and international ones were infused by means of what Irvine and Gal (2000) called ‘fractal recursivity’, jointly and simultaneously resulting in a shattering disqualification of the candidate.

This is where we can become more precise with respect to the notion of polycentricity mentioned in Section 4.1. Speech events such as the ones described by Billings are governed by various

sets of norms operating on various ‘dimensions of social life’ (Carr and Lempert 2016) and orienting towards different real or imagined centres of authority (Silverstein 1998; Blommaert 2005: 172). Some of these norms are general – think of the norms governing genres such as public speech – while others will be specific – the norms of public speech in a beauty contest in Tanzania, for instance. We can see how this contributes to the theorizing of vernacular globalization sketched earlier.⁶

Furthermore, I believe we can generalize this insight, certainly in the age of widespread social media usage. Communicative actions will always be subject to various simultaneously operating sets of norms, since they will always demand attendance to the rules of actual interactional conduct, those of the topic of the interaction, its purpose or function, the social and cultural conventions governing conduct within specific participant frameworks, particular spaces or times, specific types of encounters, and so forth. A Facebook update, for instance, demands attendance to the (highly dynamic) norms of literacy and linguistic codes, the genre and register norms of an ‘update’ (not too long, preferably multimodal, etc.), the tacit norms of one’s community of ‘friends’ regarding certain topics and ways to discuss them (think of prevalent political orientations in one’s Facebook community), the Facebook rules of conduct (proscribing certain forms of obscenity, for instance), and the rules of the algorithmic system behind Facebook that render certain updates more visible than others. And whether or not one is aware of these rules doesn’t really matter: every update will generate *effects* related to all these different but simultaneously operating sets of norms.

Thus, whenever we interact with others we find ourselves in a *polynomic* social arena. We respond not just to one set of norms but to multiple sets of finely defined norms governing aspects of the specific interactional events and its context. We can call such sets of highly specific norms *microhegemonies* – more on this below. And the presence of multiple microhegemonies turns every instance of social action into a polynomic social event.

Sociolinguistic work brings a far more precise and empirically verifiable theory of norms and normativity to social thought than most other approaches. When we think of norms, we see *a polynomic complex of moralized behavioural scripts*: several concrete sets of ordered indexicals microhegemonically governing aspects of conduct, played out simultaneously towards, and with, interlocutors who continuously valueate them morally and feed these valuations back to us. Given the centrality of norms in any sociological imagination since Durkheim, this theory will have repercussions on others.

4.3 A genre theory of social action

The theory of norms I sketched here is a building block of a theory of action: we can now assume that social action is normatively organized in the sense just described. But we have to take this somewhat further, towards a theory of action proper. There is nothing unusual about this. Models for understanding the nature and dynamics of social action have been and remain key ingredients of sociological theorizing in the Grand Tradition, from Weber and Parsons to Bourdieu, Habermas and Giddens, to name just a few. Given my intention to use sociolinguistic insights in interaction as the core of theorizing, symbolic interactionism was obviously a source of inspiration, and I will repeatedly draw on Strauss's (1993) very rich discussion of this tradition of social thought.

Recalling the discussion in the previous chapters, one fundamental assumption I borrow from that source is straightforward: 'Actions are in effect *interactions* between and among group members, not simply an individual's actions or acts' (Strauss 1993: 21, italics in original). Social action, in other words, is a verb. It is collective, is intersubjective, and involves orientations to norms; the concept of 'genre' can be a useful tool for capturing most of this in a very simple way.

Sociolinguistics has for decades been concerned with the notion of genre, as a historically established and socialized set

of linguistic-communicative features that enables specific forms of communicative behaviour to be recognized as, for instance, a joke, a lecture, a confession, a poem, a novel (Halliday 1978; Hymes 1981; Bakhtin 1986; Fabian 1991; Blommaert 2008c). From such evidence, we also know that *all* communicative behaviour is genred – or at least, that if we intend to make our communicative behaviour understood by others, it needs to be recognizable as an instance of a specific genre. Genre, thus, operates very much in the sense specified above: while every instance is unique and special, recognizability is *generic*, that is it rests on the iterativity of the ordered indexicals pointing to specific genres. Every novel is recognizable as ‘a novel’, but still we have our favourite novels.

This insight can be generalized. Social actions do not emerge from nowhere, nor can they be seen as pure acts of creativity. They are performances based on already existing sociocultural material, always uniquely contextualized and situated, and therefore involving a degree of creativity. So two dimensions are crucial here, for jointly they construct social actions as situated, performative genre work:

- 1 *Iterativity*: the usage of already existing genre templates
- 2 *Creativity*: the deviation from such templates in unique instances of genre performance

Iterativity provides what we can call the ‘structural’ aspect of social action. It ensures the recognizability of actions: they proceed largely within existing orders of indexicality that are interactionally understandable-as-something. Generic iterativity also turns situated social action into a fundamentally *historical* phenomenon – where does this iterated sociocultural material come from? How did it acquire its function as generic template? And thereby, of course, it should be seen as a crucial element in explaining sociocultural transmission, reproduction and spread.

Creativity provides what we can call the ‘diversity’ aspect of social action. It ensures the uniqueness of the situated

deployment and performance of genred features of action, of its participants, and of its chronotopic peculiarities – how and why does this particular situated instance of social action function in this particular way? Creativity, in that sense, can be seen as an ‘inflection’ of genre templates, as a term covering the small bits of deviation-from-a-model that turn the actual instance into something that triggers interactional uptake and appraisal. *This particular* lecture is nice, engaging and fun, versus boring, silly and uninteresting. It is still a lecture – the genre template has been satisfied – but it is a particular evaluated token of that type. Creativity, I add, is also the *aspirational* dimension of social action: the things we want to invent, or attempt to change, by small deviations from the normative templates. And while creativity usually only accounts for a relatively minor part of social action – it is an inflection of iterative templates – in everyday lived experience it prevails over the iterative basis of action. Our reactions and judgements of approval or rejection are based on the inflection, the ‘accent’, present in the uniquely performed act – which we can judge and react to because it is not entirely unique.

Thus, we can see any concrete social action as proceeding along lines of established normativity and deviations from such norms, as *genred* modes of collective conduct in which the sharedness of what makes actions recognizable is played off against the uniqueness of what is created by deviations from what is commonly shared. Needless to say that longitudinally, creative aspects of action may become iterative ones – exceptions become rules when they have been made into commonly ratified innovations.

There is a strong tendency (and theoretical habit) to see social action as singular, linear and goal-directed; Rational Choice, of course, takes this to its limits. This does not work.

- 1 Sociolinguistic studies of interaction have shown that actions are best seen as part of longer and more

complex sequences, in various ways (see e.g. Wortham and Reyes 2015). One, there is the intertextual nature of interaction, which aligns with the iterative aspect of social action. Actions are meaningful because they can be understood in relation to earlier similar ones (and projected onto future ones) (cf. Silverstein 2005; Silverstein and Urban 1996). Two, what looks like one singular and coherent action may, upon closer inspection, prove to be an array of different overlapping but disjointed actions – and we get changeable constellations of genres-within-genres. A conversation may contain, for instance, moments of intimate narration, of disengaged small talk and of hostile cross-questioning (cf. Goffman 1981); and narratives done in, for instance, police or immigration interviews may simultaneously be recorded into legally consequential textual reporting formats – while the interviewer's on-the-spot interactional routines would suggest nothing more than constructive conversational involvement, he or she might simultaneously be performing a procedural 'next step' practice very much detached from what goes on between the interlocutors during the interview (cf. Briggs 1997; Blommaert 2005). Actions are rarely singular.

