

Simmel Studies



Patrick Watier's Memory

Patrick Watier

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PATRICK WATIER

With the disappearance of Otthein, I lost an intellectual relationship but also a friend. My path could not have been the same if I hadn't met Otthein. It's more about the man as I gradually got to know him that I'm going to talk about, his intellectual achievements speaking for themselves.

I had the great good fortune to meet Otthein Rammstedt in 1986 in Paris, at a meeting organised by the Goethe Institute on the initiative of Michel Maffesoli - who had supported studies on Simmel from the outset - for the publication of a book devoted to Simmel in the collection of which he was director. The first symposium on Simmel in France had taken place in Strasbourg two years earlier, but Otthein had been unable to attend. This meeting in Paris marked the beginning of a long collaboration between us, some elements of which Otthein brought back in his final contribution to Simmel's complete works, in which he recounts the various moments that marked its publication as well as the history of Simmelian studies. We met again the following year in Bielefeld to discuss a collaboration between the Faculty of Social Sciences in Strasbourg and the Simmelian Research Group in Bielefeld. From the very first meeting, behind a somewhat cold appearance, I discovered a man full of warmth and generosity. In Bielefeld, where I was welcomed at Treptower Strasse, we shared good times over a drink and small meals concocted by Otthein aux fourneaux. Both he and Angela were not insensitive to the vendanges tardives pinot gris and gewurztraminer that I had brought to thank them for their accommodation. It was a studious and friendly atmosphere, far from some quite boring faculty meetings. Otthein was swarming with projects on the organization of cooperation supported by the CNRS and the DFG or the

Bosch foundation. The DFG could not support the ambitious project of publishing the complete works, but it financed research that made it possible to make progress in this field. We (the faculty) were involved in projects on the institutionalization of sociology and the role of sociologists during the First World War. I also discovered how much my knowledge of Simmel's writings was still incomplete, and Otthein guided me there.

I spoke of his generosity and what I would call his big heart. When he learned that my wife Karin's family had lived in Westeregeln near Magdeburg and that she had never been there, he surprised us at a meeting in Bielefeld, where Karin was accompanying me, by taking us there right after the Wall fell. When I had a delicate relationship with the CNU for my qualification as a university professor, he supported me publicly and morally.

To increase Simmel's sociological visibility in France, we also decided to hold a second symposium in Strasbourg, of which we were the editors.

As I was lucky enough to have students who wanted to write a thesis in Germany, not necessarily in the Simmelian field, Bielefeld was the natural choice. Otthein greatly facilitated the process, because, let's say it diplomatically, Bielefeld looked down on the University of Humanities in Strasbourg. Otthein was a lover of France and being able to establish scientific and of course friendly relations was very important to him. We were thus able to organize Strasbourg/Bielefeld seminars and to strengthen both friendly and scientific ties. His capacity for work was astounding, just look at the number of editorial notices he wrote for the complete works. It had become a private joke between Angela and Otthein: "We're going to do a bit of Simmel tonight". Maliciously, on Otthein's 81st birthday, his son Tilman was able to suggest in his speech the questions that a child would ask himself when he heard this sentence: "What is a Simmel, a drink? a cake? in any case something that two consenting adults do together". This little part says a lot about the importance of publishing the complete

works in the life of the Rammstedts, because of course it was a matter of checking the archives, pointing out changes between editions, discussing a contribution.

Otthein had a Champagne side, he sparkled, he also knew how to convince, how to draw people into scientific projects, while at the same time immediately fighting a factual error with the utmost rigour and vigour.

Otthein and Angela showed that a firm intellectual vocation can raise mountains in an increasingly bureaucratised scientific world, it is a testament to be meditated upon.