FROM CLUSTERS TO ARCS AND RINGS:

ELEMENTARY FORMS OF SOCIATION IN

TEMPORARY GATHERINGS

Clark McPhail

ABSTRACT

Temporary gatherings are patchwork quilts of alternating and varied sequences of individual and social behaviors. Some of those recurring social behaviors are, following Simmel, elementary forms of sociation: clusters, queues, arcs and rings. The assembling processes which produce temporary gatherings of individuals and clusters are examined. Several decades of observations of individuals and clusters in public gatherings are summarized. The transitions from clusters to queues, arcs and rings are described. An explanation is sketched for the development of arcs and rings. A variety of observation and experimental data is offered for the hypothesis that extraordinary phenomena are noteworthy, resulting in collective orientation and then convergent movement in the direction of the point of common interest, which movement, in turn, yields the arcs or rings as derivative social forms.

INTRODUCTION

Simmel (1909) reserved the concept of society "for permanent interactions..., [for] definable, consistent structures such as the state, the family, the guild, the church, social classes, and organizations based on common interests." He did not limit social phenomena to these macro units of analysis. He argued that "there exists an immeasurable number of less conspicuous forms of relationships and interactions" and he called these "forms of sociation." Simmel recognized that "taken singly, [these forms] may appear negligible," but he believed such forms were the "social atoms" whose interaction and merger constitute society as we know it. In this paper I examine selected micro forms of association, although not the particular forms Simmel made famous. I too am concerned with the relationship between micro social forms and macro units of analysis. Instead of society writ large, my concerns in this essay are with temporary gatherings in public places. The micro forms with which I am concerned—clusters, queues, arcs and rings—are among the social atoms of which larger gatherings are composed.

I prefer the concept of gathering to the traditional concept of "the crowd," as did Goffman (1971, 1983). The "crowd" implies a uniformity of actors as well as a unanimity and continuity of action that does not correspond to my observations of hundreds of casual, political, sports, and religious gatherings nor to the observations of other field researchers (Milgram and Toch 1969; Fisher 1972; Berk 1974; Wright 1978; Whyte 1980; McPhail 1991). Gatherings are locations in space occupied by two or more persons who may or may not act collectively; and, if they act collectively they do not do so continuously or exclusively.[1] The result is an alternation between various sequences of individual and collective action across the duration of temporary gatherings. Sequences of individual and collective action frequently occur simultaneously in different areas of the same gathering. Thus, a bird's-eye view of most temporary gatherings establishes that instead of witnessing a uniform blanket of continuous collective behavior, one is more likely to observe a patchwork quilt of varied and alternating individual behaviors, small group behaviors, and occasional, albeit brief, sequences of more inclusive collective behaviors by larger numbers of actors. I have argued (McPhail 1991) that this patchwork metaphor applies to a wide range of temporary gatherings, including demonstration and ceremonial gatherings. I concentrate here on commonplace or prosaic gatherings on street corners; in parks and shopping malls, on beaches, plazas, and campus quadrangles.

Some of these patches of collective action occur over and over in a variety of substantively different gatherings, distinguished by their particular configurations of actors and actions. I use the concept of "form" to refer to such configurations and, due to their comparative simplicity, will refer to them as elementary forms of collective action. Four such forms will be examined here: clusters, queues, arcs and rings.

I first describe the assembling processes by which temporary gatherings of individuals and clusters are produced. I then report several decades of observations in several different countries of the frequency of individuals and clusters in prosaic gatherings, and briefly describe the queues, arcs and rings that are occasionally formed from those individuals and clusters. I next offer a preliminary explanation for the transitions within gatherings from arrays of disparate individuals and clusters to the social forms here termed arcs and rings. I then survey a variety of empirical evidence for that explanation. Finally, I summarize and briefly discuss the implications of this line of analysis.

ASSEMBLING PROCESSES

The majority of gatherings in any human community are temporary. They are formed by an assembling process (McPhail and Miller 1973) that brings two or more persons from one or more different locations at time one to a common location in space at time two. They are terminated by a dispersing process that takes those persons to one or more different locations in space at time three. My concerns are with some of the individual and collective actions in which people engage within gatherings; however, the assembling processes that bring people together, more specifically some of the sources of those assembling processes, have consequences for the within-gathering behaviors which are my primary concerns.

Assembling Instructions

Among the most critical factors in the production of all temporary gatherings are assembling instructions that describe what actors or actions might be located at some alternate location, that designate where and when the actors or actions can be found in that location and that prescribe by invitation, suggestion, or command, movement to that location at that time. Thus, instructions may range from one person's very general suggestion to him or herself, or to another person, to proceed to some location for the general purpose of seeing "what's happening," to the very specific suggestion to proceed to some location to see and hear some actor or activity of particular interest to one person or both. The implementation of assembling instructions to pursue general or specific interests, however, depends on the availability of individuals to carry them out, and on their access to the designated location in space and time.

Availability

Most prosaic gatherings develop when members are free from work, school, or similar obligations. Whyte (1980, p. 18) describes a typical daily life cycle for prosaic gatherings in New York City.

Rhythms of plaza life are much alike from place to place. In the morning hours, patronage will be sporadic. A hotdog vendor setting up his car at the corner, elderly pedestrians pausing for a rest, a delivery messenger or two, a shoeshine man, some tourists, perhaps an odd type like a scavenger woman with shopping bags. If there is any construction work in the vicinity, hard hats will appear shortly after 11:00 a.m. with beer cans and sandwiches. Things begin to liven up. Around noon the main clientele begins to arrive. Soon, activity will be near peak and will stay there until a little before 2:00 p.m. Some 80 percent of the total hours of use will be concentrated in these two hours. In mid late afternoon, use is again sporadic. If there's a special event, such as a jazz concert, the flow going home will be tapped, with people staying as late as 6:00 or 6:30 p.m. Ordinarily, however, plazas go dead by 6:00 and stay that way until the next morning.