- 2 They are rarely linear as well. The creativity dimension of action also accounts for its contingent nature (in the sense of Garfinkel 1967): the inevitable indeterminacy, open-endedness and uncertainty characterizing any form of social action and manifesting itself in the very well-known category of phenomena we call misunderstanding. Certainly when we consider the earlier point, about actions rarely being singular, we should assume that we often face what Anselm Strauss called 'a cumulative mess': 'an evolving set of problems that are so unanticipated, difficult, and in extreme cases so "fateful" that control of the course of action is threatened and even rendered virtually impossible' (1993: 53). The normal course of

action is often disrupted (a lecture, for instance, by a beeping smartphone), the opening strategy rarely followed through (other than in apocryphal meeting reports), and people whom we believe to thoroughly know can still surprise us. Our interactions proceed in complex, layered contexts and in relation to (often changeable arrays of) other people, which renders their course uncertain and highly dependent on a wide range of factors, only part of which are within our conscious control.⁷

- 3 The latter has an effect on the question of the goal-directedness of action. Conditions and effects are rarely cleanly aligned, and nonlinear outcomes of interaction are legion – think of people falling in love, or of people entering as friends and leaving as enemies. And while we may have a rational interest in mind when engaging in forms of interaction – think of employment as the rational interest one may have in a job interview – we can be quite irrational in interactional proceedings and depend as much on tacit emotively given-off and picked-up cues as on tightly argued moves – such that we may leave a job interview without the job but with a good feeling. We are ready to adjust our logic to that of the interlocutors and redefine the appropriate interactional features as well as the desired outcomes of interaction in trade-offs with those of the others (e.g. Silverstein 1997; Rampton 2001; Goodwin 2007).

These qualifications gain weight when we consider current internet phenomena. In the iterative part of internet-based social action, the influence of algorithmic processes needs to be taken seriously. Such algorithmic processes are often described by means of terms such as ‘echochamber effects’ or ‘bubble effects’ (Pariser 2011; Tufekci 2015; van Nuenen 2016), and they refer to the fact that machines organizing activity in social media environments, create communities of people who (in the views of those designing such algorithms) should

‘share’ something – interests, social characteristics, opinions and so forth. Even if there is presently hardly a way in which we can profoundly and directly examine this (these algorithms are among the best-kept industrial secrets) there is little doubt that their effects reinforce and enlarge the iterative features of actions, perhaps pushing them even towards new levels of generic uniformity. Research on this is, as said, extremely difficult, but when investigating online actions, it is wise to keep an awareness that not everything we observe is an effect of deliberate human choice and agency, but an artefact of algorithmic agency.

This genre theory has methodological consequences: the validity of examples in analysis, including complex ones, rests on their generic recognizability, on the fact that through and beyond their unique situatedness we can spot the larger, historical genre templates invoked in such social actions. Every instance of social action is evidently unique, *but only to a degree*. For it is also generic, and in that sense always a token of a type, ‘representative’ of that type. The genre theory, therefore, can be seen as the grounding for an ethnography that satisfies the demand both for ecological validity and for representativeness.

4.4 A microhegemonic theory of identity

Building on to what has been established so far, I now move on to two theories that are sides of the same coin: a theory of identity, followed by another one of social groups that essentially extends the former. While there is no sensible way in which we can talk of identity without talking about the social groups in which identities are performed and enregistered, I separate them here for clarity’s sake, because identity and social groups are, in many studies, isolated as separate domains of study.

Communicative practice is always and invariably an act of identity. Sociolinguists have taken this insight on board since

the mid-1980s (Le Page and Tabouret-Keller 1985), turning it, as Allan Bell observes, into one of the most productive topics of sociolinguistic research in recent years (Bell 2016). Very few sociolinguists need to be convinced of the *performative* and *creative* nature of identity (in other words, of identity not as a given but as something that emerges in social action); of its *dialogical* nature (creating a difference between *enacted* and *ascribed* identities), of the *plurality* of identities; of the dynamics of ‘*serious*’ and ‘*ludic*’ identity work prevalent in practices such as ‘styling’; and of identity as a *problem* central to a complex politics of performance and ascription (for surveys, see De Fina, Schiffrin and Bamberg 2006; Coupland and Jaworski 2009; sophisticated examples include Harris 2006; Rampton 2006; Møller 2017). So here too, we can draw extensively on sociolinguistic insights.

This could be helpful, for the problem of categorization (another word for identity ascription) is an old one in social and humanities research, notably in quantitative ones where a degree of stability in research design is mandatory across the sample (Cicourel 1974). There is an assumption that every subject can (and perhaps should) be determined as to identity by describing him/her along essential bureaucratic parameters such as nationality, age, gender, social class, ethnicity, religious affiliation, profession – extended, sometimes, to include educational qualifications, income, family relationships, sexuality and health status. And this, let us note, is where we continue to feel the full weight of the Durkheimian tradition in research, for those are the diacritics of the modern ‘thick’ communities that have preoccupied macro-sociological research in the tradition we associate with him. The assumption, reformulated, is that we can know and understand society when we divide it into segments and relationships based on these identity categories.

In contrast to that tradition, I propose to see identities as *chronotopically organized moralized behavioural scripts*; above I suggested the term ‘microhegemonies’ as shorthand for that contorted phrase. And I will explain what I mean by that.

Let us recapitulate some of the elements in Sabrina Billings's study of the role of language in Tanzanian beauty contests, discussed above. We saw how the use of language – particular forms of English, to be more precise – was a key part of a larger set of features deployed by the contenders and judged by the audience and the jury in relation to perceived norms of 'good' conduct in such events. In fact, what we saw was that 'beauty queen' – an ascribed identity category – needed to be *performed* by enacting a set of different, dispersed 'qualities' – beauty, intelligence, education levels, humour – of which perceived fluency in 'good' English was emblematic. I emphasized that this normative system was polycentric and scaled, with local and nonlocal norms piled up onto one another, and that the judgement passed by the audience when one of the contenders failed to display the expected fluency in 'good' English was a moral judgement of the entire person: she was seen and condemned as a phony.

The judgement, an identity judgement, was a *moralization* of the degree of normativity perceived in the contender's display of a composite set of behavioural norms – a behavioural script that needs to be followed to some degree of satisfaction – which was specific to the occasion of the beauty pageant. It was *chronotopic*.

The latter is of critical importance. We long know from a wide and highly diverse literature that people do not 'have' an identity but perform identities. In the observable conduct of people, there is no such thing as 'identity': we can observe concrete, situated and interactionally contextualized identity work. This contextualization is of paramount importance: we need to adjust our identity work to the highly specific demands of particular contexts. To unpack that last term: 'context', in actual fact, is a concrete time-space configuration in which particular forms of identity are expected, required or optional, and in which, consequently, we need to deploy highly particular resources drawn from what we can conveniently call 'identity repertoires' (cf. Blommaert 2005: 234; Blommaert and De Fina 2017). To put it concretely: the beauty pageant, with its

complex layered normative orientations to global and local diacritics of success and failure, is a specific chronotope. The contenders can only be given the identity of 'beauty queen' in the time-space configuration of the pageant; outside of it, a contender would be an office clerk, somebody's daughter, a student, and what not. 'Beauty queen' and the behavioural scripts out of which it is constructed, are things that are specific to that one particular chronotope – just as bicycle racers can only call themselves 'world champion' when they have won one particular race, the world championship race. Identity work, in that sense, is never all over the place, it is very much connected to specific time-space niches.

Chronotopes help us get a precise grip on what we mean (referring back to Section 4.1) by mobility in this stage of online–offline globalization. We perpetually move from one chronotope into another, then back to the first and on to a third, and so forth. And we can describe in detail how such moves actually proceed, in physical as well as in sociocultural, politicized space. A shift from one chronotope into another, we can see, involves a massive shift in identity opportunities and criteria of judgement: what works well in one chronotopic environment may backfire in another, and vice versa. Lian Malai Madsen's (2015) study of a martial arts club in Copenhagen is a case in point. The club is superdiverse in composition and counts a large number of young Copenhageners with a migration background. These youngsters are publicly seen and often described as 'poorly integrated' and marginalized both educationally and in the labour market. They are widely perceived as a social problem. But in the martial arts club, they are often the stars, the centres of attention and bearers of prestige and status as champions. In the club, we see a carnivalesque reversal of everything these youngsters are outside of it. Their skills, competences and patterns of performance – the same ones as those that give them the negative ascribed identities mentioned a moment ago – are valued as fully integrated, as signs of extraordinary capability and even as exemplary models to be emulated by others.

