



**Lucio Perucchi, *Su Simmel. Saggi di filosofia*, Udine, Gaspari, 2019, pp. 207**

**Giuliano Covetti**

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*just* its relationships and its intentional dedication to them. What's authentic in the Bethlehemites' pursuits is their full commitment to relationships--as they would put it, "Christianity is relationships" (137). In this vein, she explicitly downplays Simmel's language about the unity of the relational self, language that persists in *The View of Life*. "Simmel might long for unity and transcendence, but he ultimately rejects both," she argues (50). Finally, and perhaps most importantly, individuality plays little role in her account; there seems little room for the singularity and uniqueness of Simmel's authentic individual in Montemaggi's interpretation.

Montemaggi's valuable study combines insightful reflection on Simmel's conception of the authentic self with a striking contemporary case study. In the process, she also reminds us of the important role that Simmel's reflections on religion played in his thought. This unique conjunction makes her book important reading for anyone concerned with these issues.

GIULIANO COVETTI

**Lucio Perucchi, *Su Simmel. Saggi di filosofia*, Udine, Gaspari, 2019, pp. 207.**

Maybe not well known out of Italian Universities, Lucio Perucchi (1947) is undoubtedly one of the most relevant personalities involved in Georg Simmel's thought (his most important work is probably the Italian translation, together with Alessandro Cavalli, of *The Philosophy of Money*). His latest book shows a strong bond with the German philosopher and sociologist that has never weakened in years. As he writes in the preface, this work aims to make available some of his essays on Simmel which nowadays are not so easy to find. But it is not the only one. Perucchi strongly believes that what Simmel wrote (both philosophically and

sociologically) is yet relevant; his thought «cannot be translated in ideology» he says, «but consists in a clear and rational analysis of the most severe contradictions of times which prepared ours» (p. 7).

The first essay (pp. 9-22) stresses this philosophical style through the relevance accorded to everyday objects by Simmel. They are powerful symbols, concrete metaphors of our world; they are traces, small (but not insignificant) parts of it. In this sense, Simmel helps us to find something metaphysical in the most simple aspect or object of our life. Again, his a-systematic philosophy allows things to speak up themselves. It is an aesthetical approach which goes strictly deep in their being, their *content*, starting from the surface of phenomena, their *form*. The key-word is still *Wechselwirkung*, just because of the strong relationship we have with our objects that define us. The mutual bond with them gives us back a wide-angle picture of our world. Which it has to be conceived, by the way, not just as the concrete pad we lay on but as *the sum of interactions* that bond us not just to the objects, but even to our fellow human beings. So, an analysis of modern culture cannot avoid of facing the role of objectification, a process triumphantly symbolized by money, which, in the complexity of modernity, is both an alienation and liberation instrument. Money and objective culture are yet the subjects of the second essay (pp. 23-36), where Perucchi compares Simmel's philosophy with the thought of one of his well-known students: György Lukács, who often underlined the relevance of Simmel's analysis on modernity for a marxist *Weltanschauung*, but, at the same time, criticizing his philosophical approach as a bourgeois one, which conceives objects and forms in such a-temporal way that puts him far from a reasonable critique of capitalism structure. Money embodies the «general relativity of the world» (p. 28), in Simmel it has become the symbol of both human relationships and the tragedy of culture. From a specific standpoint, Lukács' critique is not so inappropriate: the transformation of objects in commodities, the division of work, commodities fetishism are processes which, together with many others social forms, belong to a cluster of *objective spirit* which realization is not so far from Hegel

or Marx. Unfortunately, Simmel never had the impulse to link them to a structural critique of capitalism as a social process.

But, just like Hegel and Marx, Simmel is drawn by Perucchi as an extremely sensible spirit fully interested in problems related to the matching between forms of appearance and the forces that generated them (not so far from the problems of correspondence between actor and character or man and his masks discussed by Perucchi and linked to Pirandello's works; pp. 37-52). It is a problem which can be referred to those inherent a philosophy of history (*Historismus* in his German development) interested in the explanations of *Kulturformen*. If society is our main world, how to make intelligible its movements and changes?

