

“Getting (or Not Getting) to Know You” –Finding A Conceptual Home for Anonymity and Identifiability

Forthcoming, D. Silver and M. Brocic, *Edgar Companion to Georg Simmel*

Gary T. Marx, Professor Emeritus, M.I.T.

Abstract

Georg Simmel's work on modernization, in particular as it involves occupational differentiation, a money economy, the stranger and secrecy is central to current concerns within the sociology of knowledge and information involving personal and social data.

This article continues in his tradition, but the emphasis is on knowledge as it involves revealing and concealing in an information-based, rather than an industrial-based, society. Anonymity along with its opposite –identifiability and related terms such as publicity, privacy, transparency, visibility, confidentiality, secrecy and surveillance are at the core of many contemporary, theoretical, ethical, law and policy concerns.

This article offers definitions and concepts involving the structures and processes of attachable or detachable personal and social data. Seven broad questions are pursued involving: kinds of knowledge; the central variable of anonymity-identifiability; four broad types of anonymity; roles performed; the stuff and configurations of personal and social data that can be connected to, or disconnected from, persons; and the ironic, paradoxical and contradictory factors that swirl around, and engulf, the topic.

*All relationships of people to each other rest,
as a matter of course, upon the precondition that
they know something about each other.*

—Georg Simmel

A. Introduction: Simmel's Continuing Relevance

Knowing some things “about each other” might seem insignificant, yet they are foundational for self and society. The knowledge of the other observed by Simmel above ties to the trust that can be brought by predictability, accountability and reciprocity. When accurate, such knowledge can support a more rational ordering of personal and social matters and is a necessary condition for fairness and justice.

The conditions under which data of various kinds are, can, or should be concealed, revealed, discovered, destroyed, faked or distorted and by whom, from whom, when, under what conditions and why, are socially and theoretically of ever greater significance. Simmel is particularly relevant in considering contemporary questions of anonymity, pseudonymity and identity. The light Simmel cast continues to illuminate a century later.

Being known or unknown involves rules and tools, expectations and surprises, rights and obligations and confidence and doubt. Beyond choice, being named (identified) can reflect inherent physical or natural factors within environments that determine the availability and kinds of information. When the possibilities and limits of the physical-natural and social worlds are radically upended, as with the current shifts to a world increasingly defined by digitalization and tools that break through the previous, information-protective borders, cracks in ever fragile social orders deepen.

With the arrival of new possibilities for knowing, hiding and dissimulating information, the nature of social order becomes more problematic and contestable. This has major empirical and ethical implications for the dignity of the person and for a democratic society. Anonymity and identifiability bring new fault lines to the meanings and locations of trust and truth, even as enduring historical forms and processes remain.

This article continues in the tradition of Simmel, Durkheim and Weber and later, many others, such as Luhmann (1979), Barber (1983), Lewis and Weigert (1985) who analyzed the centrality of trust for social relations under changing conditions. The emphasis in this essay is on knowledge in an information-based, rather than an industrial-based, society.¹

Analysis of the changes in the moves from the hunting and gathering to farming, urban and urban-industrial societies, is a well-traveled road, --a road still under turbulent, muddled construction in post-modern society. Late 19th and early 20th century scholars saw how modernity fundamentally altered the nature of trust, social order and ordering. Of particular salience for this paper is the appearance of new legitimate and illegitimate opportunity structures (Merton 1956, Cloward and Ohlin 1960) for valid and deceptive identification.

The profoundly wrenching changes that accelerated in the 19th century with new forms of data, surveillance and communication have continued with even greater acceleration since the 1950s. The earth and its creatures and features have become multi-sensorial engines automatically, endlessly and effortlessly offering and gathering data to be tagged, correlated, saved, analyzed, retrieved and communicated. As well, we see tools (both material, social and legal) for blocking, disguising and eviscerating actual or potential identifying tags.

Modernization and Post-Modernization

Simmel's work on modernity in the early 20th century encapsulates the breadth and depth of changes that continue. His work on secrecy, the stranger, trust (in particular with respect to risk, truth and falsehood), the urban, work, money, population scale, space, doors, bridges and time is illustrative.

Beyond his interest in the secret society (Wolff, 1950) as a particular type of organization, he saw the withholding of information and lack of knowledge as omnipresent parts of everyday life. Secrecy is not simply the absence of knowledge but is a form of social interaction that both separates and connects. The potential to keep and discover secrets changes radically in modern society and directly touches anonymity and pseudonymity as these involve individuals, organizations and objects. His insights into the dynamics of secrecy help understand the motivations behind, and the consequences of, "motivated anonymity", a type considered in section D below.

His work on the ambivalent belonging of the stranger illustrates a social relationship steeped in anonymity, even within a context of physical proximity (Wolff, 1950). In modernity the figure of the stranger takes on new forms in the virtual realm across contexts, cultures and time, where individuals can be simultaneously connected to vast networks and yet remain fundamentally unknown to one another, absent mechanisms to learn and build confidence. For Simmel the stranger, while being from a different group, finds a role within the dominant society.

The stranger is a permanent resident but remains a resident alien --neither fully outside, nor fully inside-- known yet unknown. He or she is straddler in modern society (as are insiders as well, if to a different degree). While a participant, the stranger experiences more disconnection (less role commitment) and risks rejection relative to real [sic] insiders. The objective social factors that make him marginal or a stranger can distance and confound his subjectivity relative to that of the natives and adds a strong motivation to succeed, along with the challenges of code switching and sometimes an advantage of greater objectivity.²

The standardization of value and predictability that a money economy brought greatly expanded commerce (Wolff, 1950, Simmel 2012). This meant secondary relations which distanced individuals from fulsome, direct encounters with well-known others. In this depersonalized, context quantifiable value replaces personal knowledge for much interaction. These impacts are now even more pronounced in contemporary computer environments which so easily spread impersonal contact across contexts, cultures, geography and time.

Continuing changes in the division of labor increase institutional differentiation and occupational specialization (Wolff, 1950). This occurs along with a vast expansion of interaction with far flung (whether socially or literally), barely known others. The interdependence of distinct people and groups increases. This, rather than sameness, becomes the new basis for social order and the emergence of more differentiated identities and groups.

The size of the urban area and mobility is further supportive of knowing less about those encountered. Inferences were drawn not as they previously were from personal experiences with, or knowledge about, the other as a result of kinship and barter relations, but from roles performed, identifying symbols (uniforms, badges), places (schools, hospitals, singles bars) and from distanced, validating organizations such as banks and licensing boards.

Changes in scale involving the size and density of a population, the physical size of cities and the frequency of population movement also mattered. The city's tall, adjacent buildings with guarded entrances, windows restricted to expansive outward visibility and walled off inner offices separated insiders from outsiders. In parallel, bureaucratic walls inside add a symbolic visual and social distancing. The speeding up of urban time, whether from efficiency goals or improvements in communication and transportation, meant an increase in short, transitory interactions and superficial knowledge of others.

Simmel argued that the above factors combined to overstimulate the senses, resulting in changes to the culture and psychology of urban dwellers. A blasé attitude appears. Individuals may feel overwhelmed and become reserved, indifferent, defensive and suspicious of others and experience disconnection and alienation. This detachment and fragmentation are further amplified and transformed in the digital age, as physical proximity declines and the senses are offered ever more stimulation.

Modernization greatly reduced the ratio of direct, fulsome, first-hand experiences with others relative to the interactions in more unified, traditional settings. There is a vast increase in highly circumscribed, superficial, impersonal, particularistic, segmented and distant (whether socially or spatially) interactions. These snippets of contact can be with people who are basically strangers to the individual in the sense of knowing almost nothing personal about them, even if they are from the same social and ethnic group.

In the absence of direct, firsthand experiences more characteristic of traditional communities, the space and the need for role distance (Goffman 1963) expands. Social distance increases and the blanks are filled in with attendant stereotyping and typification (Schutz 1967) and with the ever-ready risks of error, deception and overgeneralization. Reading *into* is not the exclusive property of omitted information. With selective perception there may be reading *out* as well, particularly with stereotyped outsiders.

The rapidity of recent changes in information and communication since the mid-twentieth century contrasts with the several centuries required for the rise of modern urban society. In recent decades under computerization the speed has been even more pronounced. The meaning and specifics of anonymity and identifiability have changed significantly since the 1960s. However, naming who, or what, a person or an object or an event is, and who is responsible, remain fundamental to social order, even as new means for creating, hiding, distorting and validating these appear. This speaks directly to current ethical and policy issues involving anonymity and identifiability and AI.

Simmel observes, "Our modern life is based to a much larger extent than is usually realized upon the faith in the honesty of the other....modern life is a 'credit' economy in a much broader than a strictly economic sense." (Wolff 1950, p. 313). Ay, there's the rub! and the opportunity.

In contemporary society with the large increase in mediated interaction, how do we know with whom we are dealing and how do others know us? How do we know what, or who, might be behind and within, faceless, bureaucratic organizations --whether national or multi-national? Just what does “to know” mean? In what contexts, whether for reasons of morality, law or self-interest, are efforts undertaken to block, distort or reveal that knowledge?

Are we becoming a post-trust society, as well as a post-modern one? Given the rapidity of change, can rationality, accountability and reciprocity perform their vital social functions as risk, uncertainty and deception increasingly become the coin of the realm? Can the social bank meet its’ obligations? Do the changes that began with the enlightenment and industrialization mean that truth is ironically on its’ death noll? Are we becoming a controlling society that “allows no hermits” as D.H. Lawrence (1950) suggests? Or, as changes roil and churn through ever more intelligent inter- and intra- connected social systems, might we even be moving, as some observers claim, in a utopian direction given reconfigurations and the appearance of restorative functional alternatives?

For Simmel the picture is not fully bleak. Unlike the overly dramatic doomsayers or eternal optimists, he saw the contradictory and paradoxical consequences of modernity. The negative exists in parallel with, and is causally tied to, the positive factors of liberty, privacy and social mobility. His tempered, expansive process approach overflows with ambivalence, paradox, and irony, topics briefly considered in the conclusion.

I next turn to some ideas and basic concepts to help understand the social and cultural structures and processes of anonymity and identifiability. But first consider Table 1. What do these varied examples have in common, what separates them?

Table 1: The Omnipresence of Anonymity or Pseudonymity

Consider this small, diverse sample from a large collection of the most varied examples, all sharing elements of anonymity or pseudonymity.

