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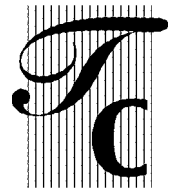
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Social ontology and research strategy

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Abstract

Theory is about starting points. Research usually relies on theory to justify starting with pre-commitments to independent variables, background factors, or structural conditions that will explain historically and geographically varying phenomena, which are treated as dependent, fungible, superficial upshots, or otherwise secondary and essentially inferior. I propose that we start by trying to describe the phenomena to be explained as they exist for the people living them. For this, we need theory of another sort, a theory of social ontology that indicates the lines of inquiry required to produce a complete description. If we start research by describing the nature of social phenomena as they are experienced, it will make a difference in structuring data gathering; in developing a research craft capable of seeing practice, interaction maneuvers, and tacit embodiment; in shaping a research agenda; and, ultimately, in where we end substantively.

Key Words

criminology • phenomenology • social interaction • sociological theory • unconscious processes

In social science, 'theory' usually means historically and geographically generalized assertions about what is most important in understanding why things occur. As such, theory is a kind of ontology that promotes debates among researchers by stratifying social reality into elevated and denigrated

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parts. Some forces, factors, conditions, features, or processes are treated as more full of being, more real, more consequential than others. The favored explanans undermines the existence of whatever explanandum it targets, rendering it a relatively impotent effect, a hollowed out superstructure, a deceptive veneer. Alternative explanations, initially standing as peer rivals, are ontologically subordinated as they are relegated to the other side, their production itself comprehended by the favored perspective.

Social theorists agree to disagree by championing different candidates among more and less protean, structuring, or authentic orders of social being. Culture theorists sing of the transcendence of the symbolic order, or at least defend its independent reality against reductionist adversaries. Inequality hunters, mixing materialism and religiosity, warn of groups whose interests underlie everything and generate dangers so powerful that they threaten the purity of everyone's environment. Analysts of psyches find behavior surfacing deep dispositions that thought can only indirectly reach. Social psychologists demonstrate the irrationalities of existing power arrangements by stepping into a dream world in which imaginary prisoners escape their mundane dilemmas; the game theorist ironically finds a world that is at once more humane and less human. Also with unintended irony, interactionists honor 'the grounded' and 'the concrete,' in the name of which they study the symbolic and what lies behind literal meanings.[1] Each theoretical perspective harbors indignation on behalf of some disrespected order of social life and, sometimes gently, sometimes not so gently, encourages a posture of ridicule, even disgust toward the claims of respect advanced on behalf of others.

By claiming to identify generally effective causes, social theory at once offers a ubiquitous hermeneutic and, what is more immediately important to the researcher, justifies putting less effort into describing those parts of social life that everyone currently presumes to be causally insignificant. Thus theories may be sorted out either by the order of social life that they honor or by the orders of social life that they justify ignoring.[2] As social data collection and manipulation have become increasingly specialized and sophisticated, theory has become ever more valuable for warranting ignorance.[3]

As careers develop, the deductive relationship between theory and data practice is commonly inverted: supports for ontologically differentiating forms of social theory grow out of research practicalities. Today many researchers are wary that too much talk of theory borders on the ideological, and yet even without theory talk, the ideologist's inflexibility remains. The invariant in study after study is the form of data. Investigators commonly structure a theory only implicitly, developing continuing themes in substantive interpretation as they master a methodological craft for gathering and manipulating data over a series of investigations.

As an implication of invariant research strategy, there is a great deal of theory floating about. Who, indeed, changes flexibly from one project to the next, starting with an ethnography; then systematically analyzing

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videotapes of naturally occurring behavior; then applying statistics to time series data; then constructing and assessing historical/comparative narratives; then running lab experiments, etc.?

All research methodologies imply a substantive view of social life. Lab experimenters tend toward mental states as explanations. If cognitive conditions or the fate of expectations shape behavior, causes can be created and observed in a researcher-controlled context. Conversely, if one is committed to conducting research on undergraduates through temporally short exposures to stimuli set up in classroom-like environments, theories about states of knowledge or expectation can be very attractive. Survey researchers commonly develop theories stressing attitudes. If 'attitudes on race' explain voting behavior, then telephone interviewing is a fine research strategy. Conversely, if one is committed to a periodic administration of survey interviewing, theoretical debates about the origins and effects of racial attitudes can be developed to a fine subtlety.

Ethnographers tend to explain patterns and events as the outcome of collective acts. If social action is not the product of a rich, multiple-party interaction, why go to the trouble of gathering data for a detailed, textured social description? If one has gone to that trouble, for example by undertaking two years of fieldwork, important phenomena better not be explicable by psychological background factors or by invariant features of individual biography that would make the bulk of the data set irrelevant.

Micro-analysts of audio or videotaped interaction repeatedly discover that what first seems to be an individual's action is in fact collaboratively produced. That this finding may be a tautology is commonly disregarded. But note that it is a standard working procedure in micro-analysis to establish the description of one party's utterance on the basis of another's response. The very facts of a transcript are established by invoking the principle of the collaborative production of social reality. What might be heard as an instance of greeting such as 'Hi!,' or alternatively as a burp, a sigh, or the aborted start of two successive utterances, perhaps a laugh and a lexical item that begins with 'I,' 'Aye!,' or 'Eye' is resolved, and the transcription is settled for all practical purposes, on hearing the other's soberly delivered response, 'How are ya?'

As a practical matter, the first move in creating a theory that stratifies social ontology is the packaging of social life as 'data,' i.e. into a form that compels respect despite the neglect of some facets of its naturally occurring existence. There is a relationship between a discipline's attitude toward theory and the respect it pays to the materials it studies. In the humanities, it is common for scholars to write a series of monographs before writing a generalizing work in which they proclaim a theoretical stance. Through the early and middle phases of a humanist's career, the facts themselves—historical events, art and craft objects, texts—may be honored as warranting attention in their own right. Social scientists more commonly treat their empirical materials in a spirit borrowed from the hard sciences, where specimens are treated in unproblematic fashion as fungible and without

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unique value. In the social sciences, a commitment to generalize starts early by blurring the idiosyncrasies of lives and events, which immediately become 'cases.'