Skeptical about a naturalistic hypothesis, Simmel enhances the one which prescribes different laws for the society and civilization, whose forms (art, uses, gestures, habits, objects, and so on) are put always in a tragic relationship with the man. For Simmel, the unceasing dialect between forms and life cannot be synthesized. Among inner and outer there's a fracture that can no longer be recomposed. The subject suffers in a world where life forces (here we recognize Nietzsche's role) are often hindered by forms (in this sense, Simmel finds exemplar Michelangelo's life. Simmel's interests for him, as well as the art question, are discussed and analyzed by Perucchi at pp. 77-87 and 127-142).

These tragic issues keep Simmel close to Heidegger, as Gadamer said (pp. 89-91). According to Perucchi, he detected in Simmel a tension to the problem of *Erleben* and the historical understanding. «The historicization of data» as Perucchi claims about Simmel, «happens in a *lebenphilosophisch* way, "liquefying them" in a dynamic of life of which appears as particular formations (*Gestaltungen*), to the point that the concept of historical understanding referred to a psychic reality identifies itself to that one based on "living totality" of its holder» (p. 98). Thus, the understanding purpose is not merely the sum of the movements, but their dynamic connection, which allows to experience every single part as embedded in the continued dialectic flow of life.

Truth will never be proved just because it is never brought by a single subject (such as the abstract *transcendental subjectivity* in Kant): it is a relational determination, always made by different instances and different subjectivities at the same moment. In this way, Perucchi proves how Simmel's thought represents a truly relevant intersection of classical German philosophy (Kant, Goethe, Hegel, Dilthey, Nietzsche).

Perucchi was not the first Italian philosopher to get into Simmel's thought: it was probably Antonio Banfi, who had the chance to meet him personally when he attended his courses in Berlin in 1910's. And this is the reason why Perucchi re-proposes an essay about him and his relationship with Simmel. Just as Lukács, (who was his classmate at *Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität*) Banfi «“inherited” from Simmel the theme of crisis of culture» (p. 144) sharing with him an idea of Communism as an appropriate response to this crisis.

Life flow, relativity, and anti-dogmatic conception of reality were the burning issues of Simmel's lessons, which soon became part of his thought. According to Perucchi, the vibrancy of his master's spirit was so fascinating for his young Italian student to the point that Banfi always tried to save him from those who, like Lukács, saw him as an irrational thinker. Simmel's concept of life as a totality made of interlacing beings «allows to conceive culture itself through variety and multiplicity of its directions, through the relativity and stackability of his values, through the differenced dynamism of its forms, its processes and its centers. The experience of crisis has been here translated in a sense of relativity and cultural complexity» (p. 144). Those are the elements who in a 1920's essay (*Il relativismo critico e l'intuizione filosofica della vita nel pensiero di G. Simmel*, preface to Italian translation of *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie*) allowed Banfi to design Simmel's philosophical attitude as *critical relativism*, which has to be intended as a *realization of life as perpetual dynamism*, as an eternal process always in being.

Thus, all the constitutive principles become regulative: the whole human life (to be intended as *Mehr-Leben*) is just a singular point of

view. Life can never be synthesized: Simmel's philosophy is the expression of an understanding attempt of life, a dialectic process that never comes to a point. According to Banfi, it is the love for this imperfect and incomplete movement (*Amor vitae*, which can be referred both to Simmel and Spinoza) that expresses the «true modern spirit» (p. 156).

Hence, art becomes the only synthesizing dimension of life. Banfi (as well as Perucchi) stresses this point: in Simmel's thought art represents the place where subject and object, immanency and transcendency, forms and contents *get in touch*. Art, as well as life in its metaphysical aspect, is a true *totality*. It is the attempt to reproduce it in the concrete world which brought Banfi close to Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie*, as an alternative to Benedetto Croce and Giovanni Gentile idealistic and neo-hegelian philosophy, very popular in Italy since the 1930's.

In conclusion, we can state that Perucchi intended to offer not a merely summary of his writings on Simmel in this essay collection. The spirit behind this book is represented not only by this purpose, but above all by the hope to get back the reader (most hopefully keeping alive) to a critical thought which believed in an idea of life as a dimension much more complex than it seems. Or should we say, as a tribute to Simmel aesthetics, "than it appears"?

CATERINA ZANFI

**Georg Simmel, *Stile moderno: Saggi di estetica sociale*, Barbara Carnevali, Andrea Pinotti (Eds.), Torino, Einaudi, 2020, pp. 437.**

Simmel's short essays seem destined to be re-presented to the public in collections, each of which provides a new and different key to their interpretation. This fate was apparent already in