Specific Cases	Common Forms
The pseudonymous essayist Marie-Luise Enckendorf aka Gertrude Kimel, Simmel’s wife	Secret ballots Ghost writers The confession booth Anonymous donors
Issur Danielovitch aka Kirk Douglas	Tombs of unknown soldiers Tests for sexually transmitted diseases
Susannah Callahan (2013) who experienced transient epileptic amnesia	Unsigned social research questionnaires Confessional booth Unsigned Graffiti
The Museum of Art Forgeries, Vienna	Voice distorters, Caller-Id blockers Foundlings (Moses in a basket) Deepfake AI communications
Thomas Baxter aka Whitey Bulger one of FBI’s most wanted criminals whose alias helped him avoid capture for 16 years (Fitzpatrick and Land 2012)	Bank robbers, costume ball/party guests wearing masks and disguises Cross-dressers
Norma McConery the Jane Doe of Roe v. Wade	Wanted posters (for persons, information, stolen goods) offering rewards, promising no questions asked

Specific Cases	Common Forms
"Anonymous" official --(aka Miles Taylor) who wrote New York Times articles about the Trump administration "Cookie Monster," FBI investigation into an international marketplace that sold millions of stolen identities (R. Legare, April 5, 2023, CBS News) The Autobiography of an Ex-Colored Man (classic account of passing for white) James Weldon Johnson	Legal fictions such as John Doe warrants, Hiding identities of court witnesses, even judges under some circumstances Shell Corporations False Flag operations Celebrities look alike Withheld or fallacious identities in sales, auctions Blind grading and refereeing Self-help and discussion groups on and off-line that promise anonymity Persons who fake their own deaths Dealing or purchasing contraband Spys and undercover police using aliases Go between in ransomware and kidnapping cases

Questions and Concepts

Two most welcome and very comprehensive books on the topic (Anon 2021 and DeGloma 2023) illustrate the range of materials under the canopy—from history to the present day and from social science data and analysis to literary and artistic treatments. In an age of narrow, disciplinary specialization this can educate the reader stuck with only one way of understanding and judging. The impossibility of grasping the field's richness within a single framework illustrates Whitehead's observation that every way of seeing is also a way of not seeing.

Yet more than appreciation of the varied harvest or relativism is required. Integration, specification and empirical illustration should be at the alter as well. In pursuit of those ends, this essay next pursues definitional and conceptual issues. It seeks to add to the sociology of knowledge and information as this involves facilitants, flows, restrictions and blockages of identity tags. It can be located within work on the sociology of information, secrecy and borders (Marx and Muschert 2007, 2009), but goes beyond it.

A major feature of Simmel's work is his offering abstract "social forms" that cut across varied interactions. Yet he strongly sought to prevent sociology from becoming the mere "...accumulation of empty concepts detached from concrete life that has brought about the 'doom of philosophy'" (Helle 2008" p. 4).

This inquiry is structured around 7 questions with an emphasis on anonymity. Philosopher and novelist Iris Murdoch observes that "*paying attention is a moral act.*" It is central to the other's dignity, to sustaining relationships and to democracy. In one of his last articles Goffman (1983, p.51) wrote: *Whenever we come in contact with another ...we find ourself with one central obligation: to render our behavior understandably relevant to what the other can come to perceive is going on*"

Given the omnipresence of anonymity and identifiability and their organic and logical ties, I had originally planned to devote equal time to them. Yet the abundance of examples of hiding and dissimulation for both individuals and organizations were more apparent and interesting than those for identifiability. That is likely because of the moral freighting associated with anonymity and pseudonymity implied by Murdoch and Goffman above. We largely expect identifiability and value facticity, honesty and authenticity.³

Far more harm is likely done by anonymity and its' forms than by their opposites, by deception than by

authenticity and by secrecy than openness. Beyond blocking access to what is hidden in the present, anonymity, along with secrecy, stops the continuity of biography and history that are so central to learning from and dealing with the past, let alone the future. The trust-intending normativity of honest identity revelations takes much less effort than the omissions, deception and lies so easily associated with being unnamed or adapting disengenuous identity tags.

To alter King Lear, the agents and subjects of anonymity are probably more sinful than those accurately identified who, in turn, are likely more sinned against than the anonymous. Identifiability and discoverability, while present within the article, are thus given less attention than anonymity and its construction.

In analyzing structures and processes with respect to attachable or detachable personal and social data, I consider some types of knowledge; the foundational variable of anonymity-identifiability; four broad types of anonymity; six basic forms within one of these -- the major category of *motivated anonymity*; roles performed; the parts and configurations of personal data that can potentially be connected to persons; and the ironic, paradoxical and contradictory factors that engulf the topic.

The following questions organize the sections in the remainder of the paper:

- 1) What is anonymity? How does it connect to forms of knowledge?
- 2) What is the variable anonymity/identifiability?
- 3) What are the major types of anonymity distinguished by their social context and the presence or absence of intentionality?
- 4) What are the major forms of personal and social data by which persons can be "known"?
- 5) How do different combinations of identity elements create varying degrees of anonymity and identifiability, and how do new technologies complicate these configurations?
- 6) What are the key social roles involved in the production, maintenance, and disruption of anonymity and identifiability?
- 7) What are the key ironies, paradoxes, and contradictions inherent in the dynamics of anonymity and identifiability in contemporary society?

B. "Yeah, But What is it Really?"

What's Your Name?

Puddin Tane...

Where do you live?

Down the lane.

What's your number?

Cucumber!

—Children's rhyme

How can we move beyond simplistic definitions of anonymity to a more nuanced understanding? The concept of "identity knowledge", a core concept considered in the next section can help with definitional problems. But first, some unpacking of the too inclusive term "knowledge" is needed. In a discussion about the conceptual elements of the global term "anonymity", a colleague with a science background grew impatient with my views and said, "yeah, but what is it really?" But that is the wrong question! Rather, we need to ask what are its different forms, what does it mean in different contexts to different role players and what conceptual elaborations can advance theoretical and empirical analysis?

In everyday usage anonymity involves taken for granted meanings that most often suggest the absence of a named, unique entity. It conveys the idea that some knowledge item is missing --most usually a legal name. Even then caution is needed. That name standing alone, unelaborated and

unsupported by other identifying tags, is woefully deficient, as is the related, common restriction only to “authorship” of things that are written.

Even if it is accurate, given how common many names are, name alone is rarely sufficient. Endless identity configurations are possible for a given name -- from the DNA of those (whether known or unknown) providing egg and sperm (to the conditions of their joining; linked to the gestation mother; to those having legal responsibility as parent(s); to those playing the social role of parents. More cross correlations introduce greater certainty, yet at the extremes certainty may be illusive.⁴ As well, it is easy to forget that results can be in error, faked, from a bad sample or simply unclear given degradation of the sample or complications involving identical twins.⁵

The dictionary is of little help here regarding contemporary usages whether involving the initial definition, synonyms, oronyms. Consider the root word. What is an ononym? According to the dictionary, ononym is – “a false or fictitious name, especially one used by a person so they can remain anonymous“. Logically the “an” prefix suggests that ononym would mean anti-nomified or unnamed, rather than falsely named. The defining characteristic of ononymity is that no valid name is offered at all. Yet the dictionary misleadingly shows it as a synonym of pseudonym. Non-identifiability is also defined as synonymous with ononymity. But identifiability is not listed as an opposite of ononymity, as it would seem logically it should be. Synonyms for ononymity are “lacking individuality, unique character, or distinction”. Mass society related characterizations such as unnoticed, unmemorable, or indistinctive are also offered. But none of these need imply unnamed.

I prefer identifiability and identified as the opposites, although named or nonymity work as well. The dictionary antonyms shown for ononymity are various terms for being noticed such as famous or a celebrity, with no implication regarding being unnamed or other missing personal information. Distinctiveness or notoriety, rather than the more logical opposite --being conventionally named, are offered as opposites. However, for some purposes noticed and unnoticed fit.

A text, graffiti, or vandalism encountered without a name are by definition anonymous. In contrast, pseudonymity differs in offering some information, if fallacious or restricted. The identifying (naming) de-anonymizes, although it can do this inaccurately or incompletely. This is distinct from the pure form.

The ambiguity of the term “knowledge” as it applies to the data that are available to label a person (or to “name” as broadly defined”) further suggests the need for better concepts. What should we call cases where nothing is available, or a specific aspect of interest is unavailable? “Knowledge-no knowledge” doesn’t work because to know that it isn’t there (absent, omitted) is, paradoxically a kind of knowledge. As well, having “knowledge” that is clearly wrong, or for which there is no available factual support, is also a kind of “knowledge”.

Perhaps to capture the ambiguity in the meaning of the term knowledge the *sociology of knowledge-ignorance* would be better. But that brings another problem regarding types of ignorance.

The absence of information and the presence of erroneous information are none-the-less forms of “knowledge”, if different from factual and analytic knowledge. To believe one has accurate knowledge when that isn’t the case certainly reflects ignorance, but it is “ignorant knowledge” as applied to a known question. That is distinct from irrational (illogical) knowledge relative to the accepted standards of logic. Or it might be nonrational where standards other than logic and fact apply (intuition, value-based judgments).

There are also the illusive “unknown unknowns” regarding questions we are not even aware of to ask, let alone be concerned with right and wrong answers. These need to be logically located. When Kant talks about the unknowability of the thing-in-itself apart from our naming it, he does not have “Deep Throat” of Watergate fame in mind. Anonymity need not remain inherently

unknowable (the Watergate source was revealed). We often see organizationally established sequences, detectives, volunteers, or merely accidents of revelation through which aspects of identifiability become known.

The unknowable universe includes empirical things that can not now be known given the limits of human cognition and perception. Lurking here is initial ignorance, but at least the possibility of an empirical answer. This answer involves a label or being identified in any of multiple ways as a result of a dynamic environment aided by technology. Current unknowns also include claims beyond the realm of conventional fact, whether of spirituality or aliens.

The depth of these conceptual snarls around the broad term knowledge can be illustrated by responses to the question, “what is 2 added to 2?” A variety of answers are possible --it can be unknown, correctly answered or wrongly answered as –“5” (erroneous or false knowledge, not non-knowledge!) If the question is interpreted to mean what happens when 2 is “added” to 2 -- meaning alongside of, then 22 would be valid/true knowledge. Even if the closest to an answer was in the form of “somewhere between 4 and 8” something more would be known and a lot ruled out. If there was no awareness of the existence of numbers it would not be envisioned as a question at all.

However the ignorance regarding what $2 + 2$ equals does not involve the *intention* to communicate/perform for an audience by withholding or distorting --as does the major type of motivated anonymity. Nor does it involve the type of ignorance found when anonymity is not perceived. Nor would it include the mixed form of ignorance seen with *known of*, but not *known about*, an entity.

Anonymity involves not applying an identifying label to a human entity (living or not) whatever the type or causes. The entity is “unlabeled” --or “unidentified”. These are better terms than “unnamed” as they give more space to include the vast universe of potential identifying or linking tags to the person beyond legal name and “authors” as only writers.

Such terms are further helpful in taking us beyond the common literary usage in which the anonymous “author” of a text is unnamed. Most examples of anonymity do not involve an “author” who writes. Rather they involve an unidentified “author” as the *agent responsible for an action*. In literary criticism a text takes on a life of its' own apart from its' author. But in everyday life, for an audience to know *who* “authored” or is responsible for an act (whether an unsigned love letter or a murder) can matter a great deal.

C. The Basic Variable of Anonymity and Identifiability: Opaque, Partial, Temporary and Changeable

*Oh, my name, it ain't nothin'
My age, it means less*

—Robert Zimmerman? Bob Dylan?



What is anonymity/identifiability? Why is conceptual elaboration necessary? What are the key dimensions of variation?

Much writing on anonymity unfortunately sees it as fixed, clear and as either present or absent, ignoring variation and degrees. The meaning is assumed to be self-evident, not going beyond taken for granted assumptions that a name or label is missing and from a message not an act. Yet consider the many highly varied, yet connected, cases of anonymity, pseudonymity and potential identifiability.

Their variety illustrates a conceptually impoverished, hodge podge of complicated, fluid, paradoxical issues. Rather than a lucid, binary presence or absence, being anonymous or identified is to varying degrees opaque, partial, temporary and changeable. To be “known” or “unknown” involves social relationships, truth and falsity, and varied audiences, contexts, settings and situations involving crisscrossing continua. It goes far beyond the identity of the message sender.

