Document generated on 04/09/2025 11:42 p.m.

Simmel Studies

Simmel's Adventure and its Relationship to the Ought of Life

Nick Osbaldiston

Volume 23, Number 2, 2019

URI: https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1075212ar
DOI: https://doi.org/10.7202/1075212ar

See table of contents

Publisher(s)

Georg Simmel Gesellschaft

ISSN

1616-2552 (print)
2512-1022 (digital)

Explore this journal

Cite this article

Osbaldiston, N. (2019). Simmel's Adventure and its Relationship to the Ought of Life. *Simmel Studies*, *23*(2), 71–96. https://doi.org/10.7202/1075212ar

Article abstract

This paper examines Georg Simmel's essay "The Adventure" in relation to more recent translations of his later philosophy. Using the foundational framework supplied to us by Simmel, the paper attempts to unpack adventures as moments in our life-course which are timeless in their influence on the self. This transcending of time manifests in the present as emotions attached to the experiences of adventures shape our consideration of the "ought". Borrowing ideas from the Romantic Wordsworth and incoporating examples from C.S. Lewis and the author's own life, the article reconsiders the adventure as not simply something experienced and over time forgotten, but as a powerful tool in the reflexive process of understanding relations between "actuality" and "ought" in life.

© Nick Osbaldiston, 2019

This document is protected by copyright law. Use of the services of Érudit (including reproduction) is subject to its terms and conditions, which can be viewed online.

https://apropos.erudit.org/en/users/policy-on-use/

This article is disseminated and preserved by Érudit.

Érudit is a non-profit inter-university consortium of the Université de Montréal, Université Laval, and the Université du Québec à Montréal. Its mission is to promote and disseminate research.

https://www.erudit.org/en/

NICK OSBALDISTON

Simmel's Adventure and its Relationship to the Ought of Life

Abstract: *This paper examines Georg Simmel's essay "The Adventure" in relation to more recent translations of his later philosophy. Using the foundational framework supplied to us by Simmel, the paper attempts to unpack adventures as moments in our life-course which are timeless in their influence on the self. This transcending of time manifests in the present as emotions attached to the experiences of adventures shape our consideration of the "ought". Borrowing ideas from the Romantic Wordsworth and incoporating examples from C.S. Lewis and the author's own life, the article reconsiders the adventure as not simply something experienced and over time forgotten, but as a powerful tool in the reflexive process of understanding relations between "actuality" and "ought" in life.*

Introduction

Of all the works in Georg Simmel's corpus of work, the essay "The Adventure" which appears in the *Philosophische Kultur* (*GSG* 14; 1997 [1910]) is perhaps one of the most ambiguous. Underpinned by an idea that the stream of an everyday life contains moments "torn-off" and located in our distant memories, Simmel presents to us an interesting but also complex rendering of the modern experience (Simmel, 1997 [1910]: 228). From his position, modernity remains cobbled pieces of fragmented worlds tied together by some sort of "[w]holeness of life" (Simmel, 1997 [1910]: 222; cf. 2010 [1918]: 119). The adventure however stands as a "form of experiencing" that feeds back into the continual reflection and relation of the individual to their negotiation of modernity (Wanderer, 1987: 24). Weinstein and Weinstein (1993) argue that

Simmel's essay also serves us as a way of understanding everyday postmodern culture. As Frisby (1992: 131) notes, along with sociability, adventure appears as one of the few possible exits from the "empty filling-in of time and consciousness" in Simmel's sociological thoughts.

The adventure is certainly appealing when examining the many practices of escape found throughout recent history (Cohen and Taylor, 1992). It exhibits, perhaps, an ongoing concern amongst classical sociologists on the state of modernity and the ability to find moments carved off from instrumental rationality and the rise of *ennui* and/or *Langeweile* (Aho, 2007). Certainly as Adam (2009: 11) convincingly argues of Weber's work, rationalisation inside of western culture increases a "yearning for charismatic leaders, spiritual fulfillment, 'sublime values' and […] all that escapes the iron grip of rationality in the social world". Hence as rationalisation intensifies, so too does the desire for irrational means which ultimately stand in "contrast to everyday reality, thereby posting a challenge to it" (Mommsen, 1992: 156) albeit maybe temporarily (Weber, 1970 [1915]).

Nevertheless Simmel's "Adventure" (1997 [1910]) represents his ongoing appreciation of the relational in social life and in contrast to Weber's work, turns towards an inner experience that is wholly in tension with the flow of the everyday consciousness. The adventure appears metaphorically like a giant wave that interrupts life on a beach, but which in due time recedes. Yet, as Kemple (2019: 165) notes of the "adventures of artistic sensibility or the philosophical mind", these waves tend to not just "interrupt the flow of existence" but alter and "redirect the flux of everyday life". In short, the waters recede, but the form of the beach changes. Using work from the English translation of Simmel's *Lebensanschaung* (*The View of Life*) (*GSG* 16; 2010 [1918]), I seek in this paper to reinvest time and consideration into what the

adventure means for Simmel, seeking to understand how it is experienced and in particular, what impact it has on the self. My intention here is not to simply regurgitate Simmel's (1997 [1910]) ideas, but to give due consideration to the "concept" as a "tool" to understanding the life of individuals with due focus on the question of the life-course (Beer, 2019: 187). Using in particular the "Law of the Individual' (2010 [1918]) and interpretations of this from Lee and Silver (2012), I seek to open what the adventure means for the individual in their understanding of how they ought to live their lives.