Similar cycles of development are reported for plazas in Chicago (Rutledge 1975) and Portland (Love 1973), and for southern California beaches (Edgerton 1979). Few weekday prosaic gatherings form before noon in parks, plazas, quadrangles, or beaches. Plaza and quadrangle gatherings diminish in the early afternoon as people return to work or classes. Park and beach gatherings may extend through the afternoon. Gatherings in all of these locations may reconvene or enlarge in the evening hours as they may on street corners, in parking lots along a town's "main drag," outside skating rinks, bowling alleys, drive-in restaurants, bars, and other local "hang outs." Weekend gatherings in these locations seldom form before noon, and may not disperse on Friday or Saturday evenings until midnight or later.

Access to Gathering Site

Whyte (1980) reports the majority of plaza and park users were office workers from nearby buildings, usually within a three block radius of the plaza. McPhail and Bailey (1986) report that the closer people were to the scene of a fire when they learned it was under way, the more likely they were to converge on the scene. Similar relationships have been reported for travel distance and participation in political demonstrations (Cichetti, Freeman, Haveman, and Kentsch 1971) and athletic victory celebrations (McPhail and Miller 1973). In communities with comprehensive public transit systems or regions (e.g., New York or London) or with expressways and a high ratio of autos to population (e.g., southern California), people converge from far as well as near (Edgerton 1979).

Assembling With Companions

An enduring myth about crowds is that they are composed of anonymous individuals. In fact the majority of members of many gatherings are neither alone nor anonymous; they have assembled with one or more family members,

McPhail and Bailey 1986). Miller (1973) reports that these clusters remain throughout gatherings and disperse thereafter in the company of those with whom they assemble. In between they sit, stand, walk, touch, talk to, and sometimes eat or drink with one another, and frequently observe what others in the setting are doing. Thus, assembling processes yield these small groups or clusters of individuals that are in prosaic gatherings in public places as well as in religious (Wimberly, Hood, Lipsey, Clelland, and Hay 1975) and political gatherings (McPhail, 1985).

Members of these small clusters are not, however, continuously engaged in mutually inclusive interaction or collective action. They often act alone even while they are together. They alternate between individual lines of action, interaction within their cluster of companions, and, occasional participation in larger forms of collective action. The latter range from queues for entry, in objects of interest, to participation with even larger numbers of actors in objects of interest, to participation with even larger numbers of actors in collective cheers, applause, singing, chanting, and the like.

SOME ELEMENTARY FORMS WITHIN GATHERINGS

Clusters

By cluster I mean two or more proximate persons, standing, sitting, or reclining, who orient in a common or convergent direction, who talk with or touch one another, or who proceed together from one point in space to another (McPhail and Wohlstein 1982). Other students of behavior in public places (James 1951, 1953; Coleman 1962; Berkowitz 1971; Bakeman and Beck 1973; Whyte 1980) have used one or more of these observable criteria to identify, describe and record what they call "small groups" and what Goffman (1971) called "withs." This phenomenon is the most frequent elementary form of social behavior observed in any temporary gathering. Clusters, like the queues, arcs and rings to be discussed below, meet the criteria for Simmel's "forms of sociation" or what I will here call "social forms": a distinctive configuration yielded by the recurring activities of two or more proximate persons with or in relation to one another.[2]

Since the 1950s social scientists have from time to time recorded the distribution of clusters and lone individuals in public places around the world. Four studies are summarized in Figure 1. John James (1951, 1953) recorded the distribution of clusters and individuals among 22, 625 persons in a variety of public places in Portland, Oregon, and reported that 55% of the members of those gatherings were in clusters of two to six persons and 45% were alone. James Coleman (1962) reported that 41% of the 2,897 pedestrians he observed in Seoul, Korea, were in clusters of two to five persons, while 59% were alone.
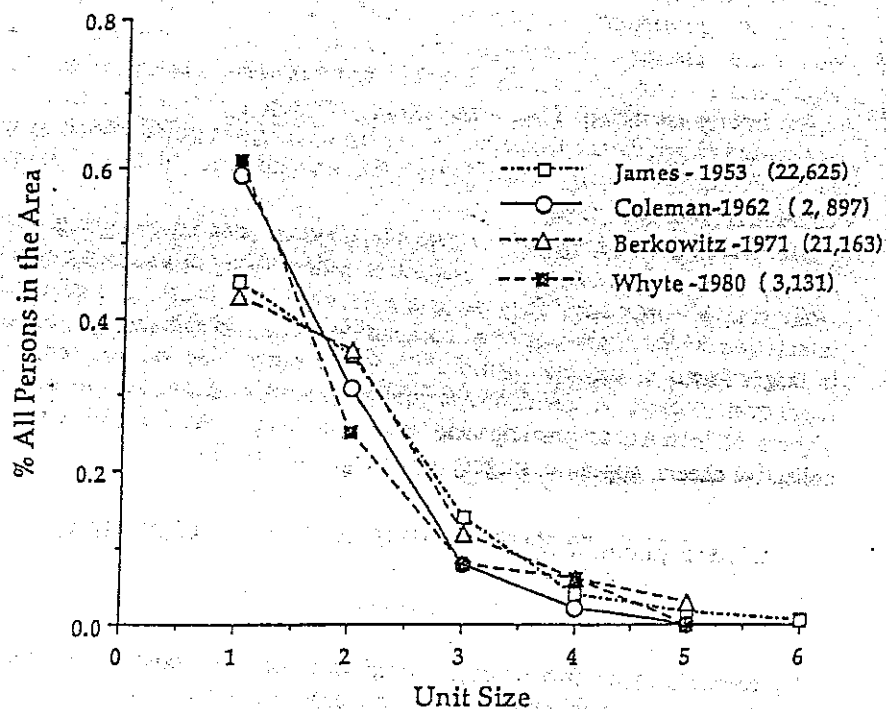
Figure 1. Percentage of Persons in Public Places by Unit Size