The twisting tendrils cry out for some inductive coherence and parsimonious ordering. What, if anything do the examples share? How to unite such a heterogeneous, collection? What does this difficulty say about the concept of anonymity beyond its’ generality and failure to keep up with the twenty-first century?

A partial resolution lies in viewing anonymity and identifiability as continua involving polar values of the broader variable of **identity knowledge about a person, group or organization as unknown or known**. To be anonymous or identified reflects an empirical outcome in the eyes of an audience and also in objective conditions. The outcome depends on contextual, setting, situational, and contingent factors both within, and beyond, human control and awareness.

There are degrees of anonymity and identifiability, varying from the potential absence, or minimal presence, of many kinds of personal information (“anon”) to its maximal presence at the other end

(the archaic “nonm” –named) with various diverging and connecting paths along the way including pseudonymity, pseudo-anonymity and pseudo-identifiability. This approach holds apart (at least initially) assumptions about the validity of what is available and what varied audiences conclude.

A visual depiction of the above points may be helpful. The topic needs to be seen in a wide context where additional aspects of identification are available beyond literal name. Considering synonyms and antonyms for, anonymity offers this context. Non-identifiability is synonymous with anonymity. Its logical opposite is identifiability (although anti-anonymity, non-anonymity or named also fit). A visual depiction:

Anonymity -----Identifiability

Pseudonym -----Mixed----Verifiable (“real” identity)

Complete or full anonymity or identifiability are impossible, given the amount of information that can potentially be attached to, or detached from, an individual in a dynamic world. Even in the case of extreme anonymity something may be uncontrollably released.

Anonymity, at a minimum, paradoxically communicates the primary anonymizing agent’s intention of being unknown, perhaps raising questions for the audience, --, “why is no information given and who it is?” Even at the identifiable end of the continuum, what can be known about another person is always limited, often has an expiration date and may be forgotten, given the vagaries of memory, distorting and segmenting (Schwartz 2000, Zerubavel 2004). It also comes with baggage such as serial numbers and hidden symbols. There is much slippage in communication and information may unintentionally be given off.

With respect to the identifiability part of the continuum the available data can vary in degrees from pseudo to accurate –suggesting another continuum (shown beneath the first line above). There are also issues regarding the quality and quantity of data with respect to where lines are drawn. How valid and reliable are the means of verification? Relativism forever hovers. Is it “real” from the perspective of outside observers who can agree on an objective, verifiable standard or real with respect to what various other actors believe to be true? At the extremes this continuum moves from fully pseudonymous (i.e., disingenuous) communication to “real”. But mixtures are common. The pseudonym may be interwoven with valid links to the person as clues (including given name, shared biographical elements --gender, age) or as “reachable”).

The pure pseudonym can be randomly generated such that no logical, substantive link to the person is available. It precludes a priori being tied to a person the way a correct birth date or DNA can. However, an index to the pseudonym can provide the link. In contrast, an unindexed, indecipherable pseudonym becomes the functional equivalent of anonymity in keeping the person unnamed.

In contrast, are situations where the audience is directly or indirectly informed that a pseudonym (“alias” in the original Greek usage) is present. This shares omission with the anonym, but is distinct because at least some information is offered and deception is often present. Both keep secret or restrict the full identity of the responsible agent, even as a pseudonymous label attached to a person, group or object moves it from being nameless.

Pseudonymous agents are not nameless (they are inaccurately or incompletely named).⁶ They are self-identifying agents, as is anyone offering their real name, but they are set apart by issues

of deception and omission.

The pseudonym may unintentionally offer clues. As Erving Goffman observed, data are often involuntarily communicated ("tells"). What is 'given off' may provide clues, in spite of an author's intention to conceal. What the basic elements of a form of communication require or offer may say something about the author re language, style, content and access or familiarity with the topic. Of course, those may be intentionally mimicked or altered in order to deceive.

Information is restricted, but there can be hints at who the person is. A middle name, nickname or abbreviation may be offered with no intention to deceive or deeply bury true identity. There is a valid, if indirect, connection to the individual. The information is true, if minimally communicative and perhaps intended as a playful giveaway or at least it is not intended to deceive. However, in presenting data there may be correspondence to actual identification elements, as when undercover officers are advised to use a first name close to their real name and claim backgrounds reflecting their actual experiences (place, skills, accent, speech).

The anonymized agent may be avoiding full bad faith by cluing the reader in that the offered name is not "real". That begs the eternal question arching over so much talk about the subject, what is "real?" Real as the conventional or appropriate name within a given culture? Real as what the person was named at birth on a birth certificate or became known as through a nickname? Real as a "realistic" label applied to a person who reflects the attributed word as in "fatty", "shorty"? Real as to the way the person sees themselves named? Real as the name a person offers to others and would like to be called or known as? Real can apply to all the potential naming tags.

An audience may be directly told, "names have been changed to protect the innocent". Or it may be self-evident as pseudonyms chosen in an obviously playful, wink-wink fashion. The type of setting may imply a pseudonym is present. Consider strippers with names such as Candy Barr or Blaze Star.

The referent may also be discernible or known to insiders, reversing the usual disclaimer to read, "any correspondence to real persons is not by coincidence." Personalized, often colorful, catchy) stickers on cars, pins and buttons, messages on clothing and vanity licence plates hint at aspects of identity. Consider a San Francisco radio listener's request for a dedication to accompany a song to be played, – "from Rice Paddy Daddy to Yokohama Mama" or an inscription carved within a heart shape on a bench, "Paco loves Pollita".

The latter examples nicely illustrate how meaning depends on the audience. Anyone hearing or seeing these knows the information is incomplete, but only a few locals in the neighborhood know the names behind the limited information. Over time, as Rice Paddy Daddy and Paco move on and away, the linkage ends, even as the names remain. Here we see two reoccurring processes - knowledge affected by what the audience brings and temporal disappearance (as well by the physical --if the carved initials are painted over or the bench is taken away).

Others names such as Merry Christmas, Dick Schmuck, Dr. Butcher, Dr. Love, Trade Marx may be taken as full pseudonyms, but are names of real persons reflecting chance, ignorance of a term's meanings in another cultural context, or a namer's sense of humor.

Finally let us note lesser forms: pseudo anonymity and pseudo identifyability. For the former an unknowing audience assumes that a communication or action is anonymous when it isn't. For the latter, an identifying agent (or audience) is manipulated into believing that the information they have is

valid (apart from a fake name, the reference to a person or organization may be falacious).

An example of pseudo anonymity is seen with hidden audio, visual and tracking devices (e.g., automated license plate readers) of which subjects are unaware. As well this can involve computer media that don't require any direct information from the user for posting or reading, but gather meta and other data via cookies. Until it became widely understood, phones with caller-id also were a form of pseudo-anonymity for the unsuspecting caller. This category is of particular interest in assessing the public's knowledge of the vulnerability of communication activities to remote monitoring. This is conditioned by what media operators reveal about their tracking potentials and privacy practices. The frequent obscurity of announcements about their practices can leave users to assume their anonymity is real, rather than pseudo.

Pseudo identifiability as a motivated form is present when a name linked to a previously unidentified person or action is deceptive. This involves efforts to cast blame elsewhere, defraud, frame or give persons undeserved credit. This is also present when an action caused independently of a human none-the-less is attributed to a person or the reverse, as in the example of a fake animal attack caused by a human (Section G).

Next we move from concepts above devoid of substance to some more empirically specific types.

D. Types of Anonymity

*The world's variety is infinite,
as is the scholar's penchant for
breaking it up into types.*

—Jorge Nuenue (pseudonom)

What are the major types of anonymity, distinguished by their social context and the presence or absence of intentionality?

Anonymity is ubiquitous in human environments, yet hardly of one piece. I will briefly suggest four broad forms, giving the most attention to *motivated anonymity*. The first three forms fit under the broad category of *de facto* or *inadvertent situational anonymity*.

A. Structural Anonymity reflects elements found in the natural or given environment that block or work against identity knowledge. The natural order brings limits, or hides altogether, identifying personal information. It makes identification of almost any sort unavailable to the unaided senses, absent interventions to alter the conditions. Lack of knowledge is a side effect of the unintentional structure of the environment, rather than the intentions of an agent. (although the failure to intervene and alter the situation, when that choice exists, can introduce intention through the back door). Consider visibility (walls, darkness, fog, blindness, geographical distance). The unknowable future resides is here. Past time fits here as well --prior experiences and events that occurred beyond the purview of the observer. Illiteracy (or otherwise not understanding a language), deafness and mental limitations can serve as structural blockages. Non-disclosed information about the body hidden by clothes or skin is further illustrative (scars, tattoos, having a pacemaker or one kidney). Erving Goffman (1963) gives many examples in discussing unseen stigmas.

Here we locate a reflective anonymity involving issues of scale or contrast. Anonymity can result from the presence of so many people in urban areas or in a large audience. In addition, audiences sharing attributes such as age, music or political preferences with others makes an individual less distinctive.

Determining or remembering, "who is it?" can be flooded or blasé out. In contrast, consider how noticeability changes when a trespasser enters a nudist colony's protective spaces, or when travelers abroad stand out to locals because of language, appearance, dress and even their way of walking. They are not anonymous (even as their more personal details are perhaps culturally alien to the locals). Identification as an

outsider is thrust upon them.⁷ The reflection found in such contexts brings *back-lit identifiability*. The person's distinctive attributes relative to the others present make them more visible.

B. Cultural Anonymity reflects everyday common sense, largely unreflected upon, taken for granted understandings of when it is unnecessary or even inappropriate to ask or offer personal information with little emotional resonance. Manners, etiquette and disattending rituals fit here, as well the protective retort-- to one who might want to know, "you don't want to know". Goffman's (1963) calls our attention to inattention and to group settings of *unfocused co-presence* (being around others but not in direct interaction with them, is not likely to involve much sharing), Purchasers of food at a market do not usually offer personal information, nor do riders of the subway usually exchange such information. Indeed, doing so would seem strange in the face of the mutual anonymity expected for the setting.

C. Uncapacious Anonymity involves persons such as foundlings, very young children lacking language or those with nonverbal autism, transient epileptic amensiacs and those with other dissociative identity disorders who are unwillingly anonymous to themselves and to others. Note the case of man who suffering from dissociative fugue came to be called "Benjamin Kyle" He was found semi-conscious in a dumpster. His true identity is a mystery in spite of many efforts to determine it. (Forsyth, 2010). In such cases where self-knowledge is sought, subjects may seek de-anonymization even as they produce their own anonymization.

As suggested, the three types above do not, in general, show strong motivation, prior thought, strategy, planning --nor much emotion. The deep social or ethical issues of the next type are less likely to be present.

D. Motivated Anonymity involves goal directed, conscious, intentional performances undertaken for strategic reasons with a potential audience in mind. These move from just being something existing in an environment (as with the prior categories above), to being "a matter of performative accomplishment" (DeGloma 2023, p. 5). What are the primary motivations for individuals and organizations to seek anonymity? How do motivations shape the forms anonymity takes?

