



## **Klaus Christian Köhnke. A Commemoration**

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## Klaus Christian Köhnke. A Commemoration

Klaus Christian Köhnke was born on 14 June, 1953 in Flensburg and passed away on 24 May, 2013 in Berlin. He was a philosopher and cultural scientist and one of the pillars of the Georg Simmel edition. Furthermore, he had a deep passion for the quantitative methods of social science, as shown by his statistics of the development of *Neokantianism* in Germany. He developed a key to generate differentiated acronyms for Simmel's collected writings to include for publication in the works edition. In addition, he developed a lexicographic procedure intended to help recognize Simmel's anonymous publications on the basis of the frequency of certain words and expressions appearing in the unsigned texts. The results of this research allowed him to publish the 17<sup>th</sup> volume of Simmel's works, including the anonymous and pseudonymous writings.

Köhnke personified one of the lines of continuity between Simmel and the fellow editors of his works. His teacher, Michael Landmann, was the son of the economist Julius Landmann and philosopher Edith Landmann who were friends of the Simmel family in Berlin. I first met Köhnke in Berlin in 1990 during the tumultuous times after the fall of the wall. He was then well known for his monumental book on the *Rise of Neokantianism* as the most influential academic philosophy in Germany in the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and in 1986 this study was awarded the 'Ernst Reuter Dissertation Prize'. After the sudden death of Michael Landmann, in 1990 Köhnke became assistant to Karlfried Gründer at the Freie Universität Berlin. At that time, I was working on Ferdinand Tönnies' theory of community at the university library and participating in Gründer's seminar on Blumenberg, so I had an interesting exchange with Köhnke about Tönnies and his vision of the work of Thomas

Hobbes. It was indeed a brief meeting. I could not continue my studies in Berlin and I had to go back to Italy to achieve my Master of Arts.

A few years later, in 1995, I started my career as a Simmel scholar in Bielefeld doing research with Otthein Rammstedt about Simmel's relationships with his French contemporaries like Bergson, Bouglé and Durkheim, and I became involved with the edition of Simmel's works. It was here that I met again with Köhnke, who in 1996 became professor of Cultural Theory and Philosophy in Leipzig, and assumed responsibility for the edition of Simmel's early work and correspondence. His innovative book *Der junge Simmel in Theoriebeziehungen und sozialen Bewegungen*, Suhrkamp 1996 (The young Simmel in theoretical relationships and social movements) then became a major object of debate in the community of Simmel's scholars: Köhnke focused on a Simmel who was unfamiliar for mainstream secondary literature. A young intellectual, engaged in the social and political debates of his time and critically inquiring into the artistic scene of the fast-growing metropolis of Berlin. There were several aspects of Köhnke's study that paved the way for an examination of Simmel's work from the point of view of the history of social movements and challenged Simmel's image as a rather apolitical aesthete.

Besides the Simmel edition, Köhnke dedicated himself to two further studies: the edition of Ernst Cassirer's posthumous manuscripts and the selected works edition of Moritz Lazarus, one of the founders of "people's psychology" (*Völkerpsychologie*) and a teacher of Simmel at the University of Berlin. For the Cassirer edition, which Köhnke edited in Berlin together with John Michael Krois and Oswald Schwemmer, he was able to attract the late, sadly lamented Rudiger Kramme, one of the most engaged editors of the Simmel edition. I met both to discuss a planned research project on Rudolph Eucken in a Pub in Berlin Charlottenburg. The Pub's owner wanted to give Köhnke the door key because he was always the last to leave the place long after the staff had left.

Köhnke was a stately, tall man with a charismatic appearance and prodigious organizational talent. At the same time, he was a scrupulous and dedicated scholar who invested most of his energies in the realization of editions of works and critical assessments of classical authors. This kind of contribution constitutes the grounding work for the reproduction of social sciences and philosophy beyond the endemic tendency to amnesia that characterizes our age. For this reason, Köhnke's achievements represent a lasting patrimony for the scientific community.