William Berkowitz's (1971) observations of 21,163 pedestrians in 17 cities around the world yielded 57% in clusters and 43% alone. William H. Whyte's (1980) observations of more than 3,131 persons in New York City plazas and parks established that approximately 60% were in clusters and 40% were alone. In sum, the majority of people in most gatherings are in companion clusters rather than alone; cluster size is inversely proportional to the frequency with which clusters are observed; and, of particular significance for this paper, clusters of six or more members are extraordinary phenomena in most gatherings in public places.

The Spatial Distribution and Redistribution of Clusters

Although the majority of people in most prosaic gatherings assemble in, or meet and interact *within*, small groups of family, friends, or acquaintances, there is not much overt interaction *between* these disparate small groups,

among solitary individuals, nor between those individuals and small groups (L. Lofland 1973). There is evidence they are aware of one another; for example, they may observe others, often repeatedly, but avert their gaze if other(s) turn their way. There is little if any of the eye contact or reciprocal acknowledgment (Miller, Hintz, and Couch 1975) that provides the basis for further interaction and social behavior. Rather, most of the time there is, throughout most temporary gatherings, a diffuse state of what Goffman (1963) called "civil inattention." Edgerton (1979, p. 206) described the individuals and clusters in the beach gatherings he studied as "alone together."

[They] share space and even mingle, but they remain strangers. They do not shake hands and introduce themselves. They do not exchange names, telephone numbers, or business cards. They do not talk to one another or play together. When they leave they rarely see one another again, at the beach or elsewhere.

Whyte (1980, p. 19) reports similar interaction patterns among plaza users in New York City. Males watch females, and vice versa. Males point, gesture, whistle, and occasionally comment aloud about a passing female. But Whyte reports he never observed a male "pick up" a female in the plazas or even attempt to do so. He concludes that "plazas are not ideal places for striking up acquaintances, and even on the most sociable of them, there is not much mingling." Instead, as I suggested earlier, people remain in the company of, and subsequently disperse with those family, friends, or acquaintances with whom they have assembled and with whom they pursue the interests for which they initially assembled.

Several studies of prosaic gatherings in public places establish that most people converge on parks, plazas, and beaches for the purpose of "relaxing," "being with friends," "people-watching" and, occasionally, "to be by myself" or "to think." There are always a few people "just passing through." If the majority of members of most gatherings in public places are thought to have such "loose agenda," other actors with more focused agenda—vendors, performers, politicians, preachers, and panhandlers—may converge on the same locations to capture the attention of an available population.

I first suggested that clusters are by-products of an assembling process in which family members, friends, or acquaintances travel with one another to, or make prior arrangements to meet at, some common location. I then presented evidence that such clusters may be the most frequent form of elementary social behavior observed in gatherings in public places. Finally, I argued that clusters of six or more members are extraordinary phenomena in most gatherings in public places. But they are not the only elementary form of social behavior observed in such gatherings. Various purveyors of particular interests can become the focus of interest with respect to which other elementary forms of social behavior develop.

Queues

A more familiar if less frequent form of elementary social behavior in temporary gatherings is the queue: two or more persons, standing more or less front to back, intermittently move forward in the direction of some scarce commodity, service, or activity (for example, food, drink, toilets, tickets, and the like). In the prototypic queue, members stand more or less face to back even though the direction of their orientation may vary considerably. Members often face and talk with their companions and even to adjacent strangers. Members occasionally face in the direction of passing pedestrians, vehicles, or other surrounding activity. What is more or less constant is the order of their position in the queue, and the direction of the queue's intermittent locomotion regarding the scarce commodity, activity, or point of service (Leibowitz 1968). While some (Mann 1969) have argued that the queue is a "social system," more recent research (Milgram, Liberty, Toledo, and Wackenhut 1986) establishes that disturbances of rank order positions in the queue are far more likely to be resisted by the individual or cluster immediately behind the disturbance; conversely, resistance virtually never comes from people in front of the disturbance, let alone by everyone in the queue. Thus, while queues involve distinctive arrangements of proximate individuals and clusters acting in relation to one another—the referent for my use of the concept "social form"—they should not be construed as social systems. Queues do not involve the same individual members interacting on a recurring basis, pursuing one or more common objectives. Nor do those interactions and pursuits result in vertical and horizontal differentiations among the members, nor the generation of rules for conduct with regard to one another and to outsiders. The only feature of queues that may meet these minimal criteria for social systems may be the small clusters of family, friends, or acquaintances participating in the queue.

Arcs and Rings

Another recurring and distinctive arrangement of individuals and clusters is the arc or ring. Stanley Milgram's discussion of "the ring" (Milgram and Toch '69, p. 518) called attention to this distinctive form of elementary social behavior.

If individuals are randomly distributed over a flat surface in the starting situation, a point of common interest in the same plane creates a [configuration] tending toward circularity. The circular arrangement is not accidental but serves an important function. It permits the most efficient arrangement of individuals around a point of common focus.