Adventure explained

Within contemporary English vernacular, adventure tends to denote activities that are exciting, daring, remarkable, novel, new but also potentially risky or speculative (Oxford Dictionary, 2019). It entails an opportunity to break away "from boredom itself" and satisfy a craving for "momentary *aesthesis*" (Aho, 2007: 447, 459). Hence, tourism in particular frequently makes use of the term in their marketing platforms. Furthermore, the rise of adventure sports sells an idea of cutting away from the monotonous tones of the everyday (Varley, 2006; Lyng, 1990). It is useful however to remind ourselves of the history of the word, especially as it seems to connect more to what Simmel refers to.

The word etymologically borrows from the French *aventur* derived from the Latin *adventura*. Initially, these words reflected instances of chance and fate in the 11th Century but then evolved to denote risk, peril and also wonder by the end of the 12th (Oxford English Dictionary, 2019). Interestingly, in the 13th Century, the term applied further to issues of mishap and misfortune, linked to the creation of the word misadventure. By the 14th Century, the word evolved further to denote remarkable experiences, but there is no indication of a positive inflection on this, as is the case in

contemporary language. In other words, adventure entailed either a wonderous moment, or one of misfortune. Simmel's (1997 [1910]) own essay titled "Philsophie des Abenteuers"[1], uses *abenteurs*, a word borrowed from the French[2]. Without entangling ourselves too much in these nuances, my purpose in revisiting this is to propose that adventure is firstly founded on a premise of chance that is foundational for Simmel's (1997 [1910]) own framing of the experience. However, in addition to this, the word itself reflects misadventure indicative of the idea that this moment carved out of the everyday is not always going to turn out well. Certainly as we will see, the gambler for Simmel is not necessarily going to win every time. Rather, the emphasis is not so much on the outcome, but the experience and the "symbolic work" carried out by the individual (Wanderer, 1987: 22).

Simmel's (1997 [1910]) work is easiest to unpack as both a discussion of the metaphysics of experiencing an adventure and a reflection on the types of people we might classify as adventurers. He begins by suggesting that "events" in life bear at times distinct or similar meanings to each other but "play" a role in the whole life-course (Ibid.: 222). In short, life is a "continuous thread" of similarity that exists as a "stream" or "continuity", or the everyday (ibid.: 222). In contrast to this, the experience of the adventure produces a "difference in the relation to the whole of our life" (ibid.: 222).

> More precisely, the most general form of adventure is its dropping out of the continuity of life. 'Wholeness of life', after all, refers to the face that a consistent process runs through the

1 This appears in Philosophische Kultur as Das Abenteur published in 1919. Kettler's translation appeared initially in Wolff's (1958) Georg Simmel 1858-1918 later republished in Frisby and Featherstone's (1997) Simmel on Culture

2 Curiously, this makes use of abend or evening though this bears no reflection on the classical or modern interpretation of the word.

> individual components of life, however crassly and irreconcilably distinct they may be. What we call an adventure stands in contrast to that interlocking of life-links […] it occurs outside the usual continuity of life (Ibid., 222).

An adventure is a distinct experience from the everyday in other words. However, this is not a simple escape from daily routine. Rather, adventure transcends the very things we use to make sense of our interactions. It escapes "life's more narrowly rational aspects" and transcends form through abandonment where the individual opens themselves up to risks, chances, uncertainty through activity/passivity (Ibid: 224; Wanderer, 1987).

Simmel (1997 [1910]: 225-226) provides a good exemplar in relating the adventure to the world of labour.

> Work, so to speak, has an organic relation to the world. In a conscious fashion, it develops the world's forces and materials toward their culmination in the human purpose, whereas in adventure we have a non-organic relation to the world. Adventure has the gesture of the conqueror, the quick seizure of opportunity, regardless of whether the portion we carve out is harmonious or disharmonious with us, with the world, or with the relation between us and the world […] we abandon ourselves to the world with fewer defenses and reserves than in any other relation.

In labour then, we seek out rational goals through the accumulation of knowledge and skills that effectively allow us a safety net. In short, we have a better grasp on what the causality of our actions may be. In contrast, if we have limited understanding or uncertainty of this causality, we tend to "limit our commitment of force, hold open the lines of retreat, and take each step as if testing the ground" (Simmel 1997 [1910], 226).

Conversely, the adventure proceeds in the "directly opposite fashion" where we take "chance, on fate, on the more-or-less that

we risk all, burn our bridges, and step into the mist, as if the road will lead us on, no matter what" (Ibid., 226). Simmel (Ibid.: 226) interestingly compares this to the philosopher who attempts to make meaning out of life, a "hopeless" act, to form "conceptual knowledge" about "an attitude of the soul, its mood toward itself, the world, God". The philosopher abandons herself to the unknown, stepping into the conceptual mist clambering to find something meaningful to say. She combines "a certain presence of mind with wonton self-abandonment in their desire to attain the extreme or extraordinary" (Kemple, 2019: 164). However, the content of the adventure is not important to Simmel. Rather, the "decisive point" of adventure arrives within the "specific nature and charm" of "experiencing" which symbolically represents something quite distinct from the everyday negotiation of form and life (Simmel, 1997 [1910]: 229). It is only through symbolic work on the part of the individual that "the peculiar colour, ardour, and rhythm of the life process become decisive and […] transform its substance" changing the moment into an "adventure" (Ibid., 229; Wanderer, 1987).