Analysts of anonymity have offered different ways of categorizing this predominant form. Marx (2017, 1999) glides over the issue as if it was self-evident, with anonymity defined by its contrast with identifiability, but without overarching categories. Wallace (1999) suggests organizing the material around three broad goals: furthering actions by the anonymous; protecting the anonymous from other's actions; and "anonymity for the sake of an [organizational] process". The Anon Collective (2021) also offers three forms --delight (fun and recreation), assaults and weapons. DeGloma (2023) identifies four types: protective anonymity; subversive anonymity (serves as a weapon); social systems anonymity which looks beyond specific motives as with the first two, to the organizational locations for diverse motives; and the anonymity of (largely denigrative, generalized) types and categories of person.

The motive/goals question, "why do they do it?" is central to the above efforts. Along with two related questions: "why use this means rather than another one?" and "what is the broader standard or value system which justifies use of the tactic?" The researchers above identify similar ideal types and settings and illustrate these with very diverse empirical content. These efforts overlap, (all include protection) but also different levels (motives, goals, locations, structures). They touch most, although not all parts of the elephant.

In drawing from, and expanding on these, I identify 6 basic types of motivated anonymity. These are not mutually exclusive and can be systematically linked in various ways (e.g., anonymity as instrumental in carrying out an initial act and then subsequently for protection from accountability, or an anonymous charitable act can feed a positive self-image and also shield the giver from other solicitations).

1) *Directly Instrumental:*

This category answers the question, “why was this means chosen?” –because anonymity or pseudonymity are necessary for the end thought. Those who change their name or do not acknowledge their gender, lifestyle, politics or racial and religious background may seek to avoid adverse typification and discrimination. Alterations can permit access to things otherwise denied such as employment, housing and publishing. In a last laugh, blacklisted screenwriter Dalton Trumbo in writing “The Front” used the names of other screen writers.⁸ Gaining access and improving their chances was also the case for many movie stars from earlier generations who changed obvious “foreign” names such as Issur Danielovitch (Kirk Douglas) Margarita Carmen Cansino (Rita Hayworth -whose physical appearance was in addition altered to make her appear less Hispanic).

As well there are those who disingenuously claim a background that would qualify them for favored consideration because of affirmative action or who simply find another identity more comfortable or one that helps them in their work. The claims of non-veterans to be veterans or fraudulent claims to be of lower caste in India are further examples. Or note the white leader of an NAACP chapter who claimed she was black or jazz musician Mezz Mezzro who “crossed over” (Wald 2000). This cuts to the very atomic, nano-center of identity and to how chosen vs. indelibly inscribed identities are viewed.

Further examples include fugitives; identity theft; a skilled artist who paints a fake Van Gogh and signs that artist’s name; or a restaurant review critic who uses a pseudonym in making a reservation. The image below suggests a form of coerced/mandatory, “voluntary”, secondary anonymity.

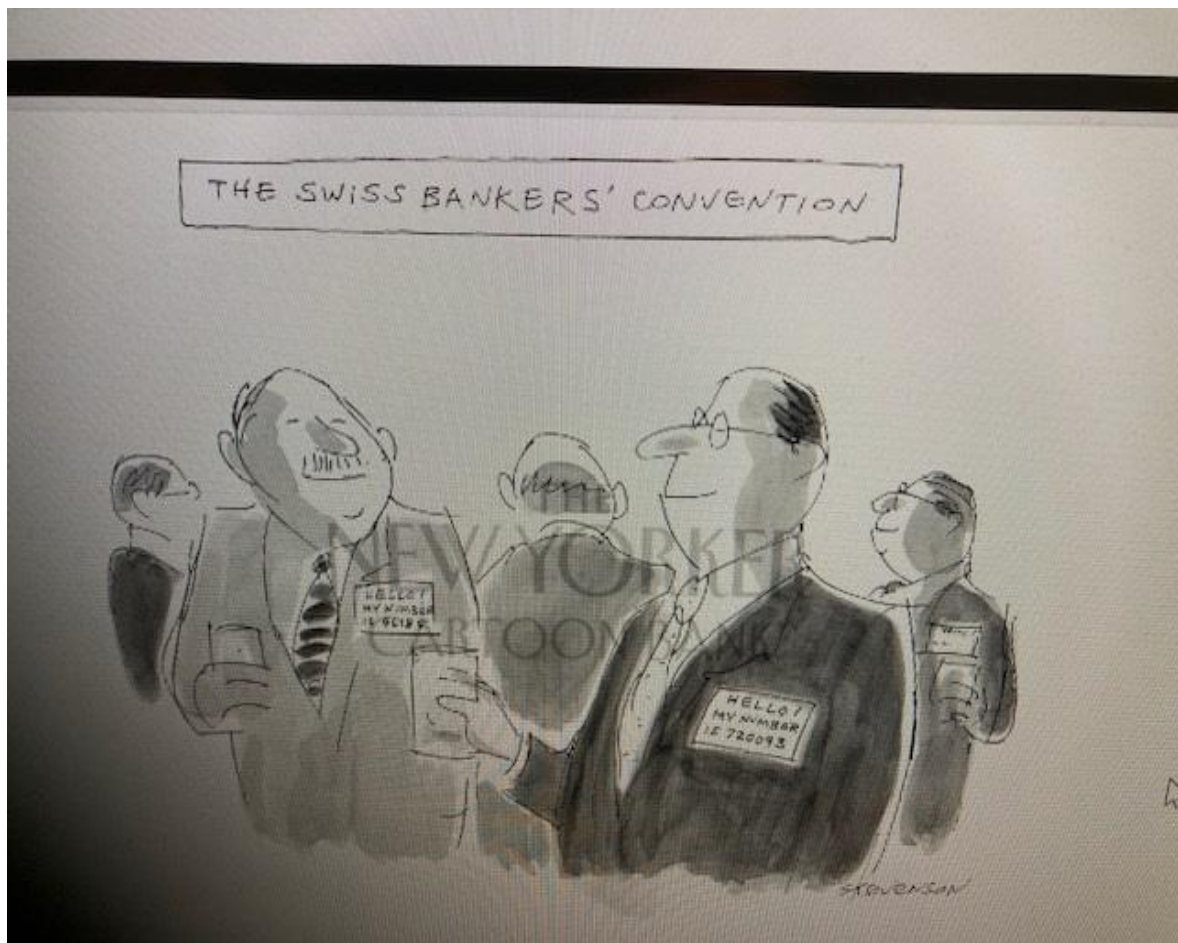


Longmire

“if you want to live then you’ll forget our faces“.

In other settings pseudonymous identity distortion, while not inherent to the activity, can facilitate it and make it easier to carry out. Consider the 1980 Elizabeth Stewart Gardner Museum where thieves, disguised as police, stole paintings worth \$200 million (Boser 2010).

Instrumentality characterizes both individuals and organizations, although not always in the same way.



2) *Organizational Incentives and Protections:*

Organizations may use secret, disingenuous forms of identity to hide their deeds (shell companies for money laundering or intelligence, false flag operations using an opponent's uniforms and weapons to carry out an attack). Organizations may incentivize anonymity for outsiders who provide information or services, permitting them to remain anonymous.

As an inducement, anonymity, beyond being promised, may be accompanied by rewards (or at least no punishment). Amnesty may be offered to persons who self-report and agree to cease behavior of concern to the organization or turn in contraband. Insurance companies and cyber-sleuths may act as intermediaries in negotiation with anonymous thieves and hackers for the return of stolen property or to unlock encrypted data. The Federal Witness Protection Program (Earley 2002) offers a pseudonymous new life. Court room witnesses sometimes testify behind a shield and/or with voice and face distortions. The identity of judges in some national security cases is withheld and historically executioners were hooded in many places.

Research organizations seeking valid results promise to destroy links to personal information or not even to request it. Public health agencies want individuals to provide data regarding infectious diseases and during epidemics. Medical testing for pregnancy and sexually transmitted diseases and for patient records more broadly there are well developed confidentiality systems. Therapists, lawyers, clergy (e.g., the

Catholic church's confessional booth) have restrictions as well. In protecting identity tags self-help organizations and discussion groups want to protect fragile identities by offering safe places to share and experiment.

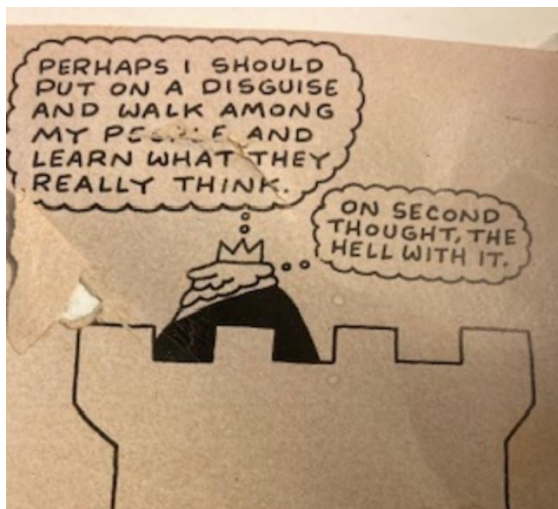
A different organizational aspect is seen in publicly announced procedures regarding how information received or generated internally is protected.

3) *Organizational Processes:*

Organizations present self-images just as people do. Anonymity here is intended to prevent inappropriate pressure and to produce outcomes perceived to be fair, impartial and legitimate. Publicizing information protection procedures sends a symbolic message and is intended to inspire the trust and confidence of constituencies and workers. Organizations are likely to function better when valid information flows freely up, down and across. Anonymity may be offered and even required (voting, judging, hotlines, internal audits and various procedures for confidentiality and record destruction).

4) *Disingenuous Messaging:*

Publicity, propaganda mis- and disinformation, half-truths, rumors and gossip can be dishonestly attributed to an authentic organization or known person such as a politician or offered anonymously or pseudonymously. Misinformation is strategically used along with the withholding and sculpting of information. The internet, deepfakes (AI aided digital clones or distortions of "real" people and even depictions of the dead) have greatly expanded fabricated offerings. Revelation of the true source and nature of action defeats the purpose. The low cost and ease of such messaging and the lag in the appearance of discovery tools to identify it, alongside of international actors trying to influence domestic opinion, account for the growth, and even flooding, of the form. Innes and Dawson (2020) and Innes (2022) note how the accessibility of social media and varied messages targeted for different audiences have changed the environment relative to the more traditional unitary messaging of mis- and disinformation.⁹ Consider the infamous 2016 "Pizzagate" case or a doctored video purportedly showing Nancy Pelosi to be drunk.



Barsotti

The King as his own secret agent, but then ...

5) *Strategic Information:*

In writing about the individual's capacity to "conceal information" Goffman (1959) identifies *strategic secrets*. Information withholding, whether viewed as righteous, pathological or neutral, is inherent to interaction. For an adversary to have one's identity, motives, goals, resources, plans, allies, networks and more, be known is advantageous. Secrecy, deception and the surprise that accompanies them on discovery (should it occur) are central.¹⁰

With many of the strategic forms, interaction (rather than the absence or avoidance of interaction) with the other, is part of the situation. It is often symmetrical as with games, economic, bargaining and negotiating exchanges. In elite auctions or contract negotiations, one, or both parties may wish to remain unknown to the other. But information rules are often asymmetrical, reflective of power (and knowledge as power) differences. A developer using a fake name may quietly purchase property in preparation for a secretly planned development. Shell organizations may (beyond white collar crimes) be used to gather a rival's information.