Milgram implies that arcs and rings form because their members *have a common interest* in seeing or hearing the activities of one or more other

individuals (or some other object) around which the arc(s) or ring(s) form. "Even when a ring grows to be many layers thick, the circular shape tends to prevail" (Milgram and Toch 1969, p. 520). Individuals in the outer layer(s) of the arc(s) or ring(s) arrange themselves such that they can see between those individuals in front of them. Even if we accept Milgram's parsimonious description and implicit explanation, several issues remain. How do two or more individuals have or come to develop the "common interest," and, how does such an "interest" occasion the alteration in their behaviors that yields the arcs and rings? An answer to the first question may in part be provided by the purpose for assembling and the instructions with which that is carried out. But purposes for assembling and for actions within gatherings can be different and, even if they are similar, can be modified across time, as the following discussion suggests.

DEFINING AND REDEFINING THE SITUATION

I share Goffman's assumption (1974, p. 8) about individuals in situations.

When individuals attend to any current situation they face the question: 'What is it that's going on here?' Whether asked explicitly, as in times of confusion and doubt, or tacitly, during occasions of usual certitude, the question is put and the answer to it is presumed by the way the individuals then proceed to get on with the affairs at hand.

To answer "the question" is to formulate a "definition of the situation." This concept is one of the older (Thomas 1928, p. 584) and more frequently used explanatory devices in the social psychological toolbox. It is also the case that this particular device frequently has been called upon for work beyond its capacity. Goffman (1974) addressed several of these problems. First he recognized that instead of the single definition of the situation implied by traditional wisdom, there can be multiple definitions of the situation across multiple individuals in a gathering at any one point in time. Second, that instead of a continuing and invariant definition of the situation, there can be shifts or "frame" the situation within which they must act, for example, a change the situation within which individuals and their companions define across time in the manner in which individuals and their companions define from the definition of the situation they are approaching when assembling to the reformulated definition upon arriving in that situation. Goffman's re-tooling of this explanatory concept was much needed and long overdue. At least two flaws remain. Insufficient attention has been given the contributions that others—for example, companions, groups, and organizations—make to the frames with which individuals operate (but see McHugh 1968; Durig 1991); and, there has been no satisfactory explanation of how frames eventually lead to observable actions.

I assume here a purposive model of individual, interactional, and collective conduct where individuals give themselves instructions regarding their goals (Mead 1938; Shibutani 1968; Powers 1973). The goals and related instructions may be (1) arrived at independently; (2) constructed interdependently with companions, or (3) adopted from some third party representing a group or organization to which the individual(s) belong (McPhail and Wohlstein 1986; McPhail and Tucker 1990; McPhail 1991). Moreover, purposive actors do not proceed in a vacuum. Actions launched in relation to goals frequently encounter disruptions, resistance, blockages, or other problems, all of which constitute negative feedback regarding the relationship between the behaviors already under way and the goals they are supposed to achieve. Individuals thereby recognize a discrepancy between where they perceive themselves to be at that time (that is, their ongoing perceptions) and where they would like to be (that is, their goals or objectives). If those goals are to be realized, individuals must make behavioral adjustments to circumvent, finesse, eliminate, or otherwise solve the problem with which they are confronted (Powers 1973). Individuals may be assisted by their companions in deciding what adjustments to make, just as they may have been earlier joined or assisted in deciding what goals to pursue, where to pursue them, and what actions might be necessary for their realization.

Preliminary Definitions

Individuals do not approach most gatherings as blank slates. They bring elements of a preliminary frame or definition of the situation, sometimes the result of prior participation, frequently the result of assembling instructions that direct them and processes that bring them to the setting in question. Individuals so equipped proceed with assumptions about the activities or actors they might find in the setting, and the implicit assumption that, upon arrival, they can do what they are proceeding to do, even if this is no more than to "see what's happening."

On-Site Reviews and Revisions

Upon arrival, individuals ask some form of Goffman's question: "What is it that's going on here?" At minimum they must look around and locate a spot to do what they and their companions have come to do, thus completing their transition from the assembling process to their initial participation within the gathering. In the course of this assessment they formulate an on-site appraisal of who is doing what and where. This review and the revised frame also establishes what is, for the time being, *ordinary* behavior for that setting.

Organizational Help

Temporary gatherings for demonstrations or for ceremonial occasions are typically organized by someone to achieve one or more objectives. Those objectives are placed on an agenda specifying, at minimum, a beginning, a middle, and an ending to the gathering. More frequently than not, someone has constructed a script that specifies who is to do what, when, where, and how to achieve those objectives. Sometimes these scripts remain in the hands of the organizers, directors, and supervisors; sometimes they are shared, in part or whole, with all members of the gathering. Sometimes the agenda and scripts are very detailed and comprehensive; sometimes they are very open-ended and sketchy. In this manner, organizers can place variable constraints on the degrees of freedom with which gathering members at the outset or throughout the duration of the gathering answer the question: "Now, what do I (we) do next?"

Organizers of ceremonial and demonstration gatherings also construct, arrange, or seek existing physical settings to facilitate their agenda and their objectives. For example, large ceremonial and demonstration gatherings are frequently assembled in stadiums, arenas, coliseums, and so forth, in which members may sit or stand on risers that maximize their line of regard to the agenda's main activities and actors on the surface in front of and below the gathering. Alternatively, when such gatherings are assembled on a level plane, the agenda's main activities and actors are sometimes positioned on an elevated stage or platform to improve the line of regard of those seated or standing below. In both settings, electronically amplified sound systems may assure that all can hear even if they cannot see. All demonstration gatherings cannot, of course, be so arranged and are subject to ecological constraints of the setting. (For useful discussions of the consequences of variations in ambient noise and light for behavior in impromptu demonstration gatherings, see Fisher [1972] and Berk [1974].)