On this point Simmel (Ibid., 231) suggests there is within every experience the "shadow of what in its intensification and distinctiveness constitutes the adventure". This causes him to consider the idea of a "threshold" (Ibid., 231). From this perspective, adventure could entail a range of activities from "lectures, classes, dishwashing" and "work" that is "shaped into an adventure when the individual experiences" it as such (Wanderer, 1987: 27). For Wanderer (1987: 27; cf. Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993), this is symbolic work where tensions between chance-necessity, activity-passivity and certainty-uncertainty are incorporated into the "central meaning of the experience". Furthermore, when pressed into the memory, the adventure is "dream-like" and the more intense the adventure, the dimmer it gets

over time. It is furthermore temporal, bounded by a sharp beginning and end (Simmel, 1997 [1910]). Like art, and perhaps philosophy, it stands "over against life" as a bordered experience that entails something "held together by an inner core" (Ibid., 223; Kemple, 2019). Most importantly, the adventure is not something that can be experienced endlessly (Frisby, 1987). Rather, it is like the painting on the wall, bordered with a central meaning within, that stands distinct to objects around it, but which also influences the meaning of those things that surround it (Kemple, 2019, see discussions below).

As noted earlier, Frisby (1992) considers adventure (as well as sociability) to be one of the few incidences where a life dominated by form, explicitly through the city and commodity, escapes. However, in reflection, Frisby (1992: 133) considers that "were Simmel able to look forward to the images of sociability and the adventure" so central to the objective culture of tourism/leisure industries, "he would have no difficulty in recognizing that their ideologically permeated forms have also been incorporated into the world of the commodity". Indeed Simmel (*GSG* 5; 1997 [1895]: 220) in an earlier reflection on the Alps, argues that "the power of capitalism extends itself to ideas as well" turning experiences like adventure into "its own private property". Within that essay, he expressively criticises alpine activities which endanger life as "completely egotistical" and "unethical" especially when it involves risking "another's life (namely guides) through possible accident" (Ibid., 221; cf. Jazbinsek, 2003). It is clear that the idea of adventure has been coopted into the tourism industry thus potentially bringing this into the sphere of rationalisation (Frisby, 1992). Nevertheless, in what follows I hope to position the adventure as something that can be deeply personal, and impact on the how the self relates to the world and their own position within it.

The ambiguous nature of the adventure as stipulated by Simmel, however, means empirical examples are not easily forthcoming (Frisby, 1992; cf. Kemple, 2019; Kjølsrød, 2003; Osbaldiston, 2012; Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993). Nevertheless, he does provide us with some illustrations in the gambler, the love affair and religious person. In the case of the gambler, the adventure lay in "meaninglessness of chance" (Simmel, 1997 [1910]: 224). The abandonment of rational means where one can predict or secure a future goal (unless one cheats) is replaced instead by luck and at times even "superstition" (Ibid., 224). The experience of tension between the known/unknown and luck/unlucky induces adventure (cf. Wanderer, 1987). For Simmel, the gambler is also one who can metaphorically burn bridges in the pursuit of the win. The mere idea of the 'perhaps' conflicts with the material need of the everyday, creating an experience of tension, excitement and potential utter dismay (the misadventure).

On the other hand, the love affair contains elements of luck but also of strength. The man, which Simmel is clear about, offers himself through the activity of courting. Here, men seek after the attention of women, but this process is fraught with the chance of rejection that is in tension with the strength (or effectiveness/attractiveness) of the seduction itself. Yet the love affair for Simmel (1997 [1910]: 228) presents a moment which "may give our life only a momentary splendour, like the ray shed in an inside room by a light flitting by outside". Today though, with the rise of algorithm driven dating services (such as matchmaker dating websites), we could ask whether love affairs remain dependent on luck anymore. Nevertheless, for Simmel, the love affair itself demonstrates a deep experience that sits on the "exclave of life" (Ibid., 228).

The final empirical example is the person who "senses that our earthly, conscious life is only an isolated fragment as compared to

the unnameable context of an existence running its course in it" (Ibid., 225). Such a person would have "such a remarkable attitude toward life" wherein "one must sense above its totality a higher unity, a super-life […] whose relation to life parallels the relation of the immediate life totality itself to those particular experiences which we call adventures" (Ibid., 225). CS Lewis (1957: 68) perhaps indicates this in his famed expression "I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world". His approach to life, in this manner, is reflective though of several key experiences I will discuss below as examples. For Simmel (1997 [1910]: 225) though the extraordinary attitude idea that one could view life on Earth as a "temporary asylum", could engender for Simmel an experience of life as adventure, thereby reshaping the individual's relationship to form/life generally.