6) *Protection or Enhancement of Self-Image:*

This motivation contrasts with the instrumental form in which identity alterations can permit access to things otherwise denied such as employment, housing and publishing. It differs from the other examples above because feelings are the driving force, not material or other gains. This type is internal and passive and seeks withdrawal from certain aspects of interaction, rather than engagement. Tom DeLoma (2023, Ch. 5) in identifying the labeler and the labeled offers a rich accounting of typifications that can degenerate. In such situations the individual avoids negative feelings that would result from the exposure of discrediting characteristics, experiences or connections. This form includes nonvisible, stigmatizing elements such as being an ex-felon, a member of a racial or religious minority, the relative of an infamous person or having a terminal illness. It can also apply to being adopted or divorced and aspects of gender and sexuality.

A positive sense of self can be maintained from holding back on such factors without worrying about how the other would respond. The withholding is not to avoid culpability, reciprocity or sanctioning, although it can also be instrumental in avoiding discrimination. Here the emphasis is on protecting the inner person. Withholding shields a vulnerable self from feelings of shame, embarrassment, responsibility, guilt, painful reminders or anticipated snubs, rude remarks, and from having to engage in conversation (whether to explain, distance oneself or hear sympathy –feigned or genuine). Perhaps well intentioned, but misguided exemptions such as, "but you are different" can also be avoided with non-disclosure.

The positive self-image sustained from withholding information about benevolent deeds, whether involving anonymous charitable donations or acting as a guardian angel also fits here. To be identified as the source would undercut the purity of the personal goal --the idea that virtue should be its own reward. Another example is in the children or close relatives of well known persons (often in politics or entertainment) who use a pseudonym in their profession in order to feel that their achievements are based on their own efforts).

E. Roles

We've got to learn to love appearances.

—Leonard Cohen

What are the key social roles involved in the production, maintenance, and disruption of anonymity and identifiability? These activities involve interpersonal interaction (or at least actions taken with other 's anticipated responses in mind). Actors are guided by rules and expectations of a given institutional and organizational setting (as in blind judging, auctions and games), or they can be free-lancers opportunistically playing their best shot, as with unsigned love letters, dirty tricks propagandists, fraudsters or black mailers. Here the outside analyst sees a communications network, even if the audience is unaware of it. The "role", if that it be, of the audience as message recipient is passive, at least initially.

Can there be anonymity if there is no interaction and only the secreted anonymizing agent is aware, not the audience? On his uninhabited island Robinson Crusoe had no one to be anonymous to, he was not a role player in a performance!¹¹ He might feel lonely or anonymous in being unseen given the circumstances, but he did not produce an act of anonymization.¹² What he experienced is different from feeling anonymous in a large crowd, whether from blending in or not being personally identified.

In its full social sense, the presence of anonymity must involve at least two role players –the person or group responsible for the initial actions and the audience. When the audience for an anonymous offering is unaware of it, there can be no social anonymity. Consider potential frauds cast upon the waters with no takers. The situation shares something with a tree falling in the forest when no one is there to hear it. In the Crusoe case there is no one to perform for.

Role players are involved in actions of connection and disconnection –of production and destruction. These acts help us meet "the first condition of humans ... to know with whom one has to deal" (Simmel 1950, p. 307). The same person may play several roles or they may be distinct. Among the major roles are:

primary anonymizing agent:--fails to add, prevents from attachment, shields or disconnects identifying information from the subject (whether person, organization or action/event). The agent self anonymizes (and is both the agent and the subject of the action). Consider a bank robber wearing a mask or a person filling out an unsigned questionnaire).

secondary anonymizing agent: --takes action to anonymize someone or something else –for example a researcher throwing away the names of subjects in an experiment (often after numerically pseudonymizing them).

pseudonymizing agent --attaches invalid or incomplete identifying information to a person or organization or action/event. Again, this may be primary or secondary depending on whether the agent is also the subject or another person is.

authorizing agent –in an organizational context the responsible entity who "authorizes" the activity. For example, review committees for covert police and intelligence actions. With rogue actors (euphemistically called "cowboys" in some settings), the authorization may occur independently of formal channels, although often with a low visibility, unrecorded wink to provide plausible deniability.

implementing (production) agent --given a division of labor, those who actually construct or facilitate the event. This can involve:

direct agents --a ghost writer, creator of a faked or forged document or builders of a Potemkin Village, unknown restorers of a painting.

third party intermediary anonymizing and pseudonymized agents --serve as opaque or shielding links between the subjects (who initially may or may not be identified, whether accurately or not to the third party agent) and the other party(ies) to a transaction (charitable donation, incognito court witsnesse, go-betweens in kidnapping and ransomware cases).

unwitting agents --passively and unknowingly manipulated into furthering the actions of the anonymizing agent. For example, in the Abscam corruption case the New Jersey mayor who was manipulated by an informant to draw Congressmen into an FBI sting (Caplan, 1983, Greene 2013).

communicating or publicizing agent shares data from an anonymous source. This may be done by a whistle blower (whether identified or not) directly publishing his or her information or, as with Deep Throat in Watergate, through intermediaries (Woodward and Bernstein 1974). The goal is to enter it into the appropriate media. Today this involves the hope for retweeting via social media and is an increasingly important propaganda tool.

identifying (de-anonymizing) agent -- searches for/attaches data linkable to a person or an organization believed to have characteristics of interest to the agent, --whether as a unique individual or as a member of a category. The action maybe primary if done by the subject as with adoptees searching for birth parents, or secondary as with searches to identify a nom de plume or spies.

audience/recipient for anonymizing or pseudonymizing agent's communications and actions --the individual, group, organization or mass public for what is/isn't communicated. This is the intended target the agent has in mind --it may involve specific individuals or organizations (e.g., a rival or an insurance company) or more general categories such as police or voters.

Construction and Deconstruction

The agents responsible for anonmized communication may directly target an audience or simply cast the message to the winds. The audience in turn may be aware or unaware of the absence, or disguise of authorship (as broadly defined). If aware, it may or may not care. In general, the audience role is passive (at least initially) than the active roles above.¹³

The effort to block or aide control via identification tags can involve several social engineering strategies (Marx 2015). Players, particularly in conflictful relations act to strengthen their abilities and to weaken those of an opponent. Both seek prevention whether to stop a linkage or to insure it cannot be disconnected or that remnants of identification remain

These emphasize insulation or exposure via visibility (Coser 1961), depending on the role the agent plays --anonymizer or identifier. Efforts to hide, disguise or discover an identity tag will involve either, or both, attention to the subject (or object) of the tagging or to the audience. The construction could involve erasure, insulation, exclusion, failing to tag or falsifying tags, regarding the subject. It can also involve weakening or blocking an identifying agent's perceptive and/or cognitive abilities (via a mask or encryption). The deconstruction of this by the identifying agent involves -- strengthening perception and

cognition (e.g., by microscopic and tools or by predicative models) and preventing or weakening the ability to hide or change.

The anonymizing agent may intentionally block or inhibit the perceptive and senses capabilities of a subject or audience (masks, darkness, barriers, sound). This can involve changing broad environmental conditions such as turning lights out or broadcasting loud sounds, as well as consider a cloak placed over a kidnap victim or over a journalist enroute to interviewing a wanted person (who may also be masked). The mask of the tricker treater or costume baller, while different in permitting the actor to see out, share with the former the construction of anonymity. The de-anonymizing agent may seek to alter such conditions through technologies that enhance the senses.

Individuals and Social Systems as Role Players

Much of the popular “who” talk about the topic implies questions regarding the individual rather than organizations. It seeks to answer the question, “who is it?” (a question well known to those of a certain age who watched Sesame St.). For example, who “really” is D.B. Cooper the parachuting hijacker or the Uni-bomber? In such cases, there is often a newsworthy event presumed to be caused by an unidentified individual agent. Less attention is given to the hidden identities of anonymizing agents and the unseen processes within organizations. The distinction between *individual* and *social system anonymity-identifiability* matters.

In five case studies DeGloma (2023) offers a rich analysis of how institutions and bureaucratic organizations can support anonymity using “cover representations”. While bureaucratic agents directly acting with end users may be partially identified (numbers, names, uniforms) they are to just “follow the rules”. They are organizationally interchangeable with any other person in the role. They, and the multiplicity of other role players far above and beyond them in time and place, are often within a broader, impenetrable thicket. Causation can be layered, deep and hidden. The New Yorker cartoon below satirizes a reverse case in which actors seek, rather than run from, responsibility --the leaders want credit instead of cover.

Whatever the challenges of figuring out the identity of the anonymous individual author/agent, determining this for organizations is even harder. Consider the question of who caused (“authored”) multi-faceted events such as a building or bridge collapse let alone a financial crisis or the current housing or health crisis vs. a hit and run driver.

Discovery (de-anonymization) agents have a much more difficult time determining, “who is the “guy behind the guy?” Who pulls their chain and the chain behind them?” ad infinitum? Where does the buck stop? Who is guiding the ship? Responsibility is obscured by one-way rotating, interweaving mirrors, the past, distance, and regional, national and international alliances and networks. Hidden hands thrive. The planned and unplanned fog can hide the causes and responsible agents for major problems. Within the system, the opaqueness and diffusion of responsibility can offer a free get out of jail card. Brother Kafka – we hear you and wish we could help.

In such settings, DeGloma (2023, p. 108) put it well, “...decisions appear to be made by an anonymous no one that holds great power without being a defined and accountable who.” Yet people act not systems! Our language is impoverished when it comes to describing the organizational role played by agents with unknown identities responsible for many social systems’ outcomes relative to the unknown identities of individual agents. There is a need go beyond the *false category consciousness* which draws

attention to the singular, non-organizational, non-institutional cases of individual identity to social systems responsibility



(Lizzy Itzkowitz, New Yorker)

Next we turn to the materials that anonymizing and pseudonymizing agents work with –the stuff of identity. What are the major types of attachable personal and social tags?

F. The Stuff of Anonymity-Identifiability

*How do I know you?
Let me count the ways.
—E.B. Greening*

How can the vast array of elements by which a person could be “known” whether uniquely, or simply as a member of a category, be organized? From the infinite universe of things that might be known and potentially attached to, or detached from, an identity, what are the major kinds of identifying elements?

Questions of identity and identification have not been ignored --Goffman (1963), Caplan and Torpey 2001), Marx (2017) and Brensinger and Eyal (2021) are among many who have pondered types of personal and social identification. There is great variation over time and across contexts with respect to

just what and how much is known about the embodied individual tagged with a *unique core identity* who is distinct from, and not interchangeable with, any other person and whose salient identity tags remain immutable enough to permit continuing identification (Marx 2017, p. 88).

Goffman (1963, p. 58) notes "*personal identity*" involves being known by others as a "unique" person as a result of the attachment of a "positive mark" or "identity peg" (name, physical appearance -face or body type, kinship location or a distinctive style) to their "...unique combination of life history items." The juxtaposition of these markers with a set of life history/experiences not "found to hold, as a combination, for any other person in the world)" differentiates the person from any other. This is captured in the song, "Only You (and You Alone)". For Goffman (1963: 63-64) *social identity* refers to groups or organizations which one is a member of, or at least has some labeling connection to. It can also apply to relationships such as between friends or family members.