But it is not inevitable to use social theory as a stratifying ontology. Theory limits research when it is an implication of invariant methods or when, by presuming some factors to be especially consequential, it justifies disregarding the description of what it regards as inconsequential. An alternative is to pick a different substantive problem from research project to project, each time exploring the relative merits of a range of alternative explanations, each time battling reification by using various forms of data, each time changing hypotheses to fit what is distinctive to the substantive problem at hand.

A kind of theory more suitable to such research flexibility is implied by a naturalistic social ontology. A naturalistic social ontology works as a caution against artificially truncating descriptions or data gathering. The first commitment is to describe the phenomena to be explained in the forms as they are experienced by the people living them. One initially asks not which theories the data validate and which they invalidate, but which ideas will best guide the description of social life into forms of data. Such a theory predicts nothing substantively differentiating about the causes of the matters to be explained, but at the same time it does predict something essential. The central claim is that unless the researcher describes phenomena according to their nature, explanatory theories will surely be wrong.

Herbert Blumer was this sort of theoretician. With stuck-out chin, he dared the reader to find any instance of social action in which the person was not shaping conduct by anticipating how the action would appear from the standpoint of another, including self-as-other (Blumer, 1969). This is a theory that tells you what you had better do—in Blumer's case, look for interaction—or you will miss something essential that will limit the power of explanation.

A naturalistic social ontology refuses to elevate any part of social reality above any other. In the tradition of Blumer's work, a phenomenon to be explained exists in the same way as what explains it, as an instance of social interaction. Crime, for example, is not seen as produced by another order of being (economic, psychological, power structure) but is a form of social interaction built up through other forms of social interaction (often grasped through the infelicitous metaphor of 'learning'). Explanans and explanandum are empirically and analytically separable but they are continuous in the flow of life and in their ideational status, they merge in undifferentiated being.[4]

Now, 'symbolic interaction' is not the only universal in social life. In similar spirit, both the American pragmatists and the European phenomenologists argued that all contents of consciousness are intentional. Anything anyone ever perceives is perceived in the process of some kind of doing. Everyone and every material environment we encounter has a pragmatic

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significance for us, even if it is only as a 'familiar' environment that, by requiring no special attention, enables us to focus energies on something for which it is the framing background. Thus a second universal is the nature of behavior as part of some kind of project. The meaning of conduct is shaped in interaction and by the actor's appreciation of conduct as a means of doing something, getting somewhere, or materializing a foreshadowed future.

The interactionist and pragmatist aspects of social conduct were developed early in the late 19th and early 20th century. A third element emerged somewhat later. Building on Heidegger, developed most briefly and accessibly by Michael Polanyi, and flowering especially in the late work of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, the new insistence was that thought must break from a Cartesian, egocentric, self-satisfied emphasis on thought, and begin the empirical work of appreciating the implications of the fact that perception and conduct are always embodied. (See also the work on the embodiment of perception opened up by James Gibson, in Gibson 1979; Gibson and Pick, 2000.)

This last contribution remains the least used, probably because it calls for a radical alteration of research practices. Thus unfortunately 'the body of thought' still is a colloquial reference to thought's content rather than to the fact that the body that thinks is, in one constituting corporeal region or another, always behind, beneath, or beyond what it thinks. Everything brought into focal attention, all contents of consciousness, any thought contemplated, even the frames of awareness and the perceived context of action are all always created through the action of a body that in some back region operates in the shadows, beyond the immediate reach of awareness. Beyond the furthest reaches of peripheral vision, eyes and head move to define the landscape.

These three universal aspects of social life offer a kind of theory that is rarely considered in discussions of theories of society. It is not a theory that initially or as a first commitment asserts why people do this or that, or why certain social formations are present in some times and places but not in others. It is a theory of description asserting that a researcher who would understand and explain any form of social conduct should seek evidence about:

1 how it is constituted through interaction, in one sense or another collaboratively and in anticipation of its meaning from the standpoint of others;
2 how everything, even the most seemingly idle comment or glance, is part of a practical course of action, a project, the innovative execution of a recipe, an effort to do a certain kind of social thing;
3 how all awareness and action is created by corporeal processes that are themselves beyond the actor's direct awareness, but that are visible to the researcher.

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Initially, naturalistic theory aims only at description. The theoretical concepts of a social ontology are grounded in actors' shaping of behavior in anticipation of its meanings for others, in their purposive engagements and skilled doings, and in the senses that flow under and through perception and conduct. There is no claim that one of these three dimensions of social action and experience is more important, fundamental, or causally prior to the others. All are always present.

But that does not mean that they are useless for explanation, which is always an attempt to understand difference. In substantive application, a description that is disciplined by the experience of social life immediately becomes a testable, empirically grounded, causal explanation. Description becomes causal explanation, not by a priori commitment to a causal form of analysis but because people are always actively engaged in the causal production of their social lives.

Any social act, from making love to making war, must be constructed if it is to exist. Seen from the outside both sex and violence may appear to be a lot of wild thrashing about, but from the inside they have coherent interactional meanings and are recognizable as a distinctive type of activity because they develop along non-random lines. The actor's 'definition of a situation' is not, as the phrase misleadingly suggests, an instant cognitive decision; it is an objectively constrained process. If the researcher's theoretical definitions must track the definitions made and lived by the people studied, description will track, and analysis will hew to, the contingent process of constructing distinctive moments of social life. A researcher who would describe social action in a way that is not just theoretically appealing but is empirically grounded, that traces what William James referred to as 'the joints of experience,' must develop evidence of the necessary and sufficient conditions for bringing that type of action into existence.[5]

A theory of social ontology explains the contents of experience by showing how experience is constituted. As such, it always bears news for the prevailing theoretical debates, just because other theories have commitments other than empirically grounded description. They favor either substantive explanatory elements or methodologies that block a full appreciation of social life as it is lived. The extraordinary modesty of a theory of social ontology, as an effort simply to describe, takes on radical potential because of the limitations that define substantive theories, and because of the cultures, both academic and popular, that require them.