To summarise, Simmel's (1997 [1910]) adventure requires a number of conditions that set it apart as such against forms. Temporally, the adventure has a distinct beginning and end. In the case of the love affair, the beginning may well be completely accidental, and the conclusion a bitter separation. For Simmel though, the adventure is removed from the "center of the ego and the course of life which the ego guides" to the extent that the more intense the adventure is, the potential that it might be remembered almost "as something experienced by another person" (Ibid., 222). On this point however, we might see the adventure as somewhat ambiguous both theoretically and empirically (Frisby, 1987). It is hard to pinpoint what adventure might be and how it situates so far outside of life. Certainly, Simmel's work here requires some care and attention to detail, but we should also not be afraid to reconsider his conceptualisation (as is the case with all classical sociology (Turner, 2003). In particular, the positioning of adventure as standing above or over life and remaining disconnected from it requires some

thought. Simmel (1997 [1910]: 222) does provide hints to this in that the adventure can be "outside the context of life" while also "somehow connected with the center". While this is relative to the tensions of things like chance/certainty and the rational/irrational, I want to suggest in this paper that the adventure potentially accomplishes more. The impact of the experience of the adventure can permeate life itself colouring it with specific powerful memories and altering understandings of the everyday. As Kemple (2019: 164) relates, "this experience (the adventure) nevertheless retains some connection to the character and identity of the person who embarks on it".

The Adventure within the View of Life

At the risk of theoretical simplicity, the adventure is a type of self-transcendence that overcome forms as stipulated above. I want to connect this now to some of the philosophes of Simmel by examining how the adventure infiltrates the self and its relations to the world. In particular, Simmel's (2010 [1918]) lengthy examination of the 'ought' (*Sollen*) and the 'actuality' (*Wirklichkeit*) and that of the "ethics of authentic individuality" (Lee and Silver, 2012: 131) provide us with a way forward here. Actuality is the "form" through which we "apprehend content" or in other words, experience other forms (such as art, science, law, relationships) (Simmel, 2010 [1918]: 99). This is how we experience life generally within the distinct and different forms of the everyday. Conversely, the ought, like and unlike Kantian logic,

> is not from the outset to be understood as merely ethically, but equally as a quite general aggregate condition of life-consciousness in which both hopes and drives, eudaimonisitic and aesthetic demands, religious ideals, even caprices and anti-ethical desires are to be found, often simultaneously with the ethical and each other (Ibid.: 100).

"Actuality" and "ought" remain categories through which we experience life as tension. Furthermore, they hold for Simmel (Ibid.: 100) a "monopoly" position through which we "experience life" (Lee and Silver, 2012). In other words, our social interactions, all of them, have the potential to be understood as a contradiction or consolidation between how one ought to act and how one actually acts (Lee and Silver, 2012; McCole, 2019).

The Law of the Individual then sets out a divergent course from Kantian ethics by ascribing life with the task of forming "our deeds into a coherent narrative that defines the person that we are living to be" which includes but is not contained within ethics alone (Lee and Silver, 2012: 133). Yet, this is not simply a process through internal reflection or excessive subjectivism. Rather, true to his relational foundations, Simmel (2010 [1918]) suggests that the "ought" develops through "vigorous self-reflection on the part of this individual in conversation with others" (Lee and Silver, 2012: 134). In other words, what we seek to become and/or internalise as values, is in continual conversation not simply with our own minds but also the relations we have with others. For instance, I might have established ideals about what it means to be a good academic initially through consultations with supervisors and so on. As time has progressed however, conversations/interactions with managers, leaders, colleagues and even family creates moments of reflection and even tension that thus transform my own "ought" of academic life. The point here is that as Lee and Silver (2012: 134) argue, the "Law of the Individual is individual without therefore being purely subjective".

The relationship between this theoretical position and the concept of the adventure perhaps appears distant. However, I would argue a number of points to connect the dots. Firstly the adventure appears to be more chance than purpose. The adventure at its core, Simmel (1997 [1910]: 224) reminds us, is "isolated and

accidental". However, the actual transformation of an event to actual *adventuring* is the result of the individual switching the act from one of mere everydayness into something deeper and more intense. This cannot be simply cognitive though. There is clearly an emotional element to this that invokes within the individual a feeling that this is a moment in time that transcends normality. Intensity of feeling accompanies the memory of the event, leaving lasting impressions on the individual. Happiness, sadness, excitement, suffering, joy and disappointment colour our memory of adventures past.

To further this argument, it is important to remember that the adventure is an experience of social interaction that often involves other humans (and non-humans) which leave lasting impressions on the psyche. Again, to invoke Kemple's (2019: 165) thoughts here, the adventure contains,

> [t]he double significances of the core of human action and experience consists in being simultaneously *centered* on itself and *decentered* through our capacity to separate ourselves from this center by reaching beyond it. This latter "eccentric" dynamic is distinctive to the adventure, and at the same time characteristic of modern life as a whole.

As noted earlier, Kemple (2019: 165) further relates, that the adventure can "interrupt the flow of existence and redirect the flux of everyday life". From this perspective, the adventure does not simply stand aside in our memories as luminous experiences that exist in the dullness of a grey existence. Rather, adventures potentially infiltrate and alter the ways in which we experience life. From the perspective of Simmel's (2010 [1918]) considerations of the development of the "ought", the adventure can play a role in the negotiations between *Wirklichkeit und Sollen*. As Lee and Silver (2012: 135) explain, our lives are in "constant dialogue between what" we "actually do and the person" we "strive to be". The

ongoing construction of the "ought" in particular, which paints the picture of the person we should be, I would argue, can be significantly impacted on by past adventures. I will consider this in the following in more detail with some illustrations that I hope demonstrate my argument.