In Madsen's study, we see quite profound identity shifts sequentially, as subjects move from one chronotope into another one. Chronotopes can and do simultaneously overlap as well – this is one of the aspects of what I call polycentricity. A mathematics class, for instance, is of course an institutionally regimented chronotope in which form and contents are tightly scripted and policed by the teacher; but that class may *at the same time* be seen as a congregation of teenage peer groups, an entirely different chronotope following a (sometimes dramatically) different set of normative behavioural expectations than those imposed by the school and the teacher, and displaying a highly different dynamics of identity as well. The underperforming student in the eyes of the teacher may be, because of exactly the *same* behavioural features, the coolest kid in class and a role model in the eyes of his/her peers. In fact, we can see Goffman's (1959) famous distinction between 'front stage' and 'backstage' as two simultaneously overlapping chronotopes, each with their own modes of social action, identity affordances and systems of normative organization; and many of the interaction rituals he described can be reconsidered as microhegemonies specific to particular chronotopic environments as well (Goffman 1967, also 1961, 1981; see also Silverstein 2005). Goffman's oeuvre, in fact, can be seen as a consistent engagement with how Americans in his time organized their social relations through forms of interactional behaviour adjusted to the chronotopes they inhabited – hence titles such as 'Relations in Public' or 'The Lecture' (Goffman 1971, 1981: Chapter 4).

Goffman described the microhegemonies of an offline society. It is evident that the online social space has enabled a multiplication of available chronotopes and relations between chronotopes, and thus generates a wide range of new modes of identity work. Since a tremendous amount of research is presently in the process of being rolled out, I must confine myself here to a general summary of available insights, and start with some comments on the particular communicative *practices* we observe in the online world (for surveys see

Leppänen and Peuronen 2012; Androutsopoulos 2016; Varis and van Nuenen 2017; Leppänen, Westinen and Kytölä 2017).

- 1 In a general sense, the emergence of online communication as a feature of everyday life has dramatically increased the importance of **literacy**, and more specifically of multimodal literacy. Online communication is overwhelmingly written (or ‘designed’: Kress 2003; Jewitt 2013). Writing, as we know, is a field of normativity which is structured quite differently from spoken discourse – writing ‘errors’ are often treated with considerably less tolerance than errors in speech – but, at the same time, online writing practices display an incredible dynamism and innovativeness dislodging the traditional boundaries of ‘writing’ (and, evidently, those of language in its traditional sense). Consider the now widespread use of emoticons and expressions such as ‘OMG’ and ‘LOL’, the influence of AAVE-based hip-hop register in new genres of mobile and online communication (Kytölä and Westinen 2015), the complex blends of visual, textual, static and dynamic features of contemporary websites, and, especially, the phenomenon of ‘memes’ (Du 2016). People do very different things in and with semiotic material online, compared to what they do in offline contexts.
- 2 Much of what is done, especially on social media, appears to be what is known as **phatic communion**: the transmission and exchange of messages in which not propositional content (‘information’) appears to be a central concern, but the maintenance of ‘convivial’ social relations and the performance of specific acts of identity – that of, for example, a ‘friend’ by means of Facebook ‘likes’, a ‘follower’ by means of Twitter retweets, or just an ‘acquaintance’ by means of quick and short mobile messages (Miller 2008; Jones 2014; Varis and Blommaert 2013; Velghe 2013).

- 3 The boundaries between online and offline social processes are **porous**. Registers of online activities such as Mass Online Games can spill over into the everyday vocabulary of gamers and become new indexicals for expressing social ties (Sierra 2016), and online activities become a learning environment where resources are built and circulated that are useful offline and now also profoundly influence such offline practices (Leppänen 2007; Maly and Varis 2015; Blommaert 2016d). Conversely, offline identity features can influence the choice and use of specific online platforms and modes of conduct (boyd 2011). And, of course, new phenomena such as online dating are meant to go offline as soon as the first online steps have been completed (Toma 2016). The internet has also become an enormous repository of explicitly didactic and normative material – the ‘how to?’ genre – in which people can get clear instructions for how to perform specific forms of identity (Blommaert and Varis 2015).
- 4 Even so, online forms of self-presentation have **characteristics and affordances of their own**, not reducible to existing offline resources. Given the absence, in general, of face-to-face contact, people can hide behind an alias and construct entirely fictional personae for themselves – something that characterizes the darker side of the online social world (boyd 2014: 100). But in more benign ways, there is a tendency to present oneself in the ‘my best day’ mode – the way one wishes to be perceived by others (Baron 2008: 71; boyd 2014). There is also a plethora of new and reconfigured discursive genres, ranging from ‘Wiki’-like formats of collaborative writing to particular modes of confessional narrative, raising issues of privacy and the limits of self-exposure (cf. Page 2012; van Nuenen 2016). The online world is a space where distinct forms of identity work can be performed, only distantly connected to what goes on elsewhere.

In spite of this final remark, all of the above implies that quite a bit of contemporary identity work is carried over and oscillates between online and offline contexts, creating highly intricate connections between, for instance, what is microhegemonically expected or permitted in the chronotope of Facebook and that of the school playground (think of cyber bullying) or the workplace (think of employers monitoring employees' social media accounts). The chronotopic nature of identities thus now evidently creates an enormous panorama of possible and expected identities, vastly more than those captured by the bureaucratic, 'thick' diacritics I mentioned at the outset. The variation of chronotopes we move through in social life demands, and endows us with, a plethora of 'light' identities, if you wish, not excluding the old and established 'thick' categories but complementing them – 'big' diacritics such as race, gender, class or ethnicity are not absent, but they are performed in different and sometimes surprising ways (e.g. Rampton 2006; Harris 2006; boyd 2011; Goebel 2013, 2015; Wang 2015; Faudree 2015; Fox and Sharma 2016).

At the level of everyday experience, however, our identities and those of others depend strongly on *details* of behaviour and appearance, of which a certain amount needs to be displayed and performed – identities, one can see, are judged on the basis of perceptions of 'enoughness' (Blommaert and Varis 2015; also Goebel 2013). We can see a reflex of the genre theory of social action here: identity work is evidently genre-based, and it will display the same calibration between tendencies towards similarity and tendencies towards deviation as the one we encountered when we discussed genres.

4.5 A theory of 'light' social groups

The discussion of identity already showed that the 'thick' diacritics of identity are not out, but that they are in need of a more delicate balancing with a wide range of other, 'light' forms of identity. To name just two, social class is not out, and neither is

ethnicity – but both are now imaginable as far more ‘styled’ than ‘given’ identities, drawn from within a repertoire of identities that contains lots of different orientations. This obviously has a bearing on the discussion of social groups as well.

This discussion has a very long pedigree. Classics of sociology address society as their object, and attempt to find and express the rules that guide it. Sociology, it is said, is the science of society. How such a society should be defined, however, has been a consistent bone of contention since the very early days of sociology as a science. Generally speaking, authors reserve the term ‘society’ for the perceived *permanent* features of a social system, often (as by Durkheim and Parsons) ad hoc circumscribed by the nation-state. Such features were believed to be less subject to rapid or radical change – as distinct from features that were seen as superficial, transient or less reliable as indicators of social structure.