Last, but not least, organizers of ceremonial and demonstration gatherings assign supervisors, marshals, stewards, or ushers to watch for, prevent, repair or resolve, breakdowns in performances, prop failures, internal or external disruptions, and other problems in or threats to the agenda, the script, and, therefore, the realization of the organizer's objectives.

A Little Help From Friends

In contrast, prosaic gatherings are rarely organized in their entirety by some one person or group to achieve particular objectives. Ordinarily there is no single agenda or script to facilitate objectives, no supervisors or stewards (beyond a police officer on foot patrol, lifeguards, or the like) to assure allegiance to the agenda and script by which objectives might be achieved, and minimal physical arrangements to facilitate line of regard or restrict movement

through the area occupied by the gathering. Individual members do, of course, have their own agenda; however, the formulation, repair, or revision of that agenda is something individuals ordinarily accomplish by themselves or with the help of the companions with whom they assemble.

The agenda of individuals and clusters in prosaic gatherings are seldom very demanding. With the exception of a few "loners," most members of prosaic gatherings are more or less available to the passing scene. Therefore, it comes as no surprise that performers, politicians, preachers, and panhandlers—those who make their living in front of audiences—attempt to capitalize on the opportunities such gatherings provide. In one way or another these actors deliberately attempt to capture the attention of some portion of the passing stream of individuals and clusters, rendering them temporary spectators for the performance the actors will then present.

Occasional Solicitation by Strangers

Harrison (1984) reports a time-lapse photographic study of the cycles of arcs and rings around street performers in New York City's Washington Square Park. Some performers did six to eight shows every weekend afternoon and evening. One of the best known was comedian Charlie Barnett who, around 7 p.m. each evening and each hour thereafter until midnight, stood on the ledge around the fountain in the center of the park and shouted: "Its show time! The next show is starting now! Everyone over here!" This explicit pitch might initially attract only twenty to thirty people to whom Barnett would announce that he would not do his show until at least half of all the remaining people in the park converged on the scene. He then directed this smaller audience, on the count of three, to "yell, cheer, applaud, whistle, and generally make an incredible amount of racket...[that]...never fails to attract great numbers of people" (Harrison, 1984, p. 82).

Direct solicitation, whether in one step or two, can frequently create an audience in prosaic gatherings. But most arcs and rings around most performers in public places are not formed by solicitation. Some performers—gamblers, mimes, musicians, jugglers, preachers, and even political activists—may employ variations on Barnett's pitch. But most simply introduce some behavior—often the first phase of their performance—which is extraordinary by contrast with what most people are doing in the setting and is therefore noteworthy to onlookers and passersby. Similarly, it is clear that many other arcs and rings in public places form around accidents, arguments, arrests, or the arrival of police, or ambulances, or television camera crews. No one directly or indirectly attempts to solicit an audience. What is n...

Problems and Their Resolution

No sequence of purposive action takes place in a vacuum. In temporary gatherings, like all other human situations, the best laid plans can go astray. Having launched a course of action in pursuit of some individual, interpersonal, or collective goal, the individuals may need give but intermittent attention to their own action, unless or until some interruption, deflection, resistance, or obstacle makes that action problematic. Even departures from the routine features of the situation in which goals are being pursued can be distracting and potentially problematic. Such disturbances constitute negative feedback which require the actor(s) to establish what the problem is, assess what if any threat is posed to the goal in question, and what if any adjustments, repairs, or supplements in conduct are required. Assuming the goal remains more or less the same (it can, of course, be modified), the individual must redress the discrepancy between where the individual is and where the individual wants to be in relation to that goal. Goffman writes of the same phenomenon (1974, pp. 338-339, emphasis added):

> When an individual finds himself in doubt or in error about what...is going on...[he]...will sharply orient to an examination of the setting so as to pick up information that will settle matters; and, of course, he can make direct requests for information. Often, too, others will provide accounts and other interventions so as to keep his interpretations stable and correct.

When any one member of a cluster of companions gives attention to something other than the behavior(s) in which they have been engaged, additional members may follow suit. Goffman notes (1974, p. 346),

> Should one participant fail to maintain prescribed attention other participants are likely to become alive to this fact and perforce involved in considering what the delict means and what should be done about it—and this involvement necessarily removes them from what they themselves should be involved in. So, one person's impropriety can create improprieties on the part of others.

Impropriety or not, the extraordinary is noteworthy. Further, when one individual shifts his line of regard away from the companions in his cluster, that shift is itself extraordinary and is the equivalent of pointing those companions in the direction of the alternative object or activity. How is this accomplished?

It is important to remember that the members of companion clusters are intermittently monitoring one another by means of touch, or sight, or sound. This is particularly evident when they are in conversation. All conversations involve a speaker and one or more auditors. Extensive research (Duncan and Fiske 1977; West and Zimmerman 1981) establishes that the speaker usually orients in the direction of the auditors when beginning to speak but only orients ... thereafter until the speaker comes to the end of an idea, or poses

a question, or is prepared to "yield the floor," or some combination, when the speaker again orients to the auditors. While the speaker has the floor, the auditors intermittently provide "back channel" signals of attention, comprehension, and perhaps agreement or disagreement; for example, orientation toward the speaker, nods, smiles, uh-huhs, hun-uhs, hmms, and uh-yeahs. Since both speaker and auditor intermittently orient toward one another *and away from one another*, each is therefore intermittently available to the other as well as to the background or the passing scene of other actors, actions, and objects.

Research by Darley, Tager, and Lewis (1973) suggests that when extraordinary events occur in that background or passing scene and are noticed by one member of a conversation cluster, his or her "startle response" or other displays of surprise are likely to be registered by the other member(s) of the cluster who have been intermittently monitoring one another, and for whom companion's startle response or surprise will likely be extraordinary and therefore noteworthy. My hypothesis is that the other member(s) will orient in the direction of whatever extraordinary phenomenon their companion has pointed out." The result is collective orientation in the direction of the extraordinary, collective orientation that has originated in the nonverbal interaction within a cluster of companions. Thus, collective orientation can result from two or more persons independently or interdependently noting and turning toward the extraordinary. A variety of illustrative evidence follows.