Reflections on adventure through Wordsworth

I would like to start with Simmel's (1997 [1910]: 222) analogy of the adventure with the dream. This relates specifically to how disconnected the adventure is to modern life. Like the dream, it stands outside of the normal negotiations and experiences of life and form. Thus, as he states, "[e]veryone knows how quickly we forget dreams because they, too, are placed outside the meaningful context of life-as-a-whole" (Ibid., 222). However, in what I have argued above, the adventure represents a transcendence of life, albeit momentarily, but can also remain a powerful memory and potential shaper of our "ought". Theoretically, this requires us to put aside the point from Simmel (Ibid., 222) that the deeper and more intense the adventure, the further it stands outside of selfhood in our memory. Rather what I am proposing here is that the more intense the adventure is, the more pressed it is in our mind. This does not necessarily mean we remember vividly the actual experience, but rather, the recollection of the metaphysical impressions it left us deeply cut into our psyche.

This necessitates us remembering that Simmel (2010 [1918]: 6) considers that the present is never simply that, but rather "always a bit of the past and a somewhat smaller bit of the future". Furthermore, experiences in the present are not merely the result of causal links from the past and all things in-between to the now. Rather, "elements of the past so to speak reach over the head of everything lying between and affect the present, combining with it into a steadily changing unity" (Ibid., 136). In some ways, Simmel's

reflections on time help us to consider further how experiences in the life-course impact our present. As such, I argue, memories of adventures can reach over the in-between and imprint themselves into our different social relations in the present. However, the content of the adventure is not important (as noted earlier) to this discussion. Rather, the experiencing of the adventure and the sensual/emotional nature of it are what impresses upon the mind. As time moves forward, the memory of the actual contents of the adventure fade while specific sensations and feelings remain intact. However, we must also remember that these too can be coloured by time and social conditions in different ways (Jedlowski, 2001; Zerubavel, 1996)[3].

To further my argument here I borrow from the Romantic Poet William Wordsworth (2001 [1850]) who provides us with a framework. In his *Prelude*, he alludes to moments in our past that serve to refresh and enlighten us in times of distress,

> There are in our existence spots of time,
> Which with distinct pre-eminence retain
> A vivifying Virtue, whence, depress'd
> By false opinion and contentious thought
> Or aught of heavier and more deadly weight
> In trivial occupations, and the round
> Of ordinary intercourse, our minds
> Are nourish'd and invisibly repair'd,
> A virtue by which pleasure is enhanced
> That penetrates, enables us to mount

3 It is important to note, as Zerubavel (1996, 285) shows, that the past is never clear but rather "filtered (and therefore inevitably distorted) through a process of interpretation that usually takes places within particular social surroundings". While I certainly do not argue against such a thought, in this piece I seek to exclude considerations of the social setting to focus instead on the metaphysical act that adventure or the memory of it can have on the ought.

> When high, more high, and lifts us up when fallen (Wordsworth, 2001[1850]: 197-198).

Wordsworth continues by suggesting that "[s]uch moments are worthy of all gratitude" and "[a]re scatter'd everywhere, taking their date from our first childhood" (ibid., 198). These "spots of time", writes Frick (2001: 12) were for Wordsworth "time for reflection and contemplation" and had potential for "transcendence into new realms of imaginative thought and discovery".

However, these memories are not simply cognitive.

> Wordsworth's theory of spots of time, it is clear, refers to highly receptive emotional-imaginative states in relation to certain specific experiences that, together, create an intense emotional power, stimulate imaginative activity, and contain symbolic significance as their ultimate reward (Frick, 2001: 14).

This philosophical consideration of memory, found in the introduction (*The Prelude*) to the never fully completed *The Recluse,* is a powerful and personal examination of the role of intense emotional experiences that serve to renovate and rejuvenate the mind. As Bishop (1954: 47; Eakin, 1973) notes, these are illustrated throughout Wordsworth's poetry, especially regarding experiences in his youth[4]. They reflect moments in time where the "climax" involves an event of deep lasting emotional significance (Ibid., 47).

---

4 Poems for Bishop (1954, 45) which demonstrate this include ones such as "the memory of the Windander Boy, the Drowned Man, Entering London, the Father and the Child and the Blind Beggar, Simplon Pass, The Night in Paris, Robespierre's Death and Snowden". However, Bishop (1954, 45) makes it a point to argue that it is not necessary to list all of the poetry that exhibits the sorts of "excitement" that reflect the "spots of time" argument. Rather, he seeks in this paper to focus on what phrase entails for Wordsworth and how they enter into our own minds as we read his poetry. It is of importance though to recall that for Simmel (1910[1997]), the adventure is a youthful exercise.

Interestingly and contrary to Wordsworth's own words in *The Prelude*, these are not always rejuvenating. In the case of *Entering London* for instance, the protagonist, overwhelmed by his exposure to the metropolis, describes a crushing feeling (described as weight and power) within him. Bishop (1954: 51) argues, with some importance to us, that the "immediate experience" in many of the "spots of time" in Wordworth's poetry (like this) is actually "terror", not so much reverie or exquisite joy.

The "spots of time" approach of Wordsworth aligns with my proposition that the adventure can, and does, speak to our minds at different times. Interestingly, these can nourish us with positive emotions (such as pleasure as Wordsworth indicates), or they can darken our experiences with negative feelings (as perhaps Wordsworth's poetry at times indicates more forcefully). The adventure, like the 'spots of time', are not remembered so much for their content (which loses its coherence and thickness over time, as Simmel (1997 [1910]) perhaps meant), but rather the *intensity* of feelings we experience during them. These acute mental, sensual and emotional states penetrate life inevitably leaving indents on our thoughts and relations. They can, dependent on the context, provide substance for the reflexive consideration of the "ought". To illustrate the argument I turn firstly back to the work of C.S Lewis and then briefly take leave to discuss two personal experiences that illustrate this further.