Here is what Georg Simmel had to say about it. Noting that the sociology of his era still had to prove its right to exist, notably against proponents of Methodological Individualism, Simmel emphasizes the fact of interaction as the eminently social phenomenon – see above – and then observes:

It is only a superficial attachment to linguistic usage (a usage quite adequate for daily practice) which makes us reserve the term ‘society’ for *permanent* interactions only. More specifically, the interactions we have in mind when we talk about ‘society’ are crystallized as definable, consistent structures such as the state and the family, the guild and the church, social classes and organizations based on common interests. (1950: 9, italics in original)

We have already encountered the same tendency towards preferring such ‘thick’ and permanent forms of organization in the work of Parsons, who focused on the governing pattern of values and their integrative effects to characterize society, while smaller and ‘lighter’ social groups were said to be tied together by norms – with the interactions between

both resulting, sometimes, in contradictions and disorder. This hierarchical ranking in which society is presented as organized, primarily, by strong ties within 'thick' communities such as those listed by Simmel (the state, church, etc.) and, secondarily, by 'lighter' ties within a plethora of social groups, of course did not prevent attention to the latter. But studies of smaller social sub-groups often articulated an awareness of their relatively superficial and ephemeral character. See, for instance, how Bourdieu and Passeron describe the Parisian student community of the 1960s:

The student milieu is possibly less integrated today than ever before. ... Everything leads us, thus, to doubt whether students, effectively, constitute a homogeneous, independent and integrated social group. (1964: 54–5, French original, my translation)

Homogeneity, independence or autonomy, and level of integration, thus, decide the kind of social group formed by students: quite a poor one compared to, for instance, social class. And one should not be carried away by the lure of superficial groupness:

Students can have common practices, but that should not lead us to conclude that they have identical experiences of such practices, or above all a collective one. (Bourdieu and Passeron 1964: 24–5)

Precisely the same argument was used by Goffman in *Encounters* (1961) when he described poker players as a tightly focused community of people otherwise unacquainted, in which clear and transparent rules of conduct were shared (and assumed to be shared as soon as someone joins a poker game). Goffman saw such brief moments of tight but temporary and ephemeral groupness as aggregations of people sharing just the rules of the encounters, but little beyond it. Such 'light' groups, or 'groupings whose boundaries we know very little about' (Goffman 1971: xxiv), could be studied as a way to

arrive at insights into fundamental social procedures such as socialization and identity development (see e.g. Becker et al. 1961 for a classic). But when it comes to understanding society (the real thing), attention should go to the 'thick' communities, and amendments to the established set of 'thick' communities, potentially dislodging the consensus about its consistency and stability, invariably led to considerable controversy.⁸

Simmel, we saw, expressed an awareness of the conventional – untheorized – nature of this consensus about the scope of 'society'. And after mentioning 'the state and the family, the guild and the church, social classes and organizations based on common interests' as the stereotypical arenas for 'permanent interactions', he goes on:

But in addition to these, there exist an immeasurable number of less conspicuous forms of relationships and kinds of interaction. Taken singly, they may appear negligible. But since in actuality they are inserted into the comprehensive and, as it were, official social formations, they alone produce society as we know it. ... On the basis of the major social formations – the traditional subject matter of social science – it would be similarly impossible to piece together the real life of society as we encounter it in our experience. (Simmel 1950: 9)⁹

In other words – and here is a methodological invective of considerable importance – if we intend to understand 'society as we know it', we need to examine these 'less conspicuous forms of relationships and kinds of interaction' not instead of but alongside 'the major social formations'. We can only get access to the necessarily abstract 'society' by investigating the on-the-ground micropractices performed by its members (called *sociation* by Simmel), taking into account that these micropractices may diverge considerably from what we believe characterizes society and may eventually show complex ties connecting practices and features of social structure (cf. Collins 1981; Goffman 1971: 196).¹⁰

The problem is familiar for sociolinguists: 'Language' with a capital L can only be examined by investigating its actual situated forms of usage; and while many prefer to define Language as a stable, autonomous and homogeneous object, the actual forms of usage are characterized by bewildering variability, diversity and changeability. I have already explained that, in addition, sociolinguists began to understand quite a while ago that very little can be learned from Language about the actual social functions and effects of language. In other words: understanding what language is and does, in the realities of social life, forces us to take the variable, diverse and dynamic actual forms of language usage ('speech') as our object, even if they cannot immediately be squeezed into a normative framework of Language. Even more: a privileged site for research, offering analytical breakthroughs of momentous importance, is the small and highly heterogeneous peer group where the boundaries of languages, and of the 'major social formations', are blurred (e.g. Gumperz 1982; Rampton 2006; Harris 2006; Jørgensen 2008).

Yet, recall the action theory sketched above: we should start from actions rather than from participants and their characteristics and put *sociation* ahead of society.¹¹ Sociolinguistics can offer a simple four-step methodological programme for empirical investigations into groups of any kind and configuration. Here it is:

- 1 Patterns of communication necessarily involve meaningful social relationships as prerequisite, conduit and outcome.
- 2 Such relationships will always, similarly, involve identities and categorizations, interactionally established.
- 3 Thus, when observing patterns of communication, we are observing the very essence of sociation and 'groupness' – regardless of how we call the groups.
- 4 And specific patterns of interaction shape specific forms of groups.

In this sociolinguistic frame, thus, we approach groups pragmatically and axiologically, from the angle of the actual observable communication practices and through the values attributed to such practices. Groups, then, are not collections of human beings but patterned sets of communicative behaviours and the relationships with which they are dialectically related. Whenever we see such ordered forms of communicative behaviour, there is an assumption of active and evolving groupness – sociation – but the analytical issue is not the nature of the group (or the label we need to choose for it) but the specific social relationships observable through and in communication – a Batesonian focus, if you wish, overtaking a Durkheimian one. All other aspects of sociation can be related to this. So if one needs the definition of a group: a group is a communicatively organized and ratified set of social relationships.

We can extend these insights now and bring them into the broader field of social action. The theoretical core of what follows can be summarized in this way:

- 1 Online social practices generate a broad range of entirely new forms of ‘light’ communities.
- 2 In the online–offline social contexts we inhabit, understanding social action requires attention to such ‘light’ groups alongside ‘thick’ groups.
- 3 Because in the everyday lived experience of large numbers of people, membership of ‘light’ communities prevails over that of ‘thick’ communities.
- 4 ‘Light’ communities, thus, display many of the features traditionally ascribed to ‘thick’ communities.
- 5 Even more: if we wish to comprehend contemporary forms of social cohesion, we need to be aware of the prominent role of ‘light’ communities and ‘light’ practices of conviviality as factors of cohesion.

Let me briefly elaborate the very first point. For those who wonder whether the internet has created anything new in the

way of social formations: yes, it has. Social media, in particular, have generated groups never previously attested: tremendously large communities of users, who – contrary to television audiences – *actively* contribute to the contents and interaction patterns of new media. Facebook's 1.79 billion users constitute a media-using community that has no precedent in history; the approximately ten million people who play the mass online game *World of Warcraft* are another type of unprecedented community; and so are the 50 million people who use the Tinder dating app to find a suitable partner.

All of these communities are formed by individuals voluntarily and actively joining them to perform entirely novel forms of social practice. Membership of such groups is experienced by many of its members as indispensable in everyday life, even if the practices performed in such groups would not always be seen as vital or indicative of one's core identity – these are 'light' groups and 'ludic' practices. But in addition to these voluntary communities, the internet generates *involuntary* communities through its algorithmic functions, bringing people together in networks of perceived shared interests and profiles, of which members are often unaware. The internet, thus, generates a range of new *performed* identities as well as a range of new *ascribed* identities; whereas the former usually function as spaces for interpersonal interaction and knowledge exchange among users, the latter's function is opaque for the ascribed members, who are categorized in terms of third-party priorities ranging from marketing to intelligence gathering and security concerns.

Having established this elementary point, I must now turn to the online–offline nexus and review some relevant research on how the interplay of online and offline identity resources enables such specific forms of communities to be formed.