THE EXTRAORDINARY IS NOTEWORTHY

Extraordinary Substance

More than a half-century ago, and prior to the advent of television, Sherif (1936, p. 77) noted that celebrities are extraordinary and noteworthy in most public places. "The sudden discovery of a celebrity (a true celebrity to millions of people all over the world wherever there is a cinema) is an event that stands from the rest of the ordinary run of familiar happenings on the street, the movement of traffic and the passing of unknown pedestrians." Celebrities themselves (Chaplin 1933, p. 102) report they are noteworthy and more.

I can be walking along a thoroughfare with an occasional recognition. People just look and nudge one another, then go on their way. But occasionally [someone] will exclaim, 'Oh, look, there's Charlie Chaplin!' and the crowd immediately takes on [his or her] excitement and gathers round until I have to make for a taxi.

The appearance of celebrities is but one kind of departure from the ordinary. But substantively extraordinary departures can also be noteworthy.

Regular participants in any setting soon take for granted the behaviors, costumes, or other characteristics of other regular participants that newcomers or provincials might consider extraordinary and noteworthy. By the same token, regular participants are the first to notice departures from what routinely transpires in their setting. For example, the veteran doorman for the apartment building opening onto a New York City plaza studied by Whyte (1980) was the first to notice and inquire about the presence and behaviors of Whyte's observer-recorders. Their actions were departures from what routinely transpired there. Similarly, Edgerton (1979) reports the startled reactions of people on a southern California beach to a woman who changed from her street clothes into a bikini under the privacy of only a beach towel, actions that often do not draw a second glance on many European beaches. Edgerton observed similar reactions to a middle-aged Anglo couple necking on the beach (1979, p. 91).

After some minutes of talking to one another they began to kiss and pet, quite avidly. Everyone in the area looked on startled; teenagers sometimes neck at the beach, but people in their fifties do so rarely, if ever.

The substantively extraordinary behaviors involved in arguments, fights, and arrests are similarly noteworthy and the shifts in orientation are frequently followed by converging locomotion that results in the formation of arcs and rings around the actors in question. Wright describes several such developments in graphic and useful detail (1978).

On other occasions individuals and clusters are noteworthy because the work they are doing or the tools they are carrying are extraordinary for the setting, or because of what the work or tools foretell. The television camera crew in public places provides one such example, suggesting that something or someone important will soon appear in the setting. We ask ourselves: "What's happening? Who's coming?" On Manhattan sidewalks, the cardboard box, the spiel of the three-card Monte or shell game dealer, and the complementary actions of their shills, provide another example: this is where some action is or can be found for those who gather around. Such configurations are extraordinary, noteworthy, and frequently the objects of onlookers' convergent lines of orientation, of their subsequent locomotion, and consequently, their formation of arcs or rings.

The Risk of Tautology

As compelling as these substantive examples might be, some readers will suspicion a logical flaw in my argument. Admittedly, it is very easy to slip into the circular trap of inferring "the extraordinary" from the convergent orientation or the formation of arcs and rings for which the extraordinary is

alleged responsible. That tautology can be avoided by establishing the extraordinary phenomena independently of its consequences. For example, one might turn to veteran users of public places or to skilled ethnographers for descriptions and documentations of routine individual and collective actions in those settings. Such systematic substantive knowledge of the ordinary would then provide a baseline for determining when the extraordinary could be said to occur and, consequently, for predicting when convergent orientation, locomotion, and the formation of arcs and rings might develop. As desirable as those baseline data on ordinary behavior might be, they are not readily available for all the settings in which arcs and rings develop. Fortunately, an alternative strategy can provide an independent measure of the extraordinary and a means of assessing the argument I have set forth.

Extraordinary Forms

Across more than four decades, thousands of observations have been made of individuals and clusters in public places in cities around the world. Clusters of six or more members are extraordinary phenomena in most public places. As Figure 2 indicates, this pattern holds regardless of the activities in which those members are engaged.[3] I suggest that extraordinary numbers of members in the otherwise ordinary phenomenon of the cluster in public places constitutes an extraordinary form.[4] My hypothesis is that such *extraordinarily large forms are noteworthy* and are followed by convergent orientation from passersby, a first step in the development of the convergent locomotion that can result in arcs and rings. Data from two experiments illustrate my claim.

Milgram, Bickman, and Berkowitz (1969) placed confederates on a New York City sidewalk and instructed them, on signal, to face upward in the direction of a sixth floor office building window. A continuous film record was coded to judge the proportion of passersby who faced upward in the same direction as the confederates, or who stopped and faced in the same direction as the confederates. Five trials each were run with one, two, three, five, ten, and fifteen confederates. As the number of confederates collectively facing upward increased, that is, as the size of the cluster in collective orientation increased, there was an overall increase in the proportion of passersby who oriented in the same direction. There were always more passersby who merely faced upward while continuing to walk than who stopped and faced upward. One problem with this study is the difficulty of deciding what is supposed to be extraordinary. Is it the number of people in the cluster engaging in some collective activity; is it the particular activity in which they are engaged; or, is it some combination of numbers and activity?