Throughout his canon of fictional works and other writings, Lewis, a Christian convert, demonstrates the impact of what he might describe as spiritual glimpses of eternity. We however here for the purposes of my argument may call them adventures. In these writings, Lewis and his characters are often drawn into moments of significant reflection and deepened insight accompanied by intense emotions. One of these experiences for Lewis occurs on a train

journey back to Oxford where he is apparently surprised by a great spiritual invitation. He writes that he,

> [w]as invited to surrender to it (the invitation). And the odd thing is that something inside me suggested that it would be "sensible" to refuse the invitation; almost that I would be better employed remembering that I was going to do a job […] Then I silenced this inward wiseacre. I accepted this invitation – threw myself open to this feathery, impalpable, tingling sensation. The rest of the journey I passed in a state which can only be described as joy (Lewis, 1986: 52-53).

This example highlights the occasional glimpse of joy that Lewis recalls about his life, but which also feeds into his fictional writings. The remarkable moment where he "threw himself open" exhibits the overcoming of life/form that is emblematic of the adventure for Simmel (1997 [1910]). However, these adventures in spirituality are not simple dream-like experiences. They feed directly into Lewis' ethos, especially around the demarcation between real joy and mere pleasure. Indeed as Lindvall (1997) suggests, Lewis' (1986) understandings of joy, shaped by memories of emotions past, demoted other emotions such as pleasures, lust and happiness away from pure authentic joy. The latter produced in Lewis a longing for an eternal world and glory (as illustrated in the quote "made for another world" found above).

Such a longing he likened to the German idea of *Sehnsucht* on which several authors of the time also obsessed over (Evans, 2014). For Lewis, this translated to an ongoing longing for an afterlife. Worldly existence is punctuated by moments or glimpses that were echoes of the eternal (Lindvall, 1997). Exposures to real joy, as heavenly, are slippery to hold in Lewis' writings and often left the individual feeling unfinished/unfulfilled. Nonetheless, these exquisite emotional experiences for Lewis (1986) also coloured the mundane differently. As Lindvall (1997: 28) suggests, all ordinary

things "became sharper and more splendidly themselves". Nevertheless, temporary experiences of the divine left humans deeply nostalgic, causing them to seek out the divine through actions and ache for spiritual enlightenment. For him personally, joy drove him. Lindvall (1997) recalls Lewis' motivation for life as likened to child-hood experiences of joy when school was nearing the end of semester and holidays were near. The emotions he experienced then, the intense anticipation, "served" him as his "criterion for joy, and especially the difference between joy and pleasure" (Lewis, 1986: 25). Throughout his life thereafter, these momentary splendours underlined his faith and inspired him to act in a manner in which he believed would reward him in the afterlife (Lindvall, 1997).

From our perspective, Lewis' experiences of joy and the subsequent longing (albeit at times painful – *Sehnsucht*) reflect a perhaps an all too religious example of the adventure. Nonetheless the formula remains. Experiences of joy, which had no relation to content as evidenced in the train journey to Oxford, pulled him out of the everyday into an intense spiritual experience. These emotional states then infiltrated his own personal "ought". He treated life in this world, as we saw in the earlier quote in this essay, as an alien place. His reflections of relations, social and non-social, then became a precursor to another world. Living a good Christian ethos would be the only way in which he would experience this slippery joy in fullness and completeness (Lindvall, 1997). Mortal life is coloured therefore by incompleteness or *Sehnsucht*.[5] Such a

5 Modern research attempts now to understand how sehnsucht influences people across life-spans in personality development. Scheibe and Freund (2008, 123) for instance highlight how past memories and experiences can leave individuals feeling incomplete and thus feeds into their own "personal utopias". We could argue that from a Simmelian perspective, this longing for completeness would never be lost as interactions would continue to feed into the dilemma of how to live a good life and continually act upon the 'ought' of the person.

condition might exemplify the devoted religious life – one in which spiritual adventures continue to nourish and uplift, but importantly imprint themselves on the individual's "ought".

In a second example, I seek leave from formality for a moment to speak about two personal experiences. Both highlight how adventures impact on the "ought" of my own life. The first relates to vocation. As a younger undergraduate, I initially enrolled in a course with the intention of eventually becoming a professional psychologist. In my course outline however, I noted with some interest a discipline called sociology, an area I had never once heard of (sociology is not often taught in schools in Australia). In some free time, I took an information seminar on the social sciences that included a presentation on sociology as a discipline and explained the style of sociological thinking. The content of the presentation is now quite vague to me (being some fifteen years ago), but the feelings involved in the moment remain vivid. The sociological ethos enticed emotions of being home and imbued an emotion akin to a calling as Weber might describe. Certainly, the social conditions of that day and my own social relations in the past played a role and perhaps the presenter's style influenced my receptiveness, but that moment which I purposely chose to experience purely out of interest suddenly became the fundamental drive for my vocational life. From then, I adopted the "ought" of what it meant to be a sociologist by switching courses, learning methods, theories and eventually becoming an active participant in the discipline as a researcher. My "ought" however is constantly in dialogue with other actors today. As noted above, the academic is in consistent reflexive conversations around what it means to be an "academic" today with peers, management, the State and even metrics. However, the emotions of that "adventure" with sociology, as I undertake my work in the present, often returns to my mind and is revisited through research, writing and teaching sporadically.