Thus a study of the foreground of crime, emotions, or neighborhood life will ironically produce its own theory specifically by abjuring a precommitment to theory. By 'foreground' I mean the contents of social experience itself. Close description of what actually goes on in the moments of committing a wide range of common crimes will show the inadequacies of rationalist, economic, materialist, and demographic explanations of crime (Katz, 1988). Close description of what happens when people laugh, cry, get angry, or get ashamed will show that emotions are not, as they have almost always been understood, in tension with thought, reason, or

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strategic self-examination. Just the reverse: emotions are lived as metamorphoses toward thought, as movements from an unself-conscious being-in-the-world to relatively more self-reflective postures (Katz, 1999). Moreover, once an explanation of the foreground of social experience has been developed and tested, one can then work to understand relationships to various background conditions, for example why it would be especially compelling to people in this or that social condition to commit a given sort of crime, how certain occupations develop crafts in making people laugh or cry, or how the sense of place varies among residents living in neighborhoods that differ by social class, ethnicity, immigration status, and crime patterns (Katz et al., in progress).

In the nine sections that follow, I take up three questions. What are the intellectual foundations for a theory of social ontology? What are the implications for shaping research projects? And how might a naturalistic commitment to theory orient contemporary research on crime? Of the three inquiries required by a naturalistic social ontology, the first, interaction, has many students and requires little explication here. The second, the pragmatics of social conduct, studies the warranting of action as an instance of a given type. It requires expansion because it has lived most vigorously in the relatively unpopulated provinces of ethnomethodology. The third and most challenging line of inquiry, into the visibly unconscious embodiment of action, receives the balance of attention.

Starting with the problem of intersubjectivity

A theory of social ontology may seem more like philosophy than social theory, but the relationship of philosophy and sociology must be reconsidered. Philosophy has already turned to social research for guidance.

Within the traditions of philosophy, the turn to empirical inquiry has been the distinctive—with regard to the intra-academic battles for domination, somewhat self-defeating—contribution of phenomenology. The problem of mutual understanding, of explaining how minds meet, or how one can trust in the accuracy of one's view of the other's outlook, was transformed from a philosophical into an empirical problem by Alfred Schutz. Schutz noted that in routine social life, one takes for granted that he or she understands others from their own standpoint. But his point was not that taking the position of the other is an unproblematic operation. Intersubjectivity does not simply happen; it is a contingent and defeasible presumption that is constantly negotiated in a troublesome world.

Ironically, there is nothing taken for granted about taking for granted the presumption that one understands the other from the other's perspective. Doubts, efforts to verify, and agreements 'for all practical purposes' to act as if there is mutual understanding are negotiated under the veneer that minds naturally meet. Even when people in social life raise questions about the accuracy of mutual understanding, they make ambiguity explicit and

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negotiate a restoration of presumptive mutual understanding according to strictly constructed procedures that are themselves taken for granted (for an exceptionally well-documented analysis, see Schegloff, 1992).

The dualistic pragmatics of social interaction

Because the maintenance of a taken-for-granted understanding that one is engaged in a given line of action is itself never taken for granted, all social action has a dualistic structure. Producing any socially effective form of social action requires producing it as a typical, authentic, real, natural instance of its type (or, what is functionally the same thing, as an instance marked as a recognizably ironic version). This indexical character of action in turn requires a double action: self-disciplined, responsive attention to the world such that conduct emerges in a recognizable form; and suspending doubt as to the problematics of the typification.

There is what might variously be termed a double-layered, laminated, or action/commentary structure in all conduct. The person at once produces a recognizable line of action and varying degrees and forms of commitment to, involvement in, distance from, embrace of, or disdain for the conduct produced. Every step forward is a phase in a more or less firm kick backward and moving away from; every throw outward brings some measure of follow-through in its wake, whether an emphatically shouted 'yes!' or a murmured and halting stutter of compromised conviction. Just as inaction is useful as a way to go to sleep, so, inversely, action awakens a provocative consciousness about itself that is simultaneously realized.

Implicitly known by everyone, the double-layered nature of action itself becomes a theme for signification. Thus, action may be underwritten without ever being performed. People commonly succeed in being taken seriously as really trying to perform a range of actions that they never actually complete, from effectively threatening violence to professing charitable concerns without ever writing the check. More commonly still, people willfully suppress doubts that another is effectively enacting a type of action, e.g. delivering a coherent lecture, making love, telling a funny joke. It is powerful testimony to the bootstrapped nature of social life that societies of all types and magnitudes are reproduced in recognizable form day after day, even while their social forms are only partially inhabited by proper spirits, even while so many people are seen as doing little to flesh out social forms beyond gesturing their will to invoke them.

The researcher should be put on alert rather than taken in by the glossy veneer of a well-oiled social machinery for reproducing society. Just barely under the surface, people are always attending to the possibility that the production of taken-for-granted reality will fail. Thus when Woody Allen, in his movie *Take the Money and Run*, hands a bank teller a stickup note, he receives not cash but the calmly posed question, 'What is a "gub"?' His demeanor, which does not immediately warrant a presumptive definition of

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the situation as a robbery, highlights ambiguities in his handwriting. Badasses, in contrast, develop an expertise in manifesting the bona fides to execute many crimes they never launch.

The ethnomethodologists took such unanticipated breaks in the presumption of intersubjective understanding to set up research into the usually invisible practices for sustaining intersubjectivity. But if they hold few positions in academia, they are not alone in the world. An orientation to such breaks also shapes the foundations of the strategic anticipatory postures and recurrent emotional responses that make up the personalities of individuals and the characters of groups.

The embodied character of the dualistic structure of social experience

All social situations contain a theme of suppressed artifice because intersubjectivity is always created through an incomplete intercorporeality. Minds meet when they are treated as having met, in consequential constructions that always mask the divergent shades of understanding that are made inevitable by the independent embodiments of biographies. However intimate two people may become, each can never fully reveal self to the other because identity is embodied and bodies, however intensely they may for some brief moments come together, never always live in the same place.

There are always questions that could be raised about whether the appearance of a shared reality is warranted. These doubts are suppressed so quickly and naturally that the actors themselves will rarely be self-conscious about the process.[6] The dualistic structure of the social act bears a sensual, emotional, aesthetic character in its very sinews.