Knowles and Bassett (1976) separated the effects of the number of confederates from the effects of the behaviors in which confederates collectively engaged. Two, four, or six confederates standing adjacent to one another were
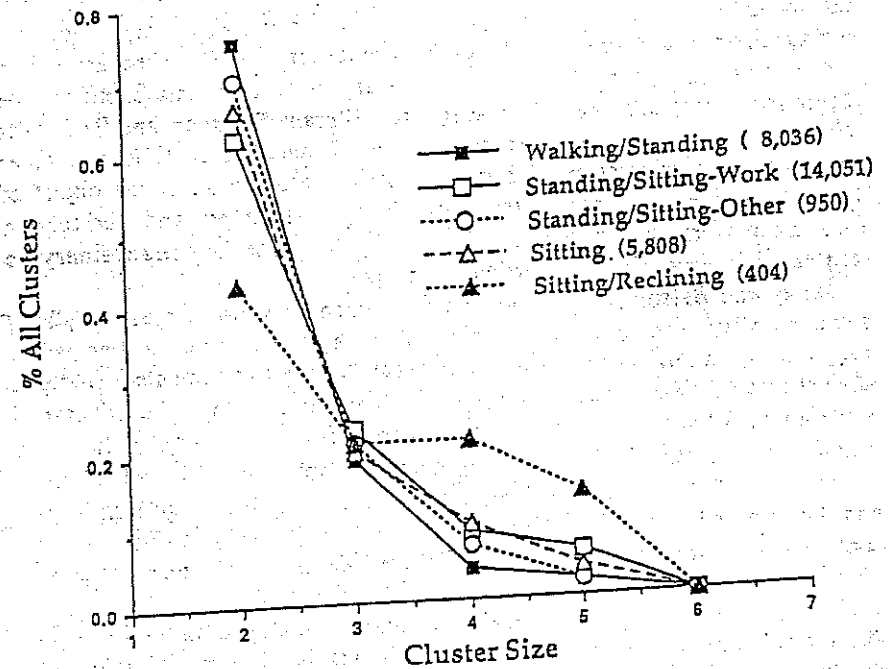
Figure 2. Percentage of All Clusters by Activity by Cluster Size

located adjacent to a major pedestrian thoroughfare on a university campus. All confederates engaged in *dyadic* conversations with one adjacent confederate, or all faced upward in collective orientation. A film record of passersby was coded for orientation in the direction of the clusters. With an increase from two to four to six adjacent persons engaged in dyadic conversations, there was only a slight increase in the number of passersby orienting in the direction of the clusters. However, an increase from two to four to six adjacent persons facing upward in collective orientation was followed by a significant increase in the number of passersby orienting in the direction of the clusters. That two, four, or even six adjacent persons engage in conversation is hardly extraordinary; two persons collectively facing upward may not be all that extraordinary; but, four persons or six persons collectively facing upward is increasingly extraordinary; and, in the setting in question, this appears to have been increasingly noteworthy to passersby.

FROM COLLECTIVE ORIENTATION TO ARCS AND RINGS

It is one thing for onlookers or passersby to orient in the direction of the extraordinary; it is quite another to move toward (or away from) the extraordinary phenomena. Collective orientation in the direction of an extraordinary phenomenon may be necessary but it is not sufficient for the formation of arcs and rings. The research by Milgram, Bickman, and Berkowitz (1969) suggests that mere orientation is less demanding on time and other behaviors than orientation plus movement in the direction of the object of orientation. Like the intermittent availability of speakers and auditors in standing clusters, the availability of passersby to notice the extraordinary, to stop and converge, warrants further attention.

Darley and Batson (1973) report an experiment in which subjects, walking down an alley from one campus building to another, passed a disheveled, coughing, groaning individual (a confederate of the experimenter) slumped against a doorway. Subjects were en route to a second building to be videotaped while giving a talk on an assigned topic: one half on the parable of the Good Samaritan, the other half on a "non-helping" topic. One third of all these subjects had been instructed to "hurry" their trip, one third to "go right over," and the remainder that they "might have to wait" upon arrival. The slumped confederate victim, ignorant of any of these treatment conditions, recorded whether passing subjects failed to notice, noticed but did not offer aid, did not stop (but notified someone at the destination), stopped and asked if the victim needed help, or stopped and insisted on taking the victim inside. Sixty percent neither noticed nor stopped. Forty percent offered indirect or direct aid. "Subjects in a hurry to reach their destination were more likely to pass the victim] without stopping" ($r = .42$), regardless of their talk topic or their measured "personality variables" (1973, p. 100). Persons who were available, who had uncommitted blocks of time, were more likely to glance, to stop, to inquire, or offer help..

Latané and Darley (1970) noted in their early research on emergency intervention that onlookers or passersby must first define or redefine such situations: the individual must first notice that something is happening; must interpret this is an emergency; must decide whether he or she has a responsibility to assist; must then decide if and how to assist; and, finally, must decide when to assist.

When the witness is a member of a cluster, other cluster members may witness or be called upon to verify what the former has witnessed as well as any proposals that may be made for actions regarding what is witnessed. Hypothetically, at least one person poses the question to self or companions: "What's that?" or "What's going on over there?" This may be followed by: "Should I (we) take a closer look? Let's go see what's happening!" (Or, "Lets get involved!") These or similar questions are posed, discussed, and resolved in the process of considering and proposing movement toward or away from the objects or activities in question. Miller, Hinlz, and Couch (1975) report that when pairs of subjects were confronted with an extraordinary or problematic development, pairs of friends were far more likely than pairs of strangers to turn to one another for verbal and nonverbal confirmation of what had occurred as well as conversation about what might or should be done about it. When pairs of friends intervened, they did so almost twice as quickly as pairs of strangers (Miller, Hinlz, and Couch 1975). Friends may have been able to do so in part because of shared past experiences and their familiarity with one another's skills, but more so I suspect because of the rich vocabulary of verbal and nonverbal symbols friends share. That vocabulary enables the two or more persons to establish a mutual goal more quickly and to propose and implement some course of action regarding that goal.

