

MATTHIEU AMAT, FABIO D'ANDREA *

Introduction

1. Crisis of culture, lack of the “idea of culture”

If one were to ask educated people what idea actually governs their lives, most of them would give a specialised answer relating to their occupation. One would not hear much of any cultural idea governing them as whole men and guiding all their specialised activities (GSG 16: 190).¹

The different processes of the objectification of life and social differentiation fragment modern life, making the perspective of a harmonious and global formation of individuality ever more remote. In its humanistic sense of *Bildung*, culture no longer constitutes any kind of potentially shared regulative idea, even for “educated people”. Simmel radicalises a *topos* of the “critique of culture” since Schiller. The problem is not so much the determination of contents or form of culture – whether, for example, science or arts, humanities or philosophy has the greater cultural value² – as the fact that the very idea of culture loses its grip on the new socio-cultural reality.

Not only is there no raw material [...] for an all-embracing cultural idea, but also the spheres whose new forms it would

* Matthieu Amat is the author of paragraphs 1, 2 and 3; Fabio D'Andrea of paragraph 4.

¹ Translated by D. Frisby and Mike Featherstone (Simmel, 1997: 80)

² On such debates, see Bollenbeck, 1994: 126-159.