The two experiences above reflect adventures that refresh and rejuvenate the mind through positive emotional states. One last example I wish to share demonstrates a mild form of misadventure. It reflects an argument that we ought to be mindful of how things can and do go bad in adventure. I recall here an experience standing at the top of a particular hill in Dunedin, New Zealand (a place notorious for being slippery in winter and very steep) as a younger person with my travelling companion on our bicycles. The details again of this moment are vague. Nonetheless, I remember at one stage he and I decided that we would let go of any fears we might have and risk it all by allowing ourselves to hurtle down this steep hill without brakes on. At some point, a small thought in my mind invited me to consider how that decision could end badly, however I ignored it spurred on by my fellow bicyclist. The emotions I remember are not distinct from those experienced by cyclists now – pleasure, speed and exhilaration as we transgressed the norms of riding in this place. It was enthralling until the event abruptly ended. Happiness turned quickly into panic, horror and dread as my companion rode into my path. I, going much faster, slammed straight into his side throwing us both off and tumbling down the hill. As we came to a halt (me by sliding at speed into an electricity generator on the footpath), I recall the immediate and intense emotion of regret. Our bikes were ruined and bent out of shape. Injuries were thankfully not substantial, but our risk-taking adventure turned sour quickly and economically costly.

This experience reflects the whole concept for Simmel (1997 [1910]) of experiencing a moment that defied normalness. For a brief few seconds, my companion and I felt the joys of letting go, risking injury in the pursuit of something deeper (perhaps a mild version of edgework as Lyng (1990) would describe). Our bridges burned down though when physics caught hold and we entangled in misadventure. The tension between happiness-unhappiness,

thrill-horror and positivity-regret is what remains poignant in my mind today. While this is a small and relatively minor incident, the adventure/misadventure feeds into my "ought" in several ways. Occasionally in social and natural interactions where risk/reward in physical pursuits (such as bike riding, hiking, etc) arrive, the very moment of displeasure that occurred when my bicycle slammed out of control into my companion infiltrates my thoughts. I have even used this experience as a teaching mechanism to my own children to warn them of the potential pitfalls of not listening to that warning voice in your mind. Of course, other social interactions including childhood socialisation, and continuous experiences with everyday life impact on the "ought" that makes up my ethos. However, this brief moment demonstrates in a personal manner how misadventure plays a part in this.

Concluding remarks

The current growing interest in Simmelian studies through arguably the Anglo publication of *The View of Life* creates opportunities for deeper reflection on the different sociological thoughts Simmel constructed in relation to his later philosophical ideas (Beer, 2019). In this paper, I have attempted to reconsider the role of the adventure by relating this to the thoughts of Simmel (2010 [1918]) on how life at times spills over boundaries into the very processes of negotiating 'actuality' and the "ought" in our social relations. My contention has been that through a multitude of experiences, one of which is the adventure, the "ought" is framed not simply through the present, but in experiences throughout our life-course. Adventure's contents are merely contextual. The actual imprint that adventure leaves on us belongs to the emotional. The more intense the adventure, the larger the indent it produces on life through feelings which do not dim with age perhaps as much as the actual content of the adventure does (cf. Simmel 1997 [1910]).

My argument above, and subsequent examples (albeit perhaps lacking empirical rigour), revolve around a few key thoughts. Firstly, adventures are not simply experiences that have positive outcomes for the individual. The complex but also open nature of Simmel's (1997 [1910]) concept here allows us room to appreciate that of misadventure. Empirical investigations into life-course biographies, as I have tried to show in my example above, might demonstrate how at times adventures can turn sour, leaving lasting emotions that linger in certain contexts and that colour our "ought". Secondly, when Frisby (1992) considers that in our current consumer driven culture that adventure is captured by marketing and promoted through avenues like travel, thus causing him to wonder whether adventure is indeed possible still, I would contend that we need to examine some of the core tenets of the adventure as moments which are separated from consumerism. Certainly, we should not doubt that adventure, like sociability, is now a marketable product and thereby subject to the flatness that capitalism imposes on experiences. However, individually, and with respect to Simmel's later *Lebensphilosophe*, we can see how adventures will continue to be a part of one's life experiences. More importantly, the emotions of the adventure contribute to how we interpret and negotiate the present. Perhaps like the accident for Marquad (1991: 122), we are more our adventures and misadventures "than our choice[s]" in life than we consider.

We might conclude by asking what the difference would be between an adventure and simply an event which is simply emotional. Indeed, not every single intense experience which invokes significant emotion can be classified as an adventure. This is not my argument. Furthermore, it is clear that as Lyng (1990) has shown, there are those who make a life out of chasing intense emotional experiences that he calls edgework (eg. adventure sports). It is also the case that not all adventures have impact on the

reflection of the "ought". Rather, what I am proposing here is that firstly, adventures often occur by chance and not always end well. Secondly, although the content of the adventure dims over time, like Simmel argues, the feelings associated with that experience remains deeply impressed on the mind. Lastly, these adventures in the life-course, which are often purely accidential, seemingly influence the ways in which the individual negotiates between "ought" and "actuality".