Once one cluster moves in the direction of the extraordinary for a closer look or listen, additional individuals and clusters who may have only oriented toward the extraordinary phenomenon may notice the aforementioned cluster's movement in the direction of the phenomenon and follow suit. Several studies of pedestrian violators of crosswalk signals at traffic intersections are relevant to this transition from collective orientation to the formation of arcs and rings. A small proportion of pedestrians standing at the curb awaiting the "walk" signal to commence locomotion in the direction of their common orientation (the other side of the street) occasionally violate the "don't walk" signal. But significant increases above that baseline proportion of violators can be produced by the introduction of confederate models (Lefkowitz, Blake, and Mouton 1955; Dannick 1973; Russell, Wilson, and Jenkins 1976). When people are orienting in a common direction and are entertaining the possibility of moving toward the object of their common focus, the likelihood that they will do so increases if they see or hear others commencing to take that same action. An increase in the number of confederate violators is moderately associated with an increase in the proportion of naive pedestrian violators, regardless of sex and race of models or pedestrians ($r = 0.33$, my secondary analysis of data from Russell, Wilson, and Jenkins 1976). So too, perhaps, is the case with those individuals' and clusters who collectively orient in the direction of some extraordinary event and then witness other individuals and clusters moving toward (or away from) that event. Their cumulative converging movements result in the formations of arcs and rings around the object of common interest.

SUMMARY

A bird's-eye view of most temporary gatherings establishes that instead of a uniform blanket of continuous collective behavior, one is more likely to observe a patchwork quilt of varied and alternating sequences of individual and

collective action. Some of those patches of collective action occur again and again in a variety of substantively different gatherings, distinguished by unique configurations that, following Simmel, I refer to as elementary forms. Four such forms were examined here: clusters, queues, arcs and rings.

I suggested that clusters are by-products of an assembling process in which family members, friends, or acquaintances travel with one another to, or make prior arrangements to meet at, some common location. I presented evidence for the claim that such clusters may be the most frequent form of elementary social behavior observed in public places. Ranging from two to five persons, the frequency with which they are observed is inversely related to their size; clusters of six or more members are extraordinary phenomena in most gatherings.

Clusters are not the only elementary form of social behavior observed in such gatherings. Vendors, performers, and other purveyors of particular interests can, in turn, become the focus around which other elementary forms of social behavior develop. Queues develop because individuals and clusters align themselves in the order of their arrival at some scarce commodity or service in which they are interested: first come, first served.

Arcs and rings also develop around a point of common interest. Sometimes this common interest is established in advance of the gathering and is the raison d'etre for the assembling process which produces the gathering in which that point of interest is to be found. When two or more individuals with similar interests in that point converge around it, the result is arcs or rings. Those social forms are therefore derivatives. The point of common interest can also be established within the gathering and there are at least two ways in which this occurs: first, through the explicit solicitation of the attention and interest of individuals in the direction of some point; and, second, by sudden departures from prevailing or routine surrounding activity, departures to which first one and then other onlookers give attention and around which they subsequently converge. I characterized this latter phenomenon with a hypothesis: the extraordinary is noteworthy. I offered several substantive illustrations and then presented systematic empirical observations and experimental evidence in support of this hypothesis.

In his pioneering study of behavior in public places Erving Goffman wrote (1963, p. 244) that "a social gathering may be only a filmy pinpoint of social organization; but however miniscule it is, there is reason to examine it sociologically." After three decades of work, we can now see more forms of social organization than the "filmy pinpoint" Goffman suggested. From the initial and predominantly small group or cluster composition of the prosaic gathering, to the occasional transition from disparate individuals and clusters into more inclusive social forms such as queues, arcs and rings, to the verbal and nonverbal interaction within and across clusters and individuals by which such transitions are accomplished, the infrastructures of temporary prosaic

gatherings are social infrastructures. There is no reason to expect any less of religious, sport, and political demonstration and ceremonial gatherings. They await our systematic investigations.

NOTES

1. For reasons that I have discussed elsewhere at length (McPhail, 1991, Chapter 5), I will use the terms social behavior, collective behavior, and collective action interchangeably throughout this essay. The traditional justifications for distinguishing between those terms are no longer defensible on empirical or logical grounds. When I use the term social or collective I refer to the behaviors or actions taken by two or more persons with or in relation to one another. Four elementary "forms" of social or collective action are considered here: clusters, queues, arcs and rings. For another useful discussion of forms see J. Lofland (1981).

2. I draw on Simmel (1909) and on Frisby's (1984) translations of Simmel's analysis of forms. Three points are relevant here. First, Simmel acknowledged that interaction between individuals is the starting point of all social formations" (Frisby 1984, p. 62). Second, social forms are independent of the interactions and circumstances which gave them birth. For example, the contemporary handshake derives from the historical circumstance in which two knights approached one another with extended, open, and empty hands to indicate they carried no weapons to that encounter. Similarly, two or more individuals do not deliberately array themselves in the distinctive spatial configurations here called arcs and rings. Those forms are derivative of individuals' purposive efforts to position themselves such that they can see and hear some common object of concern. Third, social forms are recognizable by objective criteria.

3. Figure 2 draws from all the studies summarized in Figure 1 (James 1951, 1953; Coleman 1962; Berkowitz 1971; Whyte 1980) plus the study by Bakeman and Beck (1973) who reported only their observations of clusters of two or more persons and were therefore not included in Figure 1 which summarizes observations of individuals and clusters.

4. For another application of Simmel's analysis of the relationship between numbers and forms, see van den Hoonaard's (1991) discussion of some macro forms of collective action.

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