How is the suppression accomplished? Most generally, by the same process that raises the necessity for suppression, the embodied ongoingness of action. Consider a common experience that occurs when a person struggles to use a foreign language. One becomes unusually aware of the need to fake understanding while waiting/praying for a moment to connect with the meaning of another's talk. One nods on and on, encouraging the other to continue in the hope that before long one will detect an opportunity for coherent intervention. Something similar is more subtly present in our most familiar environments. We do not, after all, hear meaning word-by-word but in large retrospective/prospective swaths. For everything we understand of the other, we suppress a constant, infinite range of possible interpretations that flare up and are as quickly extinguished. And, aside from our emotional or bodily registering of comfort or dis-ease in the process, we suppress the process of suppression.

We understand by willing understanding. We go on with the rituals of interaction as vehicles that, we trust, will keep us connected with the orientations of others. Rituals repeatedly prove their value for raising the

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spirits of shared understanding. Through body motions we transcend sensed gaps in understanding. For example, we nod 'yes' not necessarily to agree but to keep the other talking, and ourselves apparently listening, until we get it. And we create an idiosyncratic realization of the suppression process in a corporeal background that is partially hidden from the other. What one knows to be a tentative nod is often, for the other, a firm basis for launching the next phase of expression.

Doubt is suppressed by the ongoing, ubiquitous objectivity of our identities. We live a symbolic objectivity that exists independent of our will and subjectivity, repeatedly provoking us to respond. Everyday life is much less a matter of living according to plans than of discovering commitments already made. The rare moments of acting deliberately to manifest predefined versions of self are overwhelmed by the responses made necessary by the discovery of the self already in the world. The self is already in the world because it is not just interpretable symbol but obdurate object, a physical body made obdurate by being incorporated into the embodied interpretations of others.

Thus whether prepared or not, the professor shows up for class on the understanding that students are in motion to arrive. If for Freud repression was an inherently invisible suppression of inner impulses during childhood, for us in our everyday lives, suppression of self-doubt is an ongoing necessity imposed by encounters with the embodiment of our identities in the actions of others. If we need to appreciate how the suppression of the corporeal libido gives rise to the imaginary, we need even more to appreciate how the irrepressibility of the corporeally objectified nature of our identities suppresses the imaginary. As students stamp out a version of the professor's identity by marching toward class, the professor extinguishes fantasies of not showing up. The dialectical process that immediately animates our lives is a matter of defining a self in confrontation with a self already defined by others.

The sensual/aesthetic substrata of social action and the intertwining of person and environment

The transfer of the question of intersubjectivity from a philosophical to an empirical problem was phenomenology's first great contribution to social research. But as picked up from Husserl by Schutz and brought into sociology by Garfinkel, Cicourel, and micro-sociological analysis as outlined by Goffman, the message remained artificially cognitive or rationalistic. The actor's subjectivity was still treated in isolation from its objective environment. It was not until the later work of Merleau-Ponty that we received an articulation of the grounds for a dualistic understanding of the tacitly embodied nature of social experience: we are always in some respects taken by the world as we are acting on it.

The subject/object distinction that had haunted philosophy was resolved

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by, again, transforming the issue into an empirical phenomenon. A 'philosophical' claim became an assertion about social ontology. Theoretical or philosophical debates between realism and idealism, subjectivity and objectivity, solipsism and the presumption of an independent world 'out there' may be tiresome, but only if these dialectics are treated as academic oppositions. As people in the world, we live in the constant swing of a pendulum whose arc these terms describe. A close tracking of experience in action will always reveal some respects in which the person on the one hand finds him or herself already in the world, taken, constrained, facing a landscape with more and less open paths for action; and on the other, some ways in which the person appreciates being outside of the environment to which he or she responds, engaged in making a response that ranges from 'going along with' to attempts to intervene and alter.

There are many terms we customarily use that falsely imply a point where and a time during which the world ends and the person begins: ego, superego, id, cognition, thinking, decision-making. The fact of being intertwined with the environment is hard to grasp because the prosaic language we use to make the point inevitably speaks of person as one thing and environment as another. We are advised that for clarity we should write in the active voice, setting subjects formally off as if existentially independent from the objects they act upon.[7]

But the empirical reality of intertwining has infinite demonstrations. It is perhaps most readily conveyed by thinking about respiration. Breath is a critical definition of life. We cannot identify a point where the not-me of the atmosphere becomes the me of absorbed breath. A person is unambiguously separate from his or her bodily environment only in an existence before and after life, as an image in someone else's mind.

Consider also a promising candidate for the fundamental sensuality on which all the others must rely (but not vice versa), the 'sixth' sense, proprioception. As if there were a gyroscope at our centers, we constantly make adjustments flowing out to our extremities in an unbroken responsiveness to the contours of our world at hand and to our changing horizons. Whether the effort is to hear, to see, to touch, to smell, or to taste, our perception requires the mobilization of a part connected seamlessly to the whole of the body, thus implicating the center of our posture and its rhythmically inclined relationship to the world. Without thought (there is no time out from the process, no moment for thought to end, thus no moment for thought to begin), the sensed body already complements the world as perceived. A softening ground requires a different kind of step. A catcher in the distance requires a different mobilization of the throwing body than one close-by. This gyroscope is never turned on because it is never off. While problems may arise requiring focused attention and decision-making, there is no natural point of break between us and the contours of the world we bring into view through the gyroscope-guided motions of our body.

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The immediacy and constancy of repression

An understanding that the person embodies the environment and that the environment incorporates the person is profoundly challenging to traditional protocols. We love to study language, whether it be the talk done in response to survey questionnaires or transcriptions of recorded conversations. But the reason that language is so common in the data we use is that it already registers a transformation from a transcending, always-already-there intertwining in the world that evolves beyond self-conscious awareness. Language is not simply an expression of the self; it is a transmogrification, a shift in the embodiment of spirit, a wrenching out of a deeper rooting of identity in its environment.[8]

Merleau-Ponty, and Michael Polanyi in his 'from/to' and 'distal/proximate' formulations (Polanyi, 1962, 1966), vividly understood the dialectical character of the dualism in social life. Every expression, to be effective, must also be an effacing, a wiping out, or covering up that hides in order that something be revealed for others to grasp. We hear *through* the other's speech; if we focus too much on the aesthetics of what we hear or say, we lose touch with the train of thought. Listening requires a non-hearing, a negation which can be as much or more effort as is the positive seizing on the other's meaning (Merleau-Ponty, 1973). 'Face-to-face' interaction requires a blindness to features of the other's face which, if dwelled upon, would disable both from a necessary responsiveness. Conversely, each time I open my eyes to see what is around me, I throw into the shadows a world of bodily awareness that had just been present.