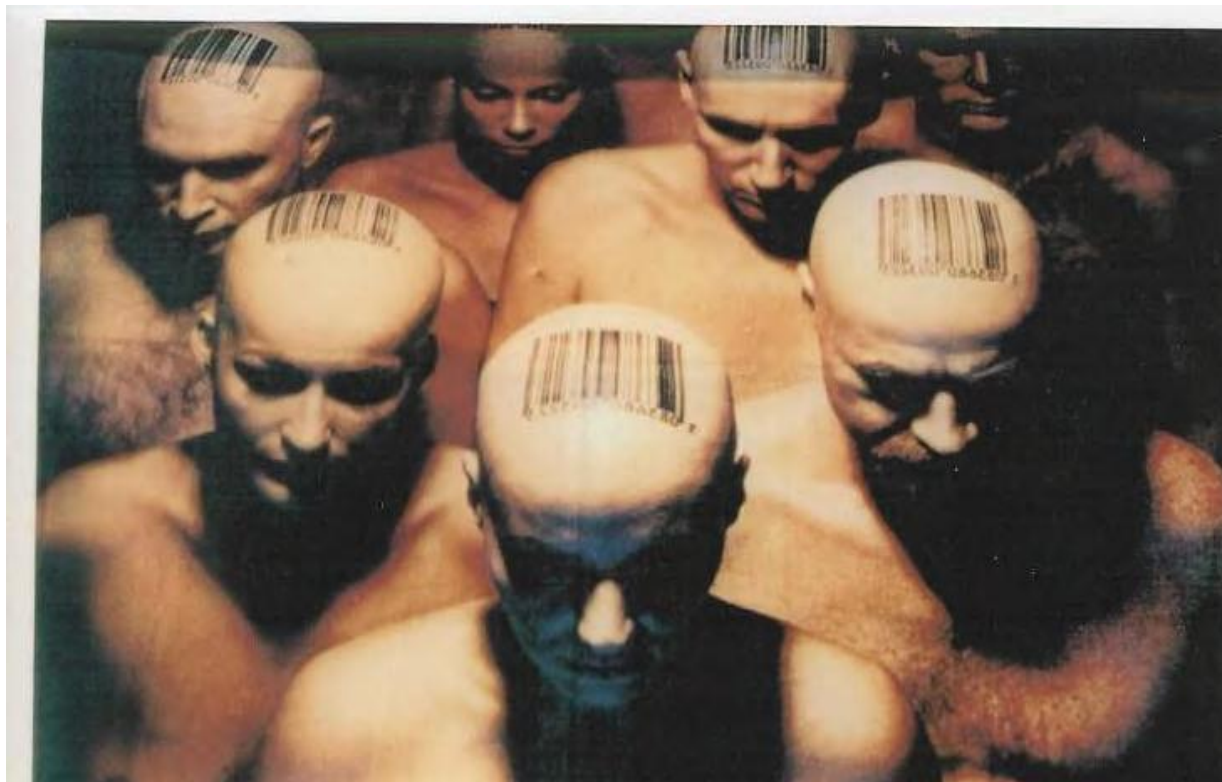
Identity knowledge can be broadened beyond Goffman's distinctions above to tags that are neither social, nor unique to the person. Wallace (1999 p. 23) very usefully broadens the topic beyond its common association only with a person's name. For her an anonymous person is one known (really better -- remains unknown) only through, "...a trait or traits which are not coordinatable with other traits such as to enable identification of the person as a whole." Traits connectable to the person can be located within various "orders" such as kinship, occupation, initial language, car owner and driver ad nauseum. Thus, anonymity is made specific by being unlinked to an "order" or category sharing the attribute. Here it is clearly a type of ignorance just as attachment to the person reflects a kind of knowledge (apart from whether or not it is factual). Anonymizing agents seek to disconnect (or prevent from connection) the traits a person "has" or might have from their identification. Discovery agents in the identification business, do the reverse.

In Marx (1999 and expanded in 2017), I suggested concepts to guide thinking about components of a person's core and unique identity, as well as personal (sensitive and intimate) and social identities. These involved types of descriptive information connectable to the individual --biometrics (DNA, age, gender at birth), reachability (geographic and electronic-cyber), temporal, networks and relationships, objects (ownership, possession), behavioral, beliefs, measurement characterizations, media references and reputation. Commercial search services (TruthFinder, InstantCheckmate, Spokeo) dredge through hundreds of databases using an astounding array of descriptive categories. Potential identifying tags can be contrasted using 19 cross cutting dimensions such as whether a tag endures or can be changed. (Marx, 2017 Ch. 4),

The seven questions in Table 1 offer a way of categorizing the infinite universe of potentially revealable, connectable and distortable elements of identity and personhood. Anonymity and identifiability are ultimately about the control of information – the 'stuff' that can be linked (as a naming act) to a "person" (whether embodied, facsimile or invented). Actions on the basis of a question may be taken without the subject's awareness, agreement, although they may be a prominent basis for self-identity. The emphasis is on more easily measurable and observable factors, rather than deep personality variables. Those are no less important, but journeys begin with initial steps. Facticity and fairness are issues always circling above the questions.

Table 1 Personal and Social Identity Tags

<i>the WHO question</i> (including biography/life experience, eligibility or entitlement question. Who is this person?
<i>the WHO ELSE question</i> (relationships, networks). Who is this person connected with?
<i>the WHERE question</i> . Where is this person geographically and how can she/he be “reached”?
<i>the TIMING question</i> . When does or (has) a behavior of interest occur(ed), singly or multiply and with what sequencing -- episodically or continually?
<i>The WHOSE IS IT, WHO MADE IT, WHO USED IT question</i> . (objects such as a computer, phone or weapon --overlaps the causal question <i>who did it?</i>) ¹⁴
<i>the COMPETENCE-SKILLS, ACTIVITY, STYLE, PATTERN question</i> . How does the person behave?
<i>the “REAL” PERSON, SELF-IMAGE question</i> . What does the person believe and feel (both performed and inner or off/ backstage)?
<i>the STATUS, MORALITY, REPUTATION, MASS MEDIA AND EVEN GOSSIP AND RUMOR questions</i> . What descriptions and beliefs are used to characterize the person?



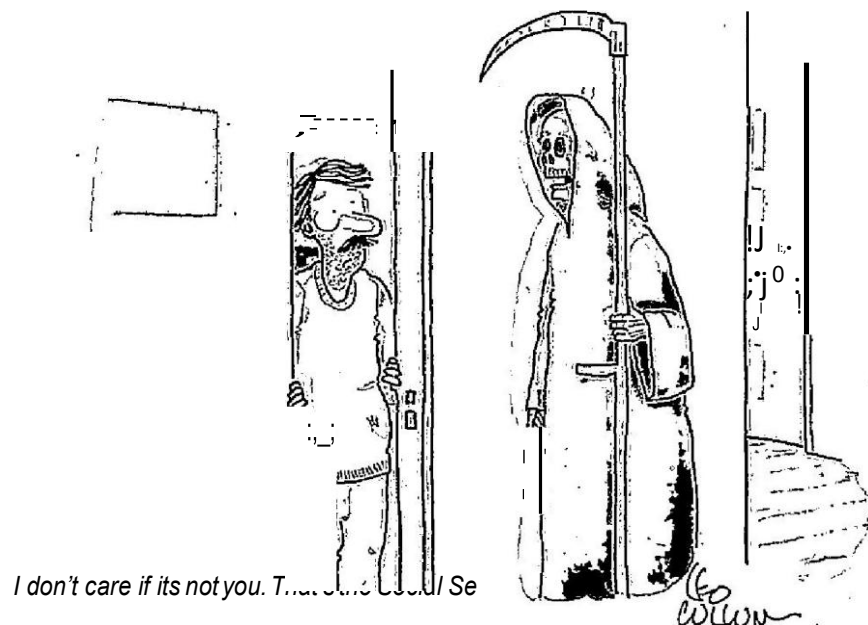
Advertisement for a Belgian youth focused radio station

In thinking about taggable items, several images come to mind. Like Lego toy structures, identity pieces can be attached to, or detached from, a person in endless configurations. Or better, imagine a gigantic paint-by-numbers canvas in the outline of a person. For each relevant item a splash of identity paint (or a small sticky tag) is added. Like a magnet, a breeder tag may attract related items. The linking tags stick to the outline of the person like cotton candy that endures (Goffman 1963). As more tags are added, the image of the person becomes ever fuller, if always incomplete. Or, with a magnets' reverse polarization --

elements may be pushed away. The paint can be scrubbed off, the sticky tags removed or fall off, memory may bleach out details.

The fluidity of many identity labels parallel Transformer toys whose basic elements can be converted to new forms. Like the toys, anonymity and identifiability are often *temporary and changeable*, with varying degrees of *continuity* and *opacity*.

Finally, while space prevents a full discussion, brief mention of further questions the elaborations above raise is appropriate. Circling the enumeration of countless identification elements is the issue of what does it mean to “identify” a person or for a person to be “unidentified”? How does identification relate to identity and to personhood? Does the individual’s “personhood” go beyond the identity? Which elements are the most important and why? How does this vary by setting and culture? What are the settings, correlates and consequences of the gaps and fits regarding how individuals view themselves, as against how others view them? As Chico Marx said in the film *Duck Soup*, “Are you going to believe me or believe your own eyes?” Per Garfinkle (1967) what are the everyday rules for “making do” that specialists and the average person use when there are mismatches?



G. Configurations of Identity Elements

What this taught me was that contrary to what I'd believed, a passport is not a document that tells us who we are but a document that shows what other people think of us.

—Orhan Pamuk

How can the ways by which a person could be “known” whether uniquely, or simply as a member of a category, be organized? How do identity tags combine to create varying degrees and types of anonymity and identifiability and how do new technologies complicate these configurations?

The word facsimile derives from the Latin for *fax simile*, “to make alike.” Alike sure, but *not* exactly the same. With contemporary technologies and cultural themes, we have become a *fac simile society* of identities accompanied by the new meme *sus* and spoiler alerts to be aware.

Consider a video involving a representation of a “person” walking and talking (we know the visual image *isn’t* the person in the literal embodied sense, but that awareness is easily suspended). It can be “real” as judged by other standards (or frames). It might be “real” in that it, to varying degrees, reflects an actual person (living or who had lived). In the closest fit between that actual person and the video the technology simply recorded or “captured” the activity and appearance (even though what is shown involves choices built into the technology or adjusted such as for lighting or sound quality).

If real in that sense, it might or might not be “real” in reflecting what the person actually feels and believes. Or is it “real” meaning an authentic representation of what is expected in that activity or typification. Consider a standard Parisian French accent that sounds accurate, whether or not this involves a “real” French-born (geographically? and/or of French family ancestry? or French as 1st language?) person or a simulated voice is heard. Is it an English stage actor “acting” as if he or she “were” able to speak French rather than memorizing and spouting back, or maybe the actor “really” can speak unaccented French rather than having a good ear for sound reproduction.

In a pure case the camera is just “allowed” to record with no editing or emendations --“accurately” reflecting what the person presents/offers --face, gender, size, color, age, voice, gait and some distinctive trait such as twisting one’s hair or a unique speech pattern, blissfully unaware of the impacts of camera design and angle etc. As suggested it could be a real person “acting” (as behaving) to be, or depict, whatever is happening. Or it could be contrived in multiple other ways. Acting is a type of role performance. *While all pretending is acting, all acting is not pretending.*

Actions consistent with the person’s usual identity, behavior and unfiltered beliefs and feelings contrasts with acting/performing as inauthentic faking, hiding and pretending. The words invite ambiguity. To make an arson fire appear to be naturally caused involves an act in which the actor performs the role of arsonist, yet passively and only indirectly performs for the audience.