In a recent paper, Ico Maly and Piia Varis (2015) show how the now well-known urban 'hipster' communities must be seen as a typical instance of Appadurai's vernacular globalization. While hipsters have become a globalized phenomenon, their actual occurrence, characteristics and social

positions are locally determined, jointly yielding a polynomic and microhegemonic identity field. The global features of the groups are largely internet-based imageries of lifestyle, consumption ethos, outlook and commodity orientation (think of the coffee cult, beards, skinny jeans, iPhones and vintage glasses as emblematic features), and the internet offers, as Maly and Varis demonstrate, an ocean of 'how to' resources for aspiring (or insecure) hipsters around the world. The internet, thus, functions as a learning environment for the various norms that shape and police hipster culture. Included in such norms are fine discursive identity distinctions that refer to the hipster label itself:

We can thus distinguish social groups that dress like hipsters, share an identity discourse based on authenticity, and frequent hipster places. They distance themselves from another group of people they call hipsters: a 'real' hipster is someone who rejects being part of a social group, and thus also rejects the hipster label which is reserved for people who desperately want to be 'hip' and are thus not 'real' or authentic. Nor are they true innovators or trendsetters, which the individualistic, authentic hipsters are. (Maly and Varis 2015: 10)

Thus, there is a strong tendency to self-identify as a non-mainstream, authentic, countercultural individualist, which, however, goes hand in hand with an exuberant and highly self-conscious neoliberal (and, thus, mainstream) consumerism, scaffolded by a globalized 'tight fit' fashion industry. As an effect, this quest for individualism results in a remarkable, global, degree of uniformity. Hipsters are eminently recognizable as hipsters, even if local accents do count and carry local identity values, and even if the usual fractality of orders of indexicality allows for emerging subdivisions within hipsterdom, such as the 'mipster' (Muslim Hipster).

Maly and Varis propose the term 'translocal micro-population' to describe hipsters, and it is easy to think of

other globalized lifestyle communities for whom this label might be suitable – think of Hip-Hop, Rasta, Metal or Gothic communities, but also of ‘fashionistas’ and ‘foodies’, of Premier League soccer fans and so forth. All these micropopulations could be more finely described as groups of people who are translocally connected as what we could call *communities of knowledge*, while locally they occur as *communities of practice*. The latter term is better known, and Lave and Wenger (1991) used it to describe groups whose frequent interaction provides a learning environment for rules and norms – not unlike Goffman’s (1961) acquaintances in their encounters or Becker et al.’s (1961) medical school students – and knowledge is evidently, in Lave and Wenger’s view, an ingredient of practice.

Theirs was, however, an ‘offline’ description, and what we see in the context of hipsters and other contemporary globalized lifestyle groups is that the internet has become an infrastructure for *separate* and *specific* forms of knowledge gathering and circulation not constricted by the experiences of face-to-face interaction, and so enabling a far wider scope and depth of scaled and polycentric community formation. We are facing a new type of social formation here: a ‘light’ community that differs from the ‘major social formations’ listed by Simmel, transcending the diacritics often thought to be essential in understanding social action, and (returning to Bourdieu and Passeron’s criteria of social groupness) displaying a high degree of homogeneity, autonomy, integration and structure over and beyond their diversity. We see, for instance, how such groups can be hierarchically structured, with ‘teachers’, ‘experts’ and ‘learners’ in clearly defined relationships vis-à-vis each other, enacted through specific modes of interaction.

The capacity of the internet for generating such translocal communities of knowledge is immense, and we are only beginning to explore this phenomenon – and to take it seriously as a relevant feature of the sociological imagination. Such communities of knowledge are usually just that: online communities or ‘fora’ where information on an endless variety of topics is exchanged and debated, often through the

hierarchical learning relationships just mentioned (e.g. Kytölä 2013; Hanell and Salö 2015; Mendoza-Denton 2015). But the internet has also enabled the emergence of a new form of translocal political community mobilization, and it is impossible to understand contemporary political and social dynamics without looking into such web-based communities of knowledge (cf. McCaughey and Ayers 2003; Graeber 2009). In fact, some of the most high-profile political events of the past decade were internet phenomena: Wikileaks and its release of hacked classified documents, the Panama Papers revealing shocking amounts of money hidden in offshore tax havens, and the alleged Russian hacking of the Democratic Party computers and its possible effect on the election of Donald Trump as US president in November 2016 (e.g. Brevini, Hintz and McCurdy 2013).¹² And in recent years, communities that started online have won offline electoral victories as bona fide political parties – think of Syriza in Greece and Podemos in Spain.

Such processes of online community formation also occur where one would least expect it, and some of the most impressive findings come from China, a country known to maintain a restrictive internet censorship policy. Caixia Du's (2016) study of the online activities of the Chinese precariat can serve to illustrate this. Due to China's economic surge, millions of young and highly educated people have become employed in precarious administrative and technical jobs. These people, Du argues, share acute feelings of disenfranchisement: low income and insecure jobs have placed them in the margins of a society increasingly focused on material success and conspicuous consumption. Since they are digitally literate and since there are hardly any spaces for unimpeded sociopolitical dissidence in China, these people articulate and share their experiences online. Du describes how this large community – a 'class in the making' as she calls it – develops its own secret language through the clever manipulation of memes, sufficiently sophisticated to mislead the censor's search engines. The community also constructs and shares an emblematic culture

called *e'gao* and revolving around parody and persiflage of prestigious cultural objects; and its members have created a distinct identity label for themselves: *diaosi*, a derogatory term signifying 'losers' (see also Li, Spotti and Kroon 2014; Yang, Tang and Wang 2015). These 'soft', cultural practices, Du insists, show the gradual coming into being of a previously non-existent social formation in China: a large precariat, critical of the government and billionaire elites and a potential source of large-scale social unrest in China. And all of this happens online.

'Light' communities, we can see, appear to have 'thick' characteristics and modes of practice. There are reasons to believe, consequently that the 'light' practices that characterize so much of the online interactions – think of liking, endorsing, sharing, retweeting on social media – are not as light as one might think. Their main functions, one suggests, are the establishment and maintenance of relationships of conviviality (Varis and Blommaert 2013). But we should not forget that conviviality is an elementary and crucial form of social conduct within established communities – very much like greeting neighbours or exchanging Christmas wishes with friends and relatives. They could as well be seen as 'light' practices with a 'thick' effect: social cohesion within online groups and, increasingly, also spilling over into the offline world.

4.6 A polycentric theory of social integration

Integration continues to be used as a keyword to describe the processes by means of which 'outsiders' – immigrants, usually – need to 'become part' of their 'host culture'. I have put quotation marks around three crucial terms here, and the reasons why will become clear shortly. Integration in this specific sense, of course, has been a central sociological concept in the Durkheim–Parsons tradition. A society is a conglomerate

of social groups held together by integration: the sharing of (a single set of) central values which define the character, the identity (singular) of that particular society (singular). And it is this specific sense of the term that motivates complaints – a long tradition of them – in which immigrants are blamed for not being ‘fully integrated’, or more specifically, ‘remaining stuck in their own culture’ and ‘refusing’ to integrate in their host society.

Half a century ago, in a trenchant critique of Parsons, C. Wright Mills (1959: 47) observed that historical changes in societies must inevitably involve shifts in the modes of integration. Several scholars documented such fundamental shifts – think of Bauman, Castells, Beck and Lash – but mainstream discourses, academic and lay, still continue to rely on the monolithic and static Parsonian imagination. In what follows I shall draw on the action-centred perspective developed above and propose that new modes of diaspora, now conditioned by access to new forms of mediated communication enabling new modes of interaction, do indeed result in new modes of integration.

To formulate this as a theoretical proposition: *people are integrated in a wide variety of communities, both ‘thick’ and ‘light’ ones, and to differing degrees.* A ‘completely integrated’ individual is an individual who has achieved such diverse forms of integration and is able to move from one community to another while shifting between the modes of integration expected in each of them.

Let us look at some corroborating research. In a splendid dissertation, Jelke Brandehof (2014; for a similar study, see Nemcova 2016; also Tall 2004) investigated the ways in which a group of Cameroonian doctoral students at Ghent University (Belgium) used communication technologies in their interactions with others. She investigated the technologies proper – mobile phone and online applications – as well as the language resources used in specific patterns of communication with specific people. Figure 4.1 is a graphic representation of the results for one male respondent (Brandehof 2014: 38).

and the virtual environment of the labour market in Cameroon. In terms of activities, he maintains contacts revolving around his studies, maintaining social and professional networks in Ghent, job-hunting on the internet and an intricate range of family and business activities back in Cameroon. Each of these activities – here is the order and nonrandomness – involves a conscious choice of medium, language variety and addressee. Interaction with his brother in Cameroon is done through smartphone applications and in a local language, while interactions with other people in the same location, on religious topics, are done in Fulbe, a language marked as a medium among Muslims.