The conceptualization of intertwined self/other or self/world identities goes a step beyond an appreciation of the problem of intersubjectivity. The construction of any collective action requires the definition of a working consensus on the situation at hand. I have already referred to the dualistic structure of the definition of the situation as requiring tacit activities that preserve the taken-for-granted sense of what is at hand and in focus. It is another step to appreciate that this dualism in turn requires a division of the presented self off from the bodily transcending identity of each participant.

The body both roots the presentation of self in all social situations and provides an ongoing continuity of experience as the individual enters and exits different situations. What must most fundamentally be sustained as a taken-for-granted presumption for social interaction is the segregation and suppression, from what is presented to the other, of a range of transcending dimensions of life (cf. Weber, 2001). These include a series of immediate concerns about the implications of current action for social relations that are lived in other times and places. In order to construct a collectively workable understanding of what is happening 'here and now,' each party to an interaction must repress the appearance, to self as well as to the other, of the meanings the current situation has for the person in relation to others encountered, and to be encountered, 'there and then.'

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This repression is part of the minimally required work for presenting a self as available to the other's responsiveness. In and through the body the person orients to the situation transcending meanings of the interaction here and now. Both expression and the hiding it requires are done through the same body and at the same time. The aesthetic/sensual character of social behavior and experience exists in the sinews of the presented/hidden crafting of action. Theories that neglect these sinews will be inadequate. Research that documents them will require innovation.

The visible unconscious and innovative methods

As opposed to Freudian and other psychological theories which rely on repression at Time One shaping limitations on awareness at Time Two, the dualism of awareness and unconscious being is being constituted constantly, and through processes which, if they must be outside of the actor's awareness in the moment of action, are not invisible to research. An appreciation of the dualistic character of action reorients the agenda for investigation. It is essential but not enough to describe what is within the actors' mutual awareness. There will also be intertwinings with the physical and social environment that are causally essential to the action but outside of the actors' attentions. It is essential, if one is concerned to produce a complete description and thus explanation of conduct, to describe the *in vivo*, *in situ*, repression of awareness that makes any socially presented action possible.

Studying the represented self is practically and ethically much easier and much more common than studying the parts of social life that are repressed as representations are produced. One enters a field with relatively little reason to pause when the objective is to study what others have already decided to make available for inspection: the talk people project with the expectation that this version of self be perceived by someone else, the categorizations made by officials, the culture produced to be advertised and sold. Such data are convenient: the materials are already packaged to be heard or read in a conventional manner.

As soon as research looks beneath and behind the self-consciously represented self, the inquiry becomes more burdensome by magnitudes and novel ethical issues emerge. All represented action is generated from a behind that is politely kept beyond legitimate gaze. Tracing the situated origins of any form of social life will always require some indiscretion. And as a practical matter, the lived forms of intersubjectivity and intertwining are not conventionally formed. It has required innovative transcribing conventions to study the tacit processes by which the taken-for-granted character of intersubjective talk is sustained. With regard to the study of emotions, the transcending challenge increases geometrically as one struggles to develop practicable descriptions of phenomena like screaming, whining, mortified shame, hysterical laughter.

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For the study of crime, the challenge is to appreciate how a subversion of conventional understandings, and thus immunity from the reach of conventional research methods, is intrinsic to the attractions of being a criminal. Consider the gambit of the unrepaid personal loan. Joe asks Tim, a newcomer to their setting (work, prison, neighborhood, school class) for a loan, to be repaid next Friday, and gets it. The amount notably does not matter for the meaning of what follows. Friday comes and Joe has other problems and cannot repay. If Joe's problems on the initial occasion were sufficient to justify the loan, why shouldn't his continued problems next pay day justify extending the loan? The dodging of repayment goes on and on, until it becomes undeniably clear that Joe does not intend to repay, that he is playing with Tim (who has discovered that Joe owes many others as well), and that getting repaid will require violence. For the researcher, there is nothing inherently invisible about the dominance strategy that is at play here. But to grasp what is going on requires describing a perverse use of standard accounts. Tim is compelled finally to get the point that Joe is using the convention of a loan, which stands somewhere between an exchange and a gift relationship, as a front that Joe expects one day to collapse, revealing the mean spirit that lies behind. But what makes the front collapse is nothing more than repetition and time. It is the very silence, the force of what is not said, that becomes increasingly prominent, and that makes every next encounter between the two another occasion in which Joe is robbing Tim. To the police, and in conventional criminology, there may be no crime here at all. In the world of Joe and Tim, there is an ongoing, infinitely expanding criminality in the relationship.

In historical research on emotions and personal identity, there is always the choice between using representational materials, such as advice manuals, popular literature and law cases, or trying to get at the lived experience behind and underneath what is produced for others. Examples of the latter include works that describe once-common practices (e.g. Corbin, 1998), and efforts to recreate the sensual and aesthetic details of everyday life. An instructive example is Piero Camporesi's *Bread of Dreams*, a series of poetically written essays that convey the interpenetration of material and imaginary worlds as sustained by the diet in much of medieval Italy, which, when it did not stimulate fantasies of horror in periods of starvation, stimulated dreams through the polluted, inebriating, disease-provoking, and hallucinogenic properties of the standard diet (Camporesi, 1989).

