

**Recurrent Feelings.**  
**Affective Regularity and Calm Emotional States**  
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The coherence over time of social reality – its reproducing itself by absorbing agency, forcing choices, and encoding the past of individuals into their present – has long engaged sociologists, also to understand how transformations can occur. Sticky, robust forms of stability permeate both micro- and macro-patterns, anchoring casual dinners and large-scale warfare, evening strolls and stock markets. Bearman (2011) calls this problem the *problem of continuity*, “the fact that 99.99999% of all human action, of all events, and of all interactions are embedded within streams of action, events, and interactions that change nothing (...) Here and elsewhere, whatever is happening in the billions of moments that are the “nows” for the billions of persons, pairs of persons, triples, and larger groups, little that is agentic ever happens.” The dimensions considered to address persistence run the gamut from structural to cultural ones, including processual, political-economic, interactional, phenomenological, biosocial, and cognitive elements. In this paper, I try to tackle continuity by analyzing its *emotional* component. This move is, to a certain extent, counterintuitive. The affective sphere is associated with volatility and imbalance; if anything, a vector of change. Yet, a major thread of sociological work on emotions (epitomized by Hochschild 2003; 2011) demonstrated that feelings and their expressions are situationally managed to get attuned to institutional requirements. Even physiological indicators of emotion, like facial expressions, are calibrated to social units (von Scheve 2012), and the same goes for postures and movements of the whole body (de Gelder 2024). Furthermore, the same dialectic between the intimately felt and the publicly conveyed informed the tactful basis of interactional harmony, the suppression of “immediate heartfelt feelings” to show what “others will be able to find at least temporarily acceptable” (Goffman 1959: 9; see Tavory and Fine 2020). This provides some substance to the affective underpinning of continuity. My argument, however, draws only marginally on emotional regulation, feeling rules, and the (highly gendered) work that goes into displaying emotions appropriate to given contextual constraints (see Wharton 2009). Rather than concentrating on how the embodiment and manifestation of feelings is socially orchestrated, this paper zeroes in on the very feelings attached to said orchestration. Hence, I start by extending to affective matters the cultural-cognitive sociology’s insight that collective patterns of attention usually

favor “figureness” over “backgroundness” (Zerubavel 2015), “somethingness” over “nothingness” (Scott 2018), eventful, labeled, transformative, spotlighted categories and features over seemingly uneventful, unnamed, non-transformative, default ones (Brekhus 2024). In the emotional realm, this entails that although low profile, prosaic, and flat emotional states might make up most of what we feel, these feelings are often unrecognized as such. The salience of capital-E Emotions organizes our accounts around emotional highlights, the climax of affective experiences edited for adaptive, narrative, or self-identification purposes. Assessing protracted activities, for example, individuals focus on peak moments that stand for the whole experience (producing well-known microeconomic paradoxes: Kahneman 2000). But the feeling of continuity rhymes with the continuity of feelings. I thus introduce the concept of *unmarked emotional states* (UES) to identify unobtrusive forms of affectivity that, though emotionally driven, do not catch the eye (still less the heart), and whose main point is precisely that: to maintain conditions that, while emotionally scaffolded, allow prolonged durability, plateau situations, and preserve the path most travelled. The analysis is meant to point up how socially consequential UES are, possibly more so than acute, canonically intended emotions. Calmness, a specific instantiation of UES, is treated in detail here and identified as a pillar of affective regularity. Analyzing *calm states*, I parse three features in particular: (-) their full-fledged emotionality, why they should be interpreted as forms of affectivity tout court; (-) their mundane character, how they can represent the actual, daily manifestation of more violent, conspicuous sentiments; (-) their prosocial and immediately intuitive aspects. But the modal nature of UES does not mean they are spontaneous or innate, resulting in fact from securing processes, and I show how they are facilitated actively and indirectly, interactionally and infrastructurally, via calming processes and *emotional banisters* of distributed-cognition nature that go beyond the epidermis of individuals (Norton 2020).

Therefore, this paper proceeds through three interrelated layers of analysis. First, the separation of everydayness and emotionality is appraised, attesting how this contributes to obfuscating the role of UES in general. Then, I analyze calmed states as a pivotal example of UES. Finally, calming reactions (a form of emotional contagion so sui generis as to verge on its opposite) are presented as a common and underappreciated response to others’ emotional manifestations, as well as inscribed in social contexts and material culture.