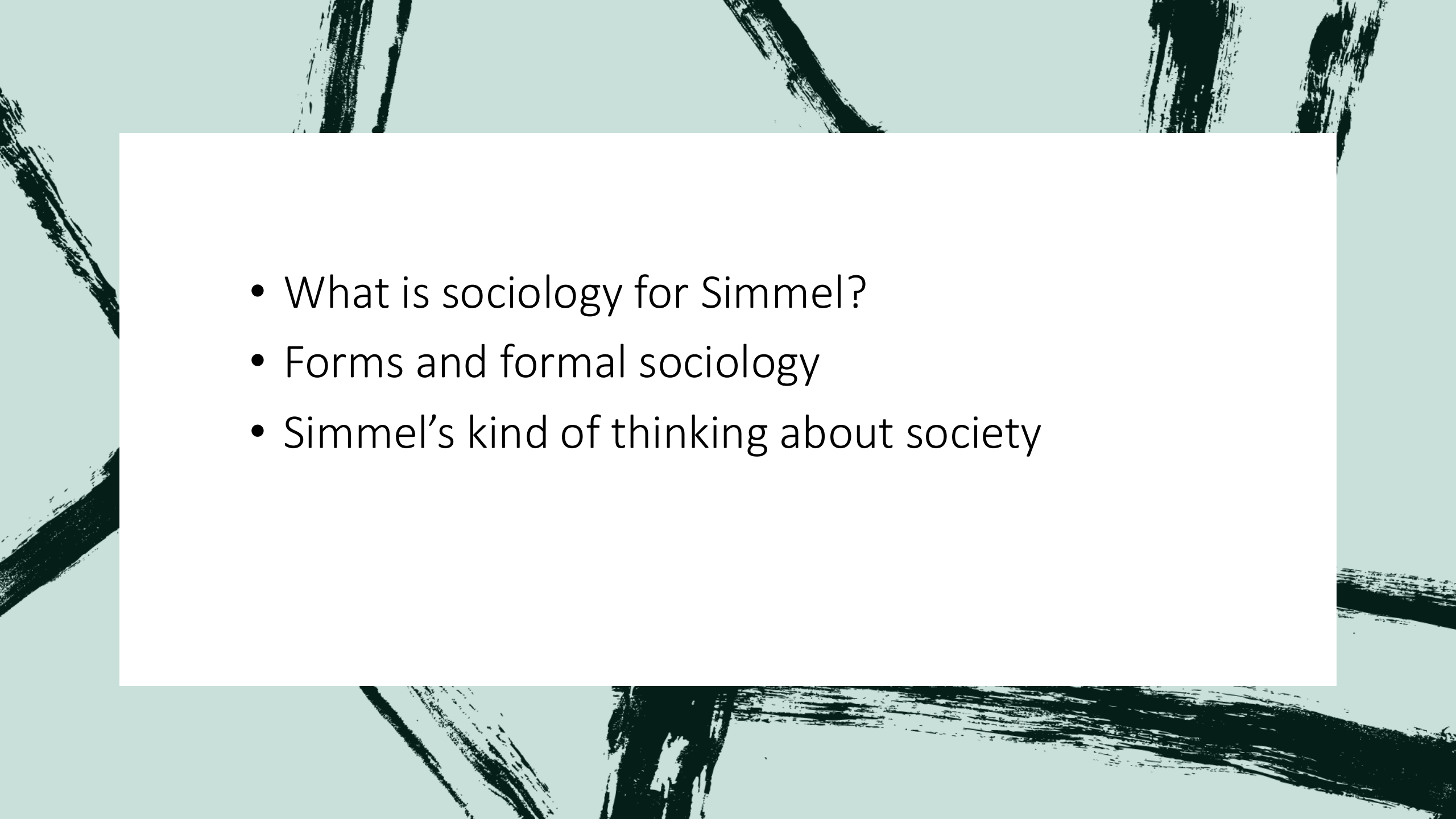


The background of the slide features a light teal color with several thick, expressive black brushstrokes. These strokes are oriented diagonally, with some running from the top-left towards the bottom-right and others from the top-right towards the bottom-left, creating a dynamic, abstract pattern.