Perhaps the most important role for theory is to encourage the risk-taking required by innovative methods. In this respect, theories that rely on and indeed celebrate representational data are not just dismal, they are destructive. These include Durkheimian formulations about the objectivity of social facts; psychological theories that impute causal forces, from libido to shame, independent of observable behavior; theories attributing causal force to 'culture' independent of situated action; rational choice and

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economic modeling that treats the descriptive tasks necessary to load preference or indifference curves as some lower form of work. All make strategic appeals to the academic prestige of 'theory' as a way of justifying anemic data gathering strategies and deflecting attention from deficiencies in the description of what is to be explained.

Intertwining: the fall softened

The intersubjective challenge implies a nothingness, an existential gap between people. The more that research reveals the elaborate and detailed work that people do to sustain the belief that a common culture provides authority for their actions, the more doubtful that any common culture exists. The implication is that if the emperor had clothes, we would not have to exercise so much deference and engage in so much ritual to see them. This was the first point American social science took from European phenomenology.

And then the appreciation of intertwining reversed the flow of ideas, emphasizing the permanence of a transcendent embrace. So long as one breathes there is no gap between self and world. It is an observable fact that my self is always rooted in the world, never really as free-floating and subject to vanishing from moment-to-moment as my routinely impoverished self-awareness may suggest. As I type this, I have no need to reinvent myself. I am provoked into existence simply by entering this place, sitting in a chair with a familiar feel, looking up at the screen and finding the last passage I wrote begging for improvement. From time to time I may lose track of my project and glance up at the books that over the years I have arranged on my shelves as a gradually sketched, complementary version of my working self. And if all else fails, I can always rely on critics for barbed provocations that will demand a corrective response.

If we take the problematic maintenance of a presumption of intersubjectivity as an analytical starting point, we can see that it is a powerful contingency of a variety of emotional reactions, including paths leading through shame to anger and even violence. But the variety of responses indicates that no one response is inevitable, and that the response developed often depends on what is readily at hand. When shamed men realize they will lose the fight, they can stop the movement to violence (Katz, 1988: 40–1) and replace anger with resentment. When toddlers fall down in the playground, they do not necessarily cry. And often when toddlers do respond by crying, they do not cry until they first catch the gaze of a presumably responsive adult, preferably mother. The fall out of intertwining with the world comes first, but what comes next is a revealing moment of nothing. The crying response only acknowledges the fall when there is reason to see a way to deny it, for example, the embrace of the

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mother. To answer an adapted version of an old question, the sound of a child falling in a motherless playground is often silence.

Similarly, when people find shockingly distorted depictions of themselves in funhouse mirrors, they sometimes ignore the mirror's defects and, without missing a beat, proceed to groom themselves, latching onto the mirror's image as a personal tool. This often happens when people are alone in front of the mirrors, or without someone with whom they can treat the distortion as humorous. Lacking ready resources for making humor, they fix their hair. Even the most extreme provocation to break a taken-for-granted intertwining with the world does not necessarily force a recognition of a crisis in intersubjectivity, although the grooming process implies a recognition that something should be done to improve the fit of one's self into others' perceptions.

Falls, or recognitions of a breach in a presumed intersubjectivity, lead to various emotional responses independent of shame. Thus a fall can lead to a recognition of a deeper embrace, as in wit's laughter; to a discovery of possibilities for embracing oneself, as in crying; or to a realization of the animosity behind a push that was directed at one as a representative of a community, in which case one never was separated from community and can justify violence in unbroken pride and with cold rationality. In many international conflicts of the last hundred years, some parties were emphatically clear that their aggression was a response to histories of shame and humiliation, but for those on the attacked side, a violent response was sufficiently motivated by a cool logic of self-defence.

The variety of responses to breaks in intersubjectivity is a natural, universal possibility owing to the multiplicity of ongoing intertwinings already objectively available in the background of awareness. When, interrupted in a course of focal activity, we turn to reassess our stance, we can look for breaks in any number of subterranean roots. A fall is already a familiar catalyst to slapstick humor, the sort of thing an adversary would have happen to us, an insignificant happenstance requiring nothing more than a temporary technical repair to our foundations, etc.

On some occasions, the person will pause in appreciation that there is an array of alternative constructions. After other falls, the person will get up with a construction of the meaning well in progress. But the experience of the fall, both the literal physical event and the metaphor of an experienced break in intersubjectivity, is universal. People will already have at hand an array of paths toward reconstruction that their culture has elaborated. And the multiplicity of possibilities will already have become intimately personal. On turning to re-examine his stance, the fallen individual will be able to find: sub-cultural, gender, age, and stratification roots, because posture and gait will already have been patterned on those lines; other parties who are responsible, because every moment in social life is seamlessly connected to a web of others; universal and impersonal dynamic strategies for managing ongoing responses to the contour, texture and density of the ground; etc.

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The Edenic fall, that moment of disengaged, self-doubting experience of existential isolation, and the response of shame it inspires, is itself a myth that obscures the ongoing involvements that never stop providing sustenance for the self (compare Scheff and Retzinger, 1991). Thus while shame may be universal in cultures and even in individual lives, shame not only is not inevitable in any given situation, it is a mystification produced by self-reflection, a mystification that obscures the inexorable embrace of the community. If so it should be expected that we will be endlessly surprised at when people become ashamed and at what people become ashamed about. Today, when there is a daily proliferation of social movements that search energetically into historical records to find experiences of group humiliation that were not properly appreciated as such for decades or even centuries, we should be especially wary that shame-to-rage theories beg inquiry into the problematic emergence of shame itself.

The theory paradox

A simple model, if valid, will be known to the people studied and will thus produce a challenging paradox: people will respond with personal and collective anticipatory maneuvers, thus creating causal complexities that, to disentangle, will require a daunting empirical analysis.

Consider two types of explanatory theories. The first is complex in the number of variables it considers as influencing conduct, but the conception of how variables shape conduct is simple. Each variable explains some part of the variance. The relationships among variables may be multiple and interactive but they can be diagrammed in two dimensions. The research challenge is to identify those variables which in combination will describe the causal paths in a large percentage of cases. If one can find a few variables that will do the job, so much the better, but a model that incorporates a large number of variables that jointly explain most of the variance at issue will also be impressive. In either case, the analytic action is concerned with the what and not the how of explanation. The how of explanation, the narrative structure, is simple: this billiard ball bounces off of that one, then that side of the table, then that other ball, changing speed and direction on until the course is shaped to impact the target ball at a particular angle and with a particular force.