As mentioned earlier, specific forms of interaction assume specific forms of sharedness and shape specific forms of groups. Our subject is integrated, through the organized use of these communication resources, in several groups situated in very different zones of social life. He is integrated in his professional and social environment in Ghent, in the local casual labour market where students can earn a bit on the side, in the Cameroonian labour market where his future lies, and in his home community. Note that I use a *positive* term here: he is integrated in all of these zones that make up his life, because his life develops in real synchronized time in these different zones, and all of these zones play a vital part in this subject's life. He remains integrated as a family member, a friend, a Muslim and a business partner in Cameroon, while he also remains integrated in his more directly tangible environment in Ghent – socially, professionally and economically. Note, of course, that some of these zones coincide with the 'thick' groups of classical sociology (the nation-state, family, religion) while others can better be described as 'light' communities – the student community, the workplace, web-based networks and so forth.

This level of simultaneous integration across groups, both 'thick' and 'light' ones, is *necessary*. Our subject intends to complete his doctoral degree work in Ghent and return as a highly qualified knowledge worker to Cameroon. Rupturing

the Cameroonian networks might jeopardize his chances of reinsertion in a lucrative labour market (and business ventures) upon his return there. While he is in Ghent, part of his life is spent there while another part continues to be spent in Cameroon, for very good reasons. The simultaneity of integration in a variety of zones, however, should not lead us to suggest that the *degrees* of integration would be similar. We can assume that our subject is more profoundly integrated in, for instance, his family and religious communities in Cameroon, than in the Ghent-based casual labor market, where he needs to rely on the advice and support of others to find his way around.

I emphasized that our subject has to remain integrated across these different zones – *sufficiently* integrated, not ‘completely’ integrated. And the technologies for cheap and intensive long-distance communication enable him to do so. This might be the fundamental shift in ‘modes of integration’ we see since the turn of the century: diaspora no longer entails a total rupture with the places and communities of origin; neither, logically, does it entail a ‘complete integration’ in the host community, because there are instruments that enable one to lead a far more gratifying life, parts of which are spent in the host society while other parts are spent elsewhere. In short, here is a textbook example of Castells’s ‘network society’ (1996). We see that diasporic subjects keep one foot in the ‘thick’ community of family, neighbourhood and local friends, while they keep another foot – on more instrumental terms – in the host society and yet another one in ‘light’ communities such as internet-based groups and the casual labour market. Together, they make up a late-modern diasporic life.

There is nothing exceptional or surprising to this: the jet-setting European professional business class members do precisely the same when they go on business trips: smartphones and the internet enable them to make calls home and to chat with their daughters before bedtime, and to inform their social network of their whereabouts by

means of social media updates. In that sense, the distance between Bauman's famous 'traveller and vagabond' is narrowing: various types of migrants are presently using technologies previously reserved for elite travellers. And just as the affordances of these technologies are seen as an improvement of a nomadic lifestyle by elite travellers, it is seen as a positive thing by these other migrants, facilitating a more rewarding and harmonious lifestyle that does not involve painful ruptures of existing social bonds, social roles, activity patterns and identities.

What looks like a *problem* from within a Parsonian theory of 'complete integration', therefore, is in actual fact a *solution* for the people performing the 'problematic' behaviour. The problem is theoretical, and rests upon the kind of monolithic and static sociological imagination criticized by C. Wright Mills and others, and upon the distance between this theory and the empirical facts of contemporary diasporic life. Demands for 'complete integration' (and complaints about the failure to do so) can best be seen as nostalgic and, when uttered in political debates, as ideological false consciousness – or more bluntly, as sociological surrealism.

4.7 Constructs

In social science, social structure is very often used as a target of analysis – one intends to say something about the 'structural' level of social organization. And it is also often used as a methodological tool – one identifies a level of social reality called 'structure', and such structures contribute to the analysis of the case examined. Some of the most epochal and influential social-scientific work was work addressing just that: the emergence and solidification of structural dimensions of society – think of the work of Parsons (1937) or that of Giddens (1984). Structure, it seems, is the most 'macro' dimension of social life, and 'structural' is the most general level of statements made in its analysis. In Fernand Braudel's

famous distinctions between time-scales, the structural was situated in the realm of the *longue durée*: the time of civilizations, of modes of production, of the climate and the demography of parts of the world (e.g. 1969, 1981). And for C. Wright Mills and several others – think of Weber and Parsons – social structure could be described mainly by attention to the institutional orders within the nation-state, and ‘if we understand how these institutional orders are related to one another, we understand the social structure of a society’ (Mills 1959: 134). The consensus appears to be that structure refers to phenomena at the level of ‘the total society’ (Mills 1959: 137) and shows a persistent, slowly developing character. In that sense, work such as that of Appadurai (1996) and Castells (1996) addresses newly emerging structures. By the same token, of course, teleological models of social evolution, such as those of Hegel and Marx, would be structural.

One will have some difficulty finding detailed descriptions of what ‘structure’ actually *is*, how it can be empirically identified and how it relates to the chaotic specifics of the everyday social processes we can observe. Attempts such as those of Giddens – who was explicit in his definitions of structure – remain open to critique and controversy (see e.g. Thompson 1984: Chapter 4). Mostly, ‘structure’ is used in a loosely defined way in the sense I outlined above. And once more, if we use what we know about language in social life as the fundamental imagery for social science, we may offer a somewhat more precise set of formulations.

Let me first sketch the field of arguments in which I shall situate my proposals. I wish to keep my distance from two quite widespread frames of reference for discussing structure.

- 1 First, I want to avoid a particular tradition of interpretation of ‘structure’. ‘Structure’, certainly in a Lévi-Straussian variety of structuralism, has acquired strong suggestions of absoluteness, abstractness, predictability, anonymity, a-temporality and staticity. Structure, as the guiding value system

of a society, is that which provides enduring stability to a social system and makes it resilient – as Parsons suggested – to the onslaught of cultural revolutions from within youth culture (Parsons 1964). And even if structure is the outcome of active *structuration* at a variety of scale levels in social life (Giddens 1984; Thompson 1984), most scholars would still use the term to describe dominant (if not determining) rules, values or principles driving the development of societies across time-space. It is also quite often presented as a social force operating below the level of consciousness and agency of people, a set of tacit and not always ‘emicy’ well-understood aspects of social life – as in the ‘deep structure’ of Chomskyan transformational grammar.

- 2 Two, I want to avoid a particular set of discursive associations. ‘Structure’ is often seen as something antagonistic to ‘postmodernist’ and ‘mobility/complexity’ approaches to social life. While traditional (‘modernist’) social science would be on the side of anonymous static structure, ‘postmodernist’ science would favour individual agency and instability, and thus would become at once ‘poststructuralist’ – in an unrealistic either/or frame in which methodological preferences appear to lead directly to ontological strictures.¹³ It is rarely observed that ‘poststructuralist’ scholars such as Bourdieu and Foucault did not just reject *any* concept of structure but rejected a specific one: the Lévi–Straussian concept referred to above. They rejected a certain kind of structuralism (and their ‘poststructuralism’ would be more accurately defined as ‘post-Lévi–Straussism’) but not ‘the structural’ as a dimension of social systems.

In general, this false antagonism often renders more nuanced and precise understandings of structure invisible. Many fail to recognize that complexity is not the absence of order, but

a different kind of order. I shall therefore use another term to make my point. Rather than using 'structure', I shall use *constructure* in what follows. New terms enable us to examine the validity of the older ones, and they also afford some measure of detachment from unwarranted intertextual readings. 'Constructure' is not technically speaking a neologism – it is an archaic term that offers a felicitous collocation of 'structure' and 'construction'. The latter term, as can be seen, can easily be changed into 'agency', and so we have a concept in which both dimensions, often seen as antagonistic, are heuristically and analytically joined, and in which the layered historicity of social processes can be captured.