SOCIOLOGICAL THEORY

Georg Simmel


WINTER TERM 2024

- 
- What is sociology for Simmel?
 - Forms and formal sociology
 - Simmel's kind of thinking about society

(1858-1918)

GEORG SIMMEL





Sociology analyzes individual existences and reconstructs them according to its own concepts.

Simmel, G., (1959 [1908]). “The Problem of Sociology”, in *Georg Simmel, 1858-1918*, Wolff, K. (ed.), The Ohio University Press, Columbus, p. 310-336.

The background of the slide features a light teal color with several thick, expressive black brushstrokes. These strokes are oriented diagonally, with some running from the top-left towards the bottom-right and others from the top-right towards the bottom-left, creating a dynamic, abstract pattern.

FORMS

conflict, competition, hierarchy, division of labor,
imitation, domination and subordination,
representation, fashion, secret, flirt, sociability

THE OBJECT OF SIMMEL'S SOCIOLOGY

- the forms of interaction
- the process of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*)

Main question

How individuals interact – not *why*
they interact?

Simmel's sociology

“It is often in formulas that Simmel unveils a form, a type of theoretical abstraction. One can, for example, think of fashion as imitation and distinction; the stranger as proximity and distance; sociability as ‘freedom of bondage’; coquetry [flirt] as an offer rescinded, or consent and denial. More than merely catchy, these formulas have ‘the tendency to differentiate and promote opposite characteristics’, this is an aspect of every form of sociation and one of ‘the most fundamental traits of the modern order’” (Levine, 2017, p. 397 [my translation]).

Thériault, Barbara (2020). “Georg Simmel and the ‘Newspaper Sociology’ of the 1920s and 1930s,” in *The Routledge International Handbook of Simmel Studies*, Fitzi, Gregor (ed.), London and New York, Routledge, p. 251–260.

The Stranger

Someone who is near and far, close and remote at the same time.

The man who comes today and stays tomorrow.

The state of being a stranger is of course a completely positive relation; it is a specific form of interaction.

Sociability (*Geselligkeit*)

a specific form of togetherness, as "the playful form of sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*)" that "has no functional purpose."

Simmel, G. (1949 [1911]). "The Sociology of Sociability," *American Journal of Sociology*, 55(3), p. 254-261 ["Soziologie der Geselligkeit », *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19.-22. Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt a. M.*, p. 1-16].

Sociability (*Geselligkeit*)

“Sociability has a basic law, reciprocity, for ‘the pleasure of the individual is always contingent upon the joy of others.’ Reciprocity is a necessity for sociability to exist, and it is also its ethics: ‘(...) in terms of success, the principle of sociability may be formulated thus: everyone should guarantee to the other that maximum of sociable values (joy, relief, vivacity) which is consonant with the maximum of values he himself receives.’”

Simmel, G. (1949 [1911]). “The Sociology of Sociability,” *American Journal of Sociology*, 55(3), p. 254-261 [“Soziologie der Geselligkeit », *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages vom 19.-22. Oktober 1910 in Frankfurt a. M.*, p. 1-16].

Fashion



From the fact that fashion as such can never be generally in vogue, the individual derives the satisfaction of knowing that as adopted by him it still represents something special and striking, while at the same time he feels inwardly supported by a set of persons who are . . . actually doing the same thing. (Simmel 1904/1971:304)

Fashion

The very character of fashion demands that it should be exercised at one time only by a portion of the given group, the great majority merely being on the road to adopting it. As soon as . . . anything that was originally done only by few has really come to be practiced by all . . . we no longer speak of fashion. As fashion spreads, it gradually goes to its doom. (ibid.:302)

Discussion

Simmel described how changes in fashion occur as the lower classes adopt the styles originating in the upper classes. How might Simmel explain the practice of purchasing \$300 jeans that are prefaded and preripped? How might race influence changes in fashion trends? More generally, how might class, gender, and racial forms of stratification affect changes in musical tastes or participation in sports as a player or spectator or even the everyday language a person speaks? To what degree are tennis and golf seen as “exclusive” sports, and on what is their exclusivity based?

Describe a specific example of a personal interaction that took on the form of sociability. Discuss the elements and feelings that made this an example of sociability as opposed to another form of interaction. Did the interaction shift in and out of sociability? How so, or why not? If present, what caused the shift/s and how did the individuals involved respond to it/them?