A second type of theory is simple in the sense of describing a critical crucible of experience, a universal challenge experienced by each person and taken as an unavoidable provocation requiring some kind of response. Such a theory, if true, will necessarily require complex narratives of causal process. The perspective on the 'fall' that I have been offering can be summarized and conveyed in the form of a fundamental, central or archetypical drama. The person, while always unself-consciously engaged

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in the world, is constantly and self-consciously shaping conduct into socially situated forms. Recurrently, the person recognizes the artificiality of the forms in which his or her conduct has been shaped; the person repeatedly appreciates the necessity of making sense of relating what happens in transient social situations to the transcending, embodied courses of his or her life.

The fall out of involvement in interaction gives rise to a range of emotions, but that range is only a small part of the complications that arise in personal and social life. Infinitely greater complications arise from the fact that people know the simple drama. People know that they will repeatedly construct and exit from situations that, for the time, they must live manifestly as all-involving. Because they anticipate the fall, they are not its simple victims. They prepare responses before entering challenging situations. With anticipation comes a range of strategies for insuring against surprise injuries, for pre-arranging explanations of disruptions, and for avoiding risk and managing rejection when it arises. Instead of a simple drama, there is a pre-commentary on the possibility of falls that takes infinite forms, ranging from aggressive 'attitude' to humility, 'pudeur,' and styles of modesty that blunt the pain of a fall by taking the initiative to manifest an awareness that it is already in progress.[9]

Further complicating the analysis, none of these forms is a completely individual creation. Thus in manifesting either an aggressive rejection or a humble acceptance of being treated as inferior, isolated, or outside a community due to personal moral incompetency, one is at the same time manifesting being with the community that has generated this form of anticipatory response. What the form exhibits, the process of manifesting the form may deny. Academics witness this strategy in the form of colleagues who dramatize humility with great aplomb and self-confidence. As analysis begins to appreciate the essentially ironic nature of the process, explanation becomes three-dimensional.

The reality of the simple drama becomes geometrically more complex when we appreciate that everyone knows that everyone else knows the simple drama. Thus every time people enter a social interaction or relationship, each can anticipate that the other will be using an unstated, unself-conscious strategy for fitting the interaction or relationship into the ongoing range of his or her social life. One cannot 'decide' how to manage the possibilities of falls because the ubiquity and ongoingness of the challenge will not allow that level of self-consciousness. One must work out how much of one's transcending life to invest in any given situation 'under the gun,' i.e. while trying to read how the other is making indications of a commitment on the same issue. People meet as mutually reflecting, distorting mirrors, each for the other casting an infinitely regressing/progressing image of what the moment means in his or her life, each working out which of the transcending images of identity shed by the other he or she manifestly should respond to.

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The social ontology of contemporary crime

Just because the simple story is taken for granted as true by everyone, the researcher will find that explanations will work simply for no-one. The implication for research is that methods rich in narrative qualities will be necessary. Consider this candidate for the overriding question about crime in the USA today: will the burgeoning Latin American and Caribbean immigrant poverty population recreate the rates of urban violence against strangers that have been produced in the last half century by the African-American poverty population? If black street criminality continues to decline, will the low income Latino population, which in California, in number and percentage, is already far larger than the low income black population ever was, sustain a high level of danger in urban life?

The simple narratives proposed in the 1970s and 1980s, for example that urban crime rates are somehow produced by social inequalities (Blau and Blau, 1982), have fared poorly in the 1990s, as inequalities mushroomed and crime significantly declined. This structural and materialist perspective was introduced as an improvement on the earlier common-sense explanation of crime as a result of unemployment, an explanation which had failed to withstand long-term historical testing, and which floundered especially dramatically in the 1960s, which were 'go go' years both for crime and for the economy (Cantor and Land, 1985). The inequalities argument never did get down to specifying the narrative connections that would produce criminal violence, the matter being left at the level of Durkheimian social fact, a level that always works quite well so long as one does not question the arbitrariness of measures ('inequality,' after all, has never been a simple perception), which is feasible so long as the correlations hold. A similar fate was suffered by demographic explanations of rising crime rates, which initially were widely accepted as compelling but which, after the declines of crime rates in the 1990s, now require ad hoc, post hoc scrambling to reconstruct (see the heroic efforts in Blumstein and Wallman, 2000).

Nor is there much reason to bet on a more complex narrative that sees crime as the outcome of shame. There is certainly no basis for assuming that the immigrant poverty population is unusually indifferent to loss of face, situational falls from respectability, and injuries to collective and personal pride. The histrionically brazen style of adolescent gang life indicates the seductions of overcoming parental humility, which is readily visible in any encounter with native authority, for example in the 'Sunday best' used to outfit the family on trips to medical offices. Nor is there any reason to presume that this population is being received with a historically unusual opening of sympathetic arms. Consider only the widely read implications of Proposition 187 in California, a 1994 State-wide measure denying public services to undocumented immigrants; the classic terrorization of immigrants by the Rampart Division of the Los Angeles Police Department, a long-running scandal that broke in 1998 and is still churning; the sexual torture of a Haitian immigrant by New York city

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policemen. There is enough shaming and sensitivity to shame in this context to explain any social problem one might wish to explain.

Instead, start with the problem of intersubjectivity. Go on to appreciate that even as the meeting of minds must be constantly negotiated, at the same time, but on a less self-conscious level, in the sensualities and aesthetics of action, everyone's conduct is always underwritten through a transcending body rooted in the social world. Keep in mind that no-one always relies on this transcendence, least of all in and around adolescence. And understand that, everyone already knowing of the danger of the fall, the people we would understand will, in effect, anticipate our readings, with the result of producing vast complications for our work.