The baseline assumption – which, I hope, is entirely uncontroversial – is that any social event is *structured*: there is always 'order' in any observed social event. But from a complexity perspective on sociolinguistic phenomena and processes, this order is always:

- 1 **Dynamic and unstable:** order is always a temporally contingent quality because systems are perpetually unfolding and changing (e.g. describing language at one point in time will necessarily result in a description which is different from what was current a generation ago as well as from what will be current in the next generation).
- 2 **Unfinished and stochastic:** given the perpetual change, any momentary observation of order will contain open-ended, quickly evolving features anticipating new forms of order; it will also contain features that are contested and conflictual, and features in the process of being eliminated or established (e.g. archaisms and neologisms, short-lived as well as more lasting ones, are always part of any synchronic observation of language). It is stochastic in the sense that today's structure might be yesterday's exception, and that outcomes are quite often not predictable from initial conditions but 'accidental' or deviant in terms of what was seen as dominant.

- 3 Non-unified:** any form of order consists of a mixture of different forces, developing at different speeds and with different scope and range (e.g. the different registers in anyone's repertoire have different speeds of development, with 'standard' registers usually slower in development than, for example, youth registers – hence our sense of 'trendiness').

As just noted, we are used to reserve the term 'structure' for the slower, more persistent forces, the *durée*, the macro dimension of social processes. I suggest we avoid this micro–macro distinction and consider *the entire mix* when we use the term 'constructure'. Given the complexity perspective, there is no telling *a priori* which of the features in the mix will determine future developments – change often happens in the margins and begins as a statistical minority or exception, often negatively qualified or overlooked. Think of the spectacular rise of emoticons as part of several mainstream genres of writing nowadays. Emoticons have not replaced the conventional forms of alphabetic writing – we still write (roman-alphabetically, at least) from left to right, and we still use the conventional orthographic symbols we associate with the written form of the language we are using. Emoticons have been added to the mix of contemporary writing, so to speak; they represent what we could call a 'light' feature, blended with the 'thick' features of conventional orthography. In terms of functions, too, we should not associate 'structure' *a priori* with 'thick' functions but do justice to 'light' functions such as that of conviviality, discussed above. They are, as we saw, only light from the kind of transcendental structuralism I dismissed earlier.

Constructures are, thus, a permanently unfolding mix of various separate structures, the momentary deployment of which in social practice grants the latter a degree of orderliness, recognizable and ratifiable for others. Going back to our theory of social action, we can see how in

constructures, we can unify traditional notions of structure and agency. Rephrased, we have a tool for recognizing the two essential characteristics of social action – iterativity and creativity. Recall, most of the behaviour we deploy socially is overwhelmingly iterative, but slightly inflected by unique, creative and situated performativity. Observe, however, that I do not equate iterativity with stability and creative performativity with change. *The entire mix* is continuously changing, including the ‘iterative’ aspects of it. Detaching the performative ‘accent’ from the iterative ‘structure’ obscures the fact that, for people in everyday practice, the ‘accent’ is often the essence of what they perceive as meaningful in social action. And it is by means of the performative ‘accent’ that the iterative features of behaviour are also transformed into unique and creative characteristics of *specific* social actions performed by *specific* people. All of this was made clear earlier when we discussed the genre theory of social action; its relevance here is evident.

Rather than as a concept that points towards the stability of social systems – the simplistic interpretation of structure, noted above – constructure thus points to the permanently changing nature of social systems *and* to the way they change. This might explain why parts of past reality remain recognizable while other parts are not. When we read Erving Goffman’s observations on social life in the United States of the 1950s and 1960s, for instance, we can still recognize a great deal of it today, even if much of our social life these days is performed in a social space that did not exist in Goffman’s world: the virtual space of social media. Interaction in this virtual world is organized along different sets of norms many of which differ strongly from the ones Goffman detected in face-to-face engagements. Online sociality, however, has not *replaced* the Goffmanian world of social interaction – the mix has changed, which is why we can still recognize ourselves in Goffman’s work, even if we realize that large chunks of our lives are led in very different ways. The constructs have changed.

4.8 Anachronism as power

Finally, I also propose a theory of power; not a general theory of power per se but a *specific* one, about one kind of institutional power. Two points of departure underlie the effort here.

- 1 In *The Utopia of Rules*, David Graeber describes the fundamental stupidity of contemporary bureaucratization, observing the spread of what he calls ‘power without knowledge’, ‘where coercion and paperwork largely substituted for the need for understanding ... subjects’ (2015: 65). The contemporary power of bureaucrats often involves an assumption of total knowledge (articulated, e.g. in Foucault’s work). Graeber, however, disagrees: ‘Situations of structural violence invariably produce extremely lopsided structures of imaginative identification’ (69). Rulers have no clue about who and what their subjects are, what it is they do, what they attach importance to, how they live. The schematization and simplification of bureaucracy serve as a substitute for intimate and experience-based knowledge but evidently fail to match up to that.
- 2 A decent amount of applied-linguistic work, notably on bureaucratic procedures such as asylum applications, shows how transnational subjects, often carrying the traces of a chequered diasporic biography, are caught in entirely unrealistic administrative templates in which their ‘origins’ are determined on the basis of imaginations of nation-state regimes of bureaucratic identity and on ‘modernist’ theories of language (cf. Maryns 2006; Blommaert 2001, 2009; Jacquemet 2015). To put it concretely: if applicants’ claims as to origin (being from country X) are being disputed, knowledge of the official, national languages of Country X is used as a definitive test. If one fails this criterion, asylum is being denied. The same happens

whenever an applicant provides discourse which is sensed to violate the rules of denotational purity: whenever he or she produces contradictions, silences, a muddled chronology or a lack (or overload) of detail, the applicant is judged to be untrustworthy and the success of his or her application is jeopardized.

The 'lopsided structures of imaginative identification' described by Graeber, we can see, in actual fact assume the shape of *anachronisms*: schemes of social imagination, and thus of patterns of meaning-making, perhaps valid in an earlier stage of development, but not adjusted to recent changes and thus inadequate to do justice to the phenomenology of present cases. At the same time, these obsolete schemata are strongly believed to have an unshakeable, persistent relevance as a rationality of administrative information-organization, and are enforced from within that rationality. Thus, an important part of contemporary institutional power is based on anachronisms.

Anachronisms are, of course, an inevitable feature of social change, and we know that governmentality – the logic of institutional bureaucracy and governance – is widely characterized by inertia. It represents a segment of society which develops more slowly than the segments it is supposed to deal with. The gap between the phenomena to be addressed and the schemata by means they are addressed are a grey zone of uncertain understanding and often arbitrary judgement – and thus, increasingly, of miscarriage of justice and of contestation. In terms of research, such anachronistic gaps offer a very rich site for investigating social change itself, based on the general image of 'constructural' social change described above: an image of different layers developing at different speeds. The different speeds manifest themselves in actual, situated cases of misunderstanding (or rather: the *incapacity* for understanding) and/or of experienced injustice.

The awareness of anachronisms is nothing new, needless to say. Durkheim's own efforts, we have seen, were grounded in his conviction that society had not been adjusted to an

important range of innovations caused by the industrialization and urbanization of France. Similar views of an old social order being crushed under the weight of a new one are widespread in the sociological literature. What this theory of anachronisms as power now offers, is *accuracy*. When earlier generations saw their societies being ill adapted to innovation, they could not possibly mean all of society, for the parts that had been innovated were also very much part of that society. What we can contribute, therefore, is a highly precise focus when we look at such phenomena. The anachronisms are *particular modes of organizing social interaction through specific patterns of meaning-making*: categorization, the connection of different phenomena, objects or persons in specific sets of relationships to each other (as when an asylum seeker is brought in a certain relationship with national languages in determining his or her origins), patterns of argumentation and the ways in which we attribute judgements of persuasiveness to certain such patterns. My proposed theory enables us to look for very precise objects of analysis that can document change and the anachronistic effects that accompany it.

