



## Introduction

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Simmel as Educator

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## *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).<sup>1</sup>

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 value<sup>2</sup> – 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

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

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

<sup>2</sup> On such debates, see Bollenbeck, 1994: 126-159.

encompass are far too diverse, indeed disparate, to permit any such ideal unification (Simmel, 1997: 80; GSG 16: 190).

The Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Enlightenment, and German idealism had such ideas, despite and beyond their profound differences. But “for at least several decades we have no longer been living by any sort of shared idea, nor indeed, to a large extent by any idea at all”. The “recent culture [...] which had developed up to 1914 [...] has diverged from all former cultural evolution”: whereas “old forms have always been destroyed by a desire for new forms”, the “opposition to the principle of form as such” constitutes the “ultimate impulse” of modern life (Simmel, 1997: 80; GSG 16: 189). This “cultural malaise” expresses the fact that life tries to “break out of any form [...] to put itself in the place of form” (Simmel, 1997: 77; GSG 16: 185). This is the pinnacle of a process which was diagnosed in the *Philosophy of Money*: the increasing discrepancy between “subjective culture” (culture as cultivation of life) and “objective culture” (culture as products of life’s objectification) (Simmel, 2004: 454; GSG 6: 522).

[T]he things that determine and surround our lives, such as tools, means of transport, the products of science, technology and art, are extremely refined. Yet individual culture, at least in the higher strata, has not progressed at all to the same extent; indeed, it has even frequently declined (Simmel, 2004: 453; GSG 16: 620).

The dialectic of objectification and subjectification is broken, so that culture, as “synthesis of a subjective development and an objective spiritual value”, becomes ever more difficult (Simmel 1997: 64; GSG 14: 399). This has serious consequences on the form of education and teaching and on their approach:

The preponderance of objective over subjective culture that developed during the nineteenth century is reflected partly in the fact that the eighteenth century pedagogic ideal was focused upon the formation of man, that is upon a personal internal

value, which was replaced during the nineteenth century, however, by the concept of “education” (*Bildung*) in the sense of a body of objective knowledge and behavioural patterns (Simmel, 2004: 453-454; GSG 6: 621).

This “Bildung” between brackets, reduced to an acquisition of objectifiable knowledge and competences is precisely what Simmel could not call an “idea of culture”.

## 2. From “philosophy of culture” to “philosophical culture”

The reading of Simmel’s essays on culture often stops with this observation and diagnosis. It reduces their analyses to a mere *Kulturkritik* of modernity. But they are part of a genuine philosophy of culture<sup>3</sup> that aims not only to offer a theoretical description of the problematic relationship between the objective forms of culture and the formation of individuality, but also to provide a new idea of culture, which could be used as guidance in the “crisis of modern culture” – that is our hypothesis, at least. It is true that this purpose is not always explicitly thematised and not completely fulfilled. But reading Simmel from this perspective throws light on many of his texts and even allows some unification of his work, as the texts that are gathered here mean to show.

What form and what content should this cultural idea take? The legacy of German neo-humanism (W. v. Humboldt, Goethe, Schleiermacher...) is obvious. However, the solution cannot be found in a simple update of the humanistic tradition – Simmel’s attempt differs, for example, from that of Werner Jaeger’s “Third Humanism” in the 1920s and 1930s. Indeed, Simmel writes:

For the modern spirit of life, antiquity frequently possesses this self-sufficiently perfect enclosed nature, which resists absorption into the pulsations and restlessness of the tempo of our development. And today this may be what moves some to

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<sup>3</sup> See in particular Geßner, 2003.