Because people anticipate the prospect of falls, they work out strategies that seek to avoid traumatic moments and that provide ready-made responses when they arise. People may avoid situations in which they do not expect to be respectfully understood. Groups can develop a culture that accepts some routine misunderstandings as existential, historically unavoidable, and intrinsically blameless, and that sees others as created through malevolence. Shame is one response to a fall but not the only response possible, and however the person responds on any given occasion, whether in being shamed, pushed to anger, reduced to tears, elevated by laughter, or otherwise, he or she is also, in some region of awareness of the possibilities, not living the other possibilities. It is equally true that laughter often arises as a transformation of the appreciation that one might be regarded as shamed, as that shame arises because, unlike some of one's peers, one cannot laugh the matter off.

In some historical moments and with regard to some empirical questions, the role of theory may be to summarize findings and predict what one is likely to find in the future. With regard to the most pressing questions about crime today, we need a different kind of theory, one that will warn us of what we dare not miss as we conduct the research that the uniqueness of the current moment makes unavoidable. Given the complexities of the phenomena, we need a guiding imagery that offers a 'heads up' for multi-method ethnographic and historical inquiries that would try to situate a comparative ethnic understanding of receding and emerging responses to brute gaps in the social life of urban America.

Notes

Thanks to Willem de Haan for detailed comments on several drafts.

1. The same point applies to semiotic and hermeneutic theories in which the apparent integrity of an element is subverted by breaking down its isolation. Instead of representing what it claims to represent, the symbolic meaning of an item is located in the sets of relations in which it figures as a part. This systemic perspective humbles claims of autonomous meaning made on behalf of any element considered alone. Like the functionalism it followed

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historically, 'structural' analysis honors the whole by deconstructing the pretensions of a part.

2. Because the reader usually cannot know who in his texts is doing what when, it is obvious that Michel Foucault must be a theorist. Having produced so many history books that do not describe when the things analyzed occurred, Foucault must be a great theorist. The substance of his theory of knowledge as a transcending and disciplining power is conveyed to the reader by his transcendence and subordination over the many documenting burdens that preoccupy less theoretical historians. The very fact of his success in achieving a dominant position as an intellectual may be the best evidence for his theory. In contrast a similarly comparative perspective on substantively diverse, supervisory, disciplining institutions, each based on its own form of specialized knowledge, Goffman's *Asylums*, was too descriptive of historically situated realities to be widely recognized as 'theory.'
3. Theory is also invaluable for sustaining discourse. In a conversation with the late Arthur Leff, a Goffman-influenced law professor, I once made the mistake of characterizing a question he raised as one of fact, to which he sensibly replied to the effect: 'Question of fact? Well, that's a surefire way to end a great discussion!' Because we consider teaching to be good when it promotes discourse, college teaching, which cannot practically accommodate extensive inquiries into the facts, is an immense institutional support for social theory. Teaching also supports social theory as a valuable convention for organizing textbooks and examinations into debates. By sorting works out into a relatively few contrasting theories, teachers present themselves to students as authorities with comprehensive understandings of areas of research that have been developed by scores of researchers conducting countless studies for decades. And in the rhetorical battles of academic life, theoretical postures ground efforts to rally support around attacks on another's work for lacking 'significance' and 'reflexivity,' or for missing 'the bigger picture' and 'sentimentally' focusing on individual cases.
4. For this reason, the writings of 'labeling' theorists have often been misunderstood as proposing a differentiating, causally deterministic theory that is alternative to explanations pointing to features in offenders' backgrounds. Becker, Kitsuse and other interactionist and phenomenologically inspired 'labeling theorists' are most accurately read as trying to expand and shift the compass of inquiry to include the constitution of prohibitions, detections, cultural preconditions and post-processing cultural elaborations of official actions against deviants. Critics have often failed to appreciate that what was different about labeling theory was not just the 'labeling' component but also the conception of theory and research. The effort was to get out of the 'pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey' game of theoretical debate, in which each team tries to transform the causal forces proposed by other teams into ends or results which one's own team can explain.

   Seductions of Crime (Katz, 1988) should also be read in this tradition. The central point is not that background is irrelevant but that inquiry

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should start with the foreground of crime, i.e. with a commitment to describe what always and uniquely occurs in the construction of different forms of deviant conduct. Once we sort crimes by their homogenous meanings to people as they are doing them, we can pursue the grounded relevancies of various background features (gender, race, social class, immigration status, etc.), and we can frequently find novel relationships between the backgrounds and foregrounds of criminal conduct.

5. The result is causal explanation without determinism, not prediction but retrodiction, a specification of the processes that will have taken place if a given form of social life is observed (see Katz, 2001).
6. In some work settings, the veneer of consensus is established with a dispatch that allows little opportunity for the investigation of divergent understandings. As they negotiate toward the disposition of routine criminal cases, prosecutor and defence lawyer rapidly typify offenders and offenses, acting as if they not only share a culture of typifications but also, and even more problematically, share an understanding of the facts of the offense and the offender's biography. What the two work toward is a 'meeting of the minds' that will suffice for all practical purposes, and if the defendant is confused or passive and the case is of little interest to others outside the negotiating circle, adversarial minds may meet on a definition of crime that becomes highly consequential for punishment despite being a substantially virtual reality (Sudnow, 1965).
7. See the injunction to the active voice in Becker (1986). My preference is to accept this advice. In consequence, my writing highlights subjects' innovations and struggles to keep the reality of intertwining from disappearing. Much continental European philosophical and sociological writing takes the opposite strategy, making institutions and objects come alive with spirits and characters that act in the world without bothering to have visible people as their instigators. Any writing style will run a risk of failing to represent either the subject's active movements or the subject's experience of the 'always already there' framing of the social context, a sense of place and dynamics of in the environment that is experienced as passively received. Whatever style one selects, it is especially helpful to be aware of the inherent limitations of language for expressing the dialectic of social reality.
8. The reference here is to language as used in routine interaction. Poetic language is distinguishable specifically because it resists the amputation of word meaning from the embodied vehicle of expression. The form and the content of expression are fully equal rivals in poetry's effort to elicit a response, and this is the source of both the resonance and the obscurity of poetic language, which by making the form of expression so prominent hides the body of the poet lurking behind, paradoxically creating a safe place for especially intimate, confessional statements.
9. Including the response of spinning a legend of a primordial fall (see Katz, 1996). The Edenic story is a kind of blues song: if everyone has fallen, then no-one really has since a communal embrace has already been guaranteed.

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