Evidently, the internet as an infrastructure for substantial innovation in the modes of social interaction, is prone to such anachronisms. It is a segment of contemporary social life that develops at very high speed, while our modes of meaning-making are slow to be synchronized. Thus, we talk about, and in, new modes of internet communication very much in ways reflecting a pre-internet complex of social relationships. A very clear and simple example of this is the fact that Facebook, the largest social media platform in the world founded in 2004, uses one of the oldest and most primitive terms in the vocabulary for human relationships as its core tool: 'friends'. Evidently, Facebook 'friends' are not necessarily coterminous with offline friends. Facebook also uses a similarly ancient and primitive term to describe the most common interaction function on its platform: 'like'. And evidently, this 'like' function covers a very broad and extraordinarily heterogeneous range of actual meanings. No one needs to actually like an update in order to

‘like’ it, and no one needs to be an actual friend in order to become a Facebook ‘friend’ (which is why one can be easily and swiftly ‘defriended’ whenever differences of opinion arise).

Those are of course innocuous phenomena, merely indexing the anachronistic gaps caused by developments in social media. Less innocent, but very difficult to pinpoint, are the effects of some of the organizing principles behind social media: the algorithmic engines used by, for example, Google and Facebook to bring people, messages and zones of social activity together on the basis of aggregations of huge amounts of (‘big’) data and metadata generated by users. These algorithms, as mentioned earlier, cannot be directly examined. But some of their effects are known. All of us, I am sure, have at times error-clicked some advertisement on a social media page – say, an advertisement for the newest model of urban SUV by Peugeot. All of us must have noticed how in the days following that erroneous click, multiple automobile advertisements appear on almost any page we open, usually cars in the same price range as the Peugeot we error-clicked. Less visible, perhaps, is the fact that in our social media newsfeeds, we are likely to encounter more people who recently clicked such advertisements in the days following our error-click, most likely people from our contacts network and people in the same geographical area as us. And also less visible, perhaps, is the fact that our perceived interest in cars of a certain brand and price range will be correlated with other data we produce through our social media usage – other products we express an interest in, other aspects of lifestyle, other persons, perhaps political views or preferences for certain sports or sports teams – all of this resulting in a permanently updated ‘algorithmic identity’, of certain interest for marketing and security professionals, over which we ourselves do not have any control, let alone agency.¹⁴

Although we can, as I said, gauge these procedures from a distance only, we can infer from what we know that these algorithms are anachronisms too. They are overwhelmingly linear and reductionist: linear, for clicking an item is interpreted as necessarily *rational* and *deliberate* – the mind-reading

procedures of the algorithm (manifestly Rational Choice-based) exclude the possibility that we clicked the button by accident, and reductionist, in the sense that clicks are seen as inspired by very specific forms of interest in the thing we clicked – an interest, for instance in buying that object rather than just admiring it or confirming our opinion that such things are absurdly expensive. The algorithmic identities thus ascribed to us may be light years removed from the actual motives driving our social conduct and from the ways in which we see ourselves. Well known, for instance, is that at a certain time when terrorism alert worldwide was red-hot, googling for information on pressure cookers was algorithmically flagged as suspicious because these mundane receptacles happened to be widely used in manufacturing home-made explosive devices. Which is an activity performed, fortunately, by very few individuals. But in order to locate these individuals, a great many more must have come under close scrutiny by security and intelligence officials – for no reason other than, perhaps, they contemplated buying a very nice pressure cooker so as to boost the quality of their bowl of evening soup.

Patterns of human interaction and meaning-making are the most sensitive indicators of social change; every neologism in our everyday language usage demonstrates this. If we wish to understand the fine grain of social change, close attention to these patterns is therefore sure to offer far more analytical purchase than almost any other aspect of social life. Power, too, can be investigated by looking at the anachronisms characterizing patterns of interaction and meaning-making deployed in governance; it can be looked at in very great detail.

Notes

- 1 One can invoke the authority of Arjun Appadurai here: ‘This theory of a break – or rupture – with its strong emphasis on electronic mediation and mass migration, is necessarily a theory of the recent past (or the extended present) because it is only

in the past two decades or so that media and migration have become so massively globalized, that is to say, active across large and irregular transnational terrains' (1996: 9).

- 2 I reiterate here an assumption already voiced by Anthony Giddens (1976: 127): 'Language as a practical activity is so central to social life that in *some* basic respects it can be treated as exemplifying social processes in general' (italics in original). This assumption, in Giddens's work, does not lead to a structured attention to this 'practical activity', though. See the discussion in J.B. Thompson (1984: Chapter 4).
- 3 It can therefore also be read as the core of 'superdiversity' as a research programme. See Arnaut (2016); Arnaut, Karrebæk and Spotti (2017); Blommaert and Rampton (2016).
- 4 Odile Heynders (2016), in an insightful study, examines how such diasporic public spheres have altered the nature and impact of writers as public intellectuals. A variety of 'traditional' social roles is affected by this transformation of the public sphere in which global rock star status is no longer the privilege of sports and entertainment professionals (including US presidents), but now includes the likes of Thomas Piketty, author of a not-too-easily-readable book. Piketty is not the first scientist reaching global celebrity status in spite of the fact that very few of his admirers are able to say what exactly he is arguing for in his work – think of Einstein a century ago – but his fame remains a very rare phenomenon, certainly in a culture in which argumentative complexity is increasingly dispreferred.
- 5 It is very much worth underscoring this, because of the exceedingly abstract (and unrealistic) ways in which norms and values are being discussed in much academic work and most public debate. Durkheim's own perspective, to his credit, was radically empirical and opposed to *a priori* generalization (Durkheim 1961: 26).
- 6 One can profitably compare the view articulated here with Agha's (2007b) concept of 'stereotypes' (or 'models', Gal 2016) – indexical complexes to which we orient whenever we communicate and that provide the referenced 'type' of identity of which we provide 'tokens' in our actual communicative conduct. One will find amidst overwhelming agreement two small differences. I emphasize the scaled multiplicity of such 'stereotypes' – the polynomic nature of social conduct – and

suggest a far broader behavioural field of ratification and uptake to be in play. In that sense, I am more inclined towards symbolic interactionism than Agha would, I presume, allow.

- 7 Read, for instance, Goffman's famous discussion of 'tie-signs' (signs that provide information on the social ties between people, such as e.g. holding hands). Goffman explains that while tie-signs are a culturally encoded resource for identity and social relationship checking, the work of such checking is fraught with complications: 'In Western society tie-signs tend to be inherently ambiguous in the sense that signs can designate relationships of different name, different terms, and different stage – or can entirely and intentionally mislead' (Goffman 1971: 196).
- 8 One can think of the many energetic debates throughout the twentieth century on the concept and validity of social class as a key sociological notion. Attempts towards 'inventing' new or additional social classes were consistently met with hostility – see, for examples, C. Wright Mills's (1951) description of an emerging 'White Collar' class, and Guy Standing's (2011) proposal for seeing the 'precariat' as a class-on-the-way-in.
- 9 With this quote Erving Goffman opened his PhD dissertation, and much of Goffman's work can thus be seen as engaging with the baseline 'sociation' processes Simmel outlined, developing within 'less conspicuous forms of relationship and kinds of interaction'. I am grateful to Rob Moore for pointing this out to me.
- 10 We see affinities here between Simmel's methodological view and phenomenology, especially Husserl's discussion of the 'life-world' as the subjective basis for objectivity (Backhaus 2003).
- 11 I echo here the critique of Goodwin and Goodwin (2004) against Goffman's (1981) famous distinctions between participants, that left their basic preconceived interactional roles intact (with ratified vs. unratified participants, for instance, still remaining preconceived as 'hearers'). The Goodwins suggested focusing on the actual activities performed by participants in interactions, allowing for a much more fine-grained set of distinctions a posteriori.
- 12 Trump's own media strategy is sure to become a topic of research in future years as well. Trump systematically rejected what he called 'mainstream mass media', claiming they were

biased, and waged an intensive social media campaign – leading to frequent allegations of ‘fake news’. See Maly (2016) for a first appraisal.

- 13 Nik Coupland walks into the trap of such false antagonism: ‘We may have reached a metatheoretical peak in the fetishising of mobility and the antagonistic critiquing of structure, stability, and stasis’ (2016: 440 and discussion 440–2).
- 14 The link between these issues and security concerns cannot be explored fully here, but has been extensively documented and discussed in, for example, Rampton 2016b; Charalambous et al. 2016; Khan 2017.