That brings us to questions regarding the continuity and authenticity of the entangled pieces of the body, behavior and associated identity items. A major factor here is the dynamic “degree of biographical mutability” (Brensinger and Eyal 2021) across situations and time, with major changes enabled by contemporary technology making many forms of identity tag ever easier to change.

Is it a “real name” --real as in known in the culture like the name George? Or it is like Elon Musk’s child called X (not a common name in the culture, but in the child’s case not anonymity or pseudonymity). It is a real name because he was legally labeled that. So, we have a body and a real name within that small social system that knows and honors it (it would never work as a password, nor I imagine as a name for a social security number). Or is it a name (whether known or unknown within the relevant culture) that is pseudonymously used for a person that doesn’t exist --as with Farmer John’s food products? DeGloma (2023) That pseudo” farmer” stands in contrast to my favorite authentically named “Mama Lil’s Peppers” (after the “real” person Lillian Lev).

We can also consider the fluidity of the attachable and detachable elements above --whether physical/biological elements, associations, affiliations, experiences or certification. How easy or difficult is it to locate or hide, create, discover, validate and change identity tags? Can tags be reversed and can that be hidden? When it is easy, as it now is, we see the explosion of pseudonymity. What are the rules and expectations governing identification tags in varied contexts and cultures?

In the 1939 film “The Wizard of Oz” the Scarecrow plaintively sings, “if I only had a brain”, while fellow traveler the Tin Man wishes for a heart. Born a century later, their wishes could become

reality. The continuities tied to the body and identity are ever more challenged as the modern person's freedom to choose is joined with the changes offered by technology and medicine.

We need not go full cyborg or bionic person to note the implications of implants, hormones and other drugs and chemicals, body sculpting and contouring, natural and synthetic body parts (whether external or internal), surgery (facial, breasts, buttocks, genitalia, height, weight, muscle tone, hair, eyesight for the blind, limbs) that alter the body. Imagine the identity and accountability challenges to answering "who is that?" when amalgams emerge with mechanical parts and those from multiple humans. This takes monozygotic twins whose bodies are joined to a new level.

Consider just the implications for the expectation of facial recognition expressed in popular terms such as, "that's her", or "I'd know that face anywhere". Recent developments may introduce new uncertainty about the face's time immemorial role as it ties to personal identification, --at least in extreme cases. More than 50 *total face replacements* have been done in recent years (Howard 2024).

Note also the array of self-improvement behavioral techniques from all variety of psychotherapy to speech and posture therapy to enhancements for athletic performance to the professional spy's suitcase of tricks and specialized schools. These alterations in the person stand apart from changes in all bodies as a result of aging, but even there, anti-aging products promise change (or to halt it and even claim to go back toward youth). Then there are of course the temporary changes wrought by cosmetics and prosthetics regarding hair, eye and skin color, body size, gender appearance, tattoo appearance and much more.

The *temporary* changes in appearance that film makeup artists can produce in actors regarding body size, face and skin color are well known. [show some images] But as suggested above, more *enduring* changes, whether from surgery and implants or hormones involving various parts of the body, including genitals, are becoming more common.



There is much variation with respect to the connections between embodiment, bodies and their parts, personhood and identity tags. What are some common patterns with respect to these naming possibilities? Attending to the separation or joining of these is central to the topic. As with Lego and Transformer toy construction, the pieces can be unconnected or connected in endless ways (whether factual, believed or not).

Some configurations:

- A facial image a (wanted poster, photo, artist's reconstruction from eye-witnesses) with no name, body or location. 15 A rich behavioral profile similarly lacking other identifying aspects fits here – for this and the next 3 patterns the question is, “who is it?”
- An unlocated, unknown person across all attributes, but with a known (but unreachable location) –knowing where, but not who.
- A live, located person with no name (very young child, autistic, traumatized, amnesiac person) --acts as a self-anonymizing agent rather than as a self-identifying agent
- unidentified dead bodies in military deaths, plane crashes, earthquakes, suicide, murder, unidentified and unclaimed bodies in morgues may be given unique or generic (“Doe”) pseudonyms.
- Unidentified human traces (body parts such as teeth or hair, DNA, fingerprints, personal objects, voice, gait, handwriting as well as radio wave transmissions from an unknown location. --whose is it and/or what is it?
- An identified (“known of to varying degrees”) person but no body or location – (missing persons, runaways, kidnapped, fugitives (including death fakers), lost children and lost and wandering mentally ill persons. –where are you?
- Deepfake AI generated images fraudulently showing a person talking, doing things or in places they never were. Various real (name, other biographical details) can be joined to simulated “pieces” such as appearance, voice, gait and location. This can include a deceased victim's AI created impact statement used at his killer's sentencing (NPR 2025), a body separated from its real name and biography in WWII chronicled by Montague (1954). In the absence of a body, note a “knowledgeable and friendly” AI chatbot profile created in 2024 using the name and photo of a young girl killed 18 years before (Wu, 2024).¹⁶



"He's dead. Would you like his voice mail"?

- A different kind of disconnect is seen in the rare cases when an animal label is attached to a human action or the reverse. Note several 2024 cases in which humans attempted to blame a bear for their actions (Treisman 2024 Wagner 2024). Two of the cases involved wilderness murders and another damage to cars for which insurance claims were filed (see the bear costume below believed to be worn when the attacks were staged (performed!). The case outwardly parallels the Navajo Skinwalkers shapeshifting legend of humanoid transformation into a four-legged animal. (Maragaritoff, M. 2024)
- In an example of pseudo identifiability or pseudo causality we see a perpetrator disguising a murder as a suicide or an accident. The guilty person may plant his or her, or another person's, information on the deceased and may take over the person's identity. In related naming cases we see the misnomic label involves wrongful authorship –an arson fire disguised as a result of natural causes, a wrong medical diagnosis or miscarriages of justice in which a person is suspected of a crime of arson or murder in events that were not caused by a human.



Pseudo identifiability and pseudo causality --Bear costume worn by a man trying to pass as a bear

H. Irony, Paradox and Contradiction

It is often as if the creative moments of the soul were dying from its' own products.

—Georg Simmel

Contradiction, paradox and irony reflect Simmel's understanding of the tensions of modern life. There is the constant interplay of opposing forces, unintended consequences and unseen hands, including, but transcending, power differences. We see a shape-shifting, flexible conveyor belt of changes, involving both observable empirical outcomes and value judgements. Donald Levine's (1971) comprehensive analysis of ambiguity demonstrates its central place in social theory for Simmel, his contemporaries and today. It is also an early fount for Robert Merton and the centrality of unanticipated consequences, subjectivity and symbolic interaction and tradeoffs in all forms of interaction and social system.

While poetic, and sometimes striking with the clarity of a bell, Simmel was often tentative. The historical changes he saw were hardly unidimensional, linear, nor beyond questioning. He wrote, "All that can be proved can also be disputed." To which he added "Only the unprovable is indisputable". That supports his strong view about the relativity of much perception and belief, and the limits on fully grasping the meaning of behavior as it is known and experienced by others. Humility and continual questioning are necessary efforts since to be objective about people can hide, "... the most boundless solipsism" (Wolf 1950, p. xx). The limits of certainty are captured when the quote that opened this article -- "all relationships of people to each other rest, as a matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other" is immediately followed by his calling attention to factors that limit knowledge of the other and the incompleteness of what is known.

With respect to his conclusions, if Simmel was asked, "is that true?", he might have ducked the question saying only, "it's complicated", or "yes, no, maybe", "sometimes" or "it depends". But what it depends on depends too! The concept-wrestler is well served by seeing that often, it is not "either/or", "both and", nor "neither/nor".¹⁷ Instead, there are mixtures sparked by the disequilibrating and merging of changing

strands in motion --with factual knowledge garnered amidst the haze of differentially situated observers.

Kurt Wolff (1950 p. ixiv) observes that Simmel's use of the German word "*wechselwirkung*" is translated as "interaction", but a more literal meaning is "reciprocity". That term more precisely captures the inherent bounce-back processes Simmel observed everywhere. A process view of behavior is very much needed, as persons and groups *reciprocally* respond to each other and to changing conditions with imperfect knowledge.

That response of course occurs within the limiting environment of *structures*, which have elements tentativeness and fluidity. As a founder of modern sociology Simmel was attuned to the world(s) the individual inherits or is dealt. Yet in spite of the power of the social and cultural Simmel was very opposed to "...the singularity of the person being reduced to the intersection of social influences" and was "... a strong spokesperson for the uniqueness of the individual and for the dignity of the person" (Helle, 2008, p. 3)

Paradoxically the individual is both a cultural clone and singular. This reflects the homogenizing and directing impacts of inherited culture and social structure joined with the agency and uniqueness of the individual. Here we see the varied interactions found in the circles of modernity, as well as in the depths and creativity of the person, apart from reserve, habit or deception. The fullness and unique core identity of each individual and their reality/being stands apart from, even as it is interwoven with, society, culture and interaction with others.

A contemporary observer of Simmel captured the openness of his approach as his students were taken -- "...down an oblique pit into the mind, he was not a teacher, he was an 'inciter'. : 'just about the time when ... one felt he had reached a conclusion, he had a way of raising his right arm" and turning an "imaginary object so as to exhibit still another facet." (Wolff 1950, xvii) This playful, mercurial way of presenting also characterized Erving Goffman.

The limits of certainty are captured when the quote that opened this article -- "all relationships of people to each other rest, as a matter of course, upon the precondition that they know something about each other" is immediately followed by his calling attention to factors that limit knowledge of the other and the incompleteness of what is known.

Of course, per the *New Yorker* cartoon below, some things may appear to be eternal, as with direct face-to-face eye contact, as well as eternally exploited! Yet the bases of trust are dynamic and multi-splendored and often far from clear, either empirically or morally.



Spatial constraints prevent exploring these central aspects of Simmel's work. In on-going work I consider:

1) the individual as both cultural clone and distinct, impacted by structure but also by unique experiences and individual agency and creativity.

2) social change –such as in the size and scale of the urban environment and economic activity advance social mobility and the ideals of the Enlightenment and bring new forms of integration, while disrupting older forms and increasing alienation, anomie and indifference.

3) traditional boundaries, borders, bridges and what is taken as knowledge --whether involving time, space and communication or truth are rendered asunder by modernization, but functional alternatives eventually emerge.

4) Simmel's observation that "truthfulness and lies are of the most far reaching significance for relations among men" (Wolff 1950 p. 312), without the self-righteous moralizing of earlier theorists, privileges contextual variability. Whether empirically or analytically, what is taken as knowledge involves *multiple sided-swords dependent on context*. Unpacking those and their contradictions is what makes social analysis so challenging. The truthfulness and fullness of identifiability are strands of the broader complications and contradictions found with authenticity in contemporary society.

5) Anonymity and identifiability can have an objective, tangible, fixed status or a subjective, intangible, fluid status. Contrast the endurable fixity of a fire caused by an arsonist who is never identified (perhaps being consumed by the fire) with the immediate shift in the move from being a being a stranger abroad to being known on returning home. The meaning is highly dependent on the setting and situation.