Sociologically then the adventure opens a range of possibilities both empirically and theoretically. It allows us to consider upon how experiences of the past, cut out of the everydayness of the world (but not necessarily always apart from the everyday), feed into reflexivity over how we interpret and understand certain contexts, social interactions and relations. Certainly, when attempting to interrogate life-biographies, life-courses and narratives of even future ambitions, these adventures may well illuminate the ongoing relatedness of the past and the importance of intense emotions on how we think, feel and act in the present. Simmel's (1910[1997]) thoughts on the adventure in combination with his *Lebensphilosophe* invites us to consider closer the work of emotions and how intense feelings within moments (like adventures) enter into our social relations and create space for reflection.

Bibliography

Adam B. (2009). "Culture Future Matters: An Exploration in the Spirit of Max Weber's Methodological Writings", in *Time and Society*, 18, pp.7-25.

Aho K. (2007). "Simmel on Acceleration, Boredom, and Extreme Aesthesia", in *Journal for the Theory of Social Behaviour*, 37(4), pp.448-462.

Beer D. (2019). *Georg Simmel's Concluding Thoughts: Worlds, Lives, Fragments*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Bishop J. (1959). "Wordsworth and the 'Spots of Time'", in *ELH*, 26(1), pp.45-65.

Cohen S and Taylor L. (1992). *Escape Attempts: The Theory and Practice of Resistance to Everyday Life*, Routledge: London.

Eakin, S. (1973). "The Spots of Time in Early Versions of 'The Prelude'", in *Studies in Romanticism*, 12(1), pp.389-405.

Evans J. (2014). "C.S. Lewis, Thomas Wolfe, and the Transatlantic Expression of Sehnsucht", in *Inklings Forever*, 9(5), pp.1-8.

Frick W. (2001). "Symbolic Latency: Images of Transformation across Space and Time", in *Journal of Humanistic Psychology*, 41(3), pp.9-30.

Frisby D. (1987). *Fragments of Modernity*. Polity Press: Cambridge.

Frisby D. (1992). *Simmel and Since: Essays on George Simmel's Social Theory*, Routledge: London.

Jazbinsek D. (2003). "The Metropolis and Mental Life of Georg Simmel: on the History of Antipathy", in *Journal of Urban History*, 30(1), pp.102-125.

Jedlowski P. (2001). "Memory and Sociology: Themes and Issues", in *Time and Society,* 10(1), pp.29-44.

Kemple T. (2019). "Simmel's Sense of Adventure: Death and Old Age in Philosophy, Art, and Everyday Life", in *The Germanic Review*, 94, pp.163-174.

Kjølsrød L. (2003). "Adventure Revisited: On Structure and Metaphor in Specialized Play", in *Sociology*, 37(3), pp.459-476.

Lee M. and Silver D. (2012). "Simmel's Law of the Individual and the Ethics of Relational Self", in *Theory, Culture and Society*, 29(7-8), pp.124-145.

Lewis C.S. (1957). *Mere Christianity*, G. Bles.: London.

Lewis C.S. (1986). *Present Concerns and Other Essays*, Harcourt Brace Jovanovich: New York.

Lindvall T. (1997). "Joy and *Seinsucht*", in *Mars Hill Review*, 8, pp.25-38.

Lyng S. (1990). "Edgework: a Social Psychological Analaysis of Voluntary Risk Taking", in *American Journal of Sociology*, 95(4), pp.851-886.

Marquad O. (1991). *In Defense of the Accidental: Philosophical Studies*, Oxford University Press: Oxford.

McCole J. (2019). "Georg Simmel: Decentering the Self and Recovering Individuality", in *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture and Theory*, 94(2), pp.151-162.

Mommsen W. (1992). *The Political and Social Theory of Max Weber*, Chicago University Press: Chicago.

Osbaldiston N. (2012). *Seeking Authenticity in Place, Culture and Self*, Palgrave Macmillan: New York.

Oxford English Dictionary. (2019). "Etymology: Adventure". https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/2923?rskey=5m1KDg&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid

Pyyhtinen O. (2018). *The Simmelian Legacy*, Palgrave Macmillan: London.

Simmel G. (1997 [1895]). "The Alpine Journey" In D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture*, London: Sage, pp.219-220.

Simmel G. (1997 [1910]). "The Adventure" In D. Frisby and M. Featherstone (eds.), *Simmel on Culture*, London: Sage, pp.221-232.

Simmel G. (2010 [1918]). *The View of Life: Four Metaphysical Essays with Journal Aphroisms*, Chicago University Press: Chicago.

Turner S. (2003). "The Maturity of Social Theory" In C.A.Camic (ed.), *The Dialogical Turn: New Roles for Sociology in the Postdisciplinary Age*, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers: New York, pp.141-170.

Varley P. (2006). "Confecting Adventure and Playing with Meaning: The Adventure Commodification Continuum", in *Journal of Sport and Tourism*, 11(2), pp.173-194.

Wanderer J. (1987). "Simmel's Forms of Experiencing: The Adventure as Symbolic Work", in *Symbolic Interaction*, 10(1), pp.21-28.

Weber M. (1970[1915]). "Religious Rejections of the World and Their Directions" In H. Gerth (ed.), *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul: London, pp.323-362.

Weinstein D. and Weinstein M.A. (1993). *Postmodern(ized) Simmel*, Routledge: London.