6) The imprecision of language noted earlier with respect to the multiple meanings of knowledge and antonyms and synonyms for anonymity. The segmented interaction of modernism and cultural typification means that individuals are both "seen" and "unseen". In the paradox of "present absences" what is missing may none-the-less communicate. Consider negative space or silence in art, typography and music.

7) The contradictions, conflicts and inconsistencies seen with preferences, performance and value conflicts with sharing or withholding information --whether involving individuals and other individuals, individuals and organizations, or organizations and other organizations.

Good Confusion

Janus, the Roman god of duality, doorways, transitions and choices offers the perfect metaphor for the subject. In the eternal challenges from hegemonic forces, the *presence* of contextually appropriate masks is necessary in the pursuit of truth, decency, social justice and democracy. But transparency accompanying the *absence* of inappropriate masks is also necessary in the pursuit of accountability and reciprocity in personal, organizational and societal relations. The pendulum between the conflicts never stops moving.

As the above discussion suggests, the topic is drenched in ironies, conflicting individual and social forces, trade-offs and value conflicts. Consequences --intended and unintended, utopian and dystopian, or more modestly, good and bad (given the values of a democratic society) abound. Concealment and revelation, disconnection and connection are necessary, if often messy (whether practically or ethically), components of daily life.

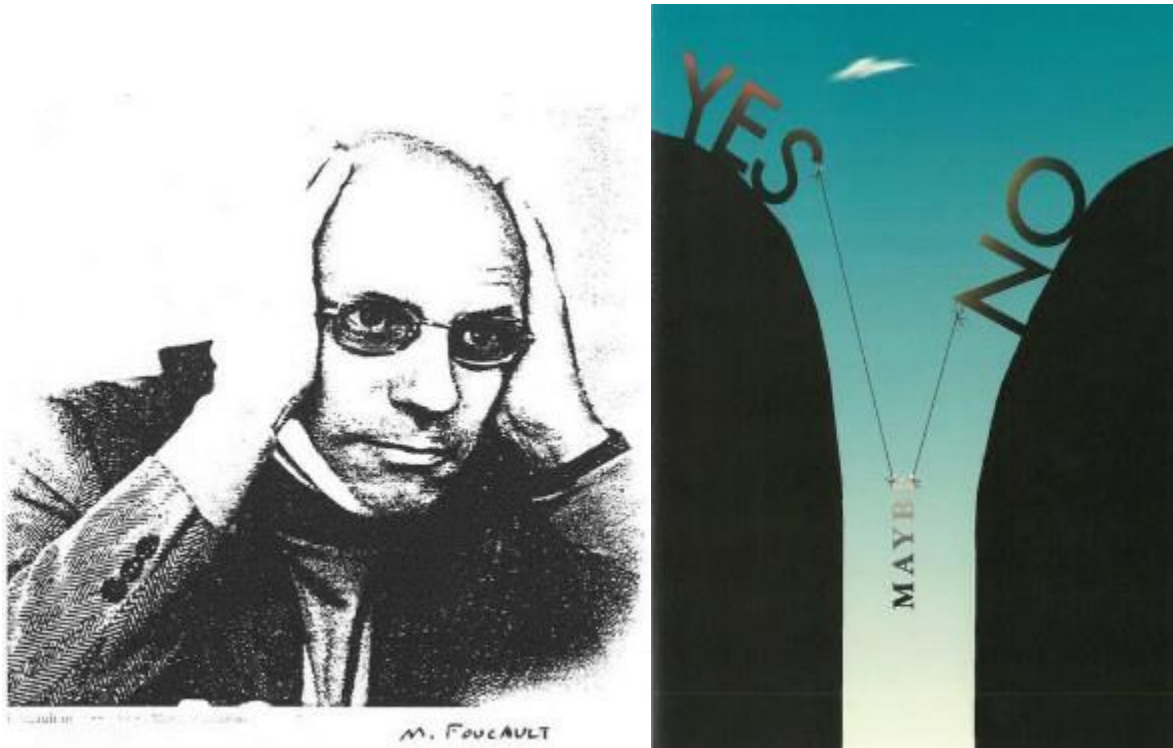
Secrecy, withholding, distorting and faking can tie to the more ignoble aspects of stratification. The shield of anonymity can hide the dense entanglements of power, exclusion, inequality, injustice, dissimilitude, corruption, and political aggression and repression. Yet anonymity can also support freedom of expression, association, movement and experimentation, and offer protection for challengers and

democracy itself. Its opposite --information discovery and access can be resources for accountability and for challenging injustice and engendering trust.

The dilemmas surrounding anonymity and identifiability are not problems to be 'solved,' but rather enduring tensions to be understood and navigated. Simmel offers a powerful lens for doing that. The deep changes in information environments seen in the last half-century bring an even stronger need for understanding, and policies sensitive to, but not drowned by, the complexity.

Whether self-consciously chosen as a tool, or merely resulting from the elements in a situation, anonymity and identifiability like surveillance, privacy, publicity, confidentiality, visibility and secrecy (Marx, 1988, 2017) are neither good nor bad but *maybe*, --with context, comportment and contingency as determinative.

Certainly the topic is confusing as the image of M. Foucault below suggests. But it can be good confusion in pointing out the need for greater conceptual and moral clarity in issueS so central to our time.



L. Appendix: Concepts

Anonymity

Pseudonymity

Identifiability

Pseudo anonymity (from audience's perspective)

Pseudo identifiability (from audience's perspective) same as pseudo de-anonymity

Verifiable ("real") identity)

Individual anonymity-identifiability

Social system anonymity-identifiability

Three perspectives on Anonymity and Identifiability

The structure of situations

The motivation/goal anonymization agent

The perceptions of the audience

Four Types of Anonymity

De facto anonymity (includes back-lit identifiability and anonymity by homogeneity)

Cultural anonymity

Uncapacious anonymity

Motivated anonymity

Six Types of Motivated Anonymity

Directly Instrumental: Organizational Incentives: Organizational Processus

Disingenuous Messaging: Strategic Information

Protection or Enhancement of Self-Image

Roles

Anonymizing agent --primary, secondary, active, passive

Production agent

Authorizing agent

Pseudonymizing agent --primary, secondary, active, passive

Pseudo identifiability aka pseudonymous (fake) identifiability

Third party intermediary anonymizing and pseudonymizing agents

Unwitting anonymous agent

Identifying (de-anonymizing) agent

Typification (Schutz 1967), Typifier and Typified (DeGloma 2023)

Audience/recipient for anonymizing or pseudonymizing communications and actions

Communicating or publicizing agent

Some Helpful Concepts

Unique core personal identity --distinct from, and not interchangeable with, any other person (Goffman 1963, Marx 2017)

Social Identity (Goffman 1963)

Strange making technologies (Virnoche 2021)

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² This is related, but distinct, from various other conceptions of the stranger identified by Park, 1928, Schutz 1967, Levine 1971, Bauman 1997 and Goldberg 2021.

³ Yet transparency has its' limits. Of course there are counters --consider folklore's instructions such as, "TMI", "you, don't want to know" and "that's more than I need to know". While it sounds heretical, particularly with the horrors of post-truth and "alternative facts" that so debase contemporary public life, there are social functions of ignorance, ignoring and errors and, at rare times censorship and secrecy (Moore and Tumin, 1949, Levine 1971, Protor and Schiebinger 2008). Moore and Tumin (p. 795) note that ignorance can be viewed "...as an active and often positive element in operating structures and relations". However, with any talk of function, one must ask who is it functional for, for how long, with what other consequences and how is this measured? Also the opposites --note the allure of partly clothed pinups as against fully naked figures or the boredom and impatience that can be present with full answers that eliminate the mystery, wonder and playfulness of curiosity. The partial revelation and concealment of flirting (Simmel 1984) with its' inconclusiveness and the absence of certainty, also offers a qualification.

⁴ However, with enough data, strong grounds for reaching conclusions about identity, even with no DNA, fingerprints or dental records, identification can be made much more likely with less need to "round up the usual suspects", but in such cases as with the null hypothesis, it is easier to rule out (disprove) than to rule in, that "this is the one".

⁵ Yet all is not lost, researchers in Iceland found that only a minority of identical twins had all the same genes (Jonsson et al. 2021).

⁶ This can refer to an embodied (or once embodied) person with a name or pseudonym. It can also refer to a paper or other trail of invented persons, as in some intelligence operations, or to an action caused by natural events (fire, animal attack) wrongly attributed to a human.

⁷ However, this also becomes a form of motivated anonymity when the individual can choose to only be in homogeneous settings to avoid discrimination and protection of self-feelings.

⁸ Note also P.H. Vazak, an academy award nominee for screenwriting. Vazak is credited with the script for *Greystoke the Legend of Tarzan Lord of the Apes*. But he was not the author, he is the dog of screenwriter Robert Towne. Using the dog, rather than his own name reflected Towne's dissatisfaction with the film (Jason 2015).

⁹ Beyond a consistent effort to direct or redirect public opinion, the goal may be to confuse it and create doubt, chaos and discord drawing on factual and fake news. Their research documents how the same Russian intelligence agency using pseudonyms sent out ambiguous and contradictory messages, intended to speak to different audiences. Tactics include sculpting of information, denial of credibility, event ghosting and spoofing of algorithms.

¹⁰ The sociology of surprise –an underdeveloped area offers a way of linking several strands of the sociology of knowledge, including expectations tied to unintended, and often unanticipated, consequences for an audience, although these can be very intended by the producing agent.

¹¹ Of course, anonymity when intended can be social within the subjectivity of the agent as observer who imagines the presumed responses of other(s) and takes action to be unidentified. Mining James, Meade, Cooley and the generations of inheritors for how they treated the imagined interactions produced within one's subjectivity would help to order this for mentally healthy, as well as ill persons.

¹² What he experienced is different from feeling anonymous in a large crowd, whether from blending in or not being personally identified.

¹³ If aware and concerned by it, recipients may move to an identifying role in order to de-anonomize. Research on this natural history and the correlates of whether or not and when audiences care is absent.

¹⁴ Consider who created a painting without a name that is in the style of Picasso. It might have been done by him, or it might have been done in his style. Consider also a recently discovered painting apparently done by him that is signed, as well as one that is in his style signed by someone else who might, or might not, be using their real name. The issue of a distinctive style or a sensibility reflecting a particular author or painter or social group can further deepen the identity issues. Restorers of important painters are another unnamed category sharing a background space with ghost writers. Issues of accurate reproduction of a style, whether in painting, music or speech raise authenticity, identity and legitimacy issues (including cultural app- and misappropriation).

¹⁵ This may or may not convey other information such as age, gender, height, skin, eye, facial features, hair types, limbs plus –assuming these aren't messed with. Are they permanent, discoverable? Wanted posters and requests are worthy of greater analysis.

¹⁶ Online open-source biographical detail along with easy to use tools for face and voice cloning/editing such as TalkingFaces and FaceSwap are an invitation to misinformation and worse. Consider also Nudity and related sites that take off rather than attach. Simmel would not have been surprised by the catch-up tools for detection such as "WeVerify" and "AI Detector".
that also appear shortly after.

¹⁷ Yet the wrestler is not well served by paralysis from unbounded analysis. Montaigne (Hartle 2007) wisely bemused that if things were not so complex he could make decisions, rather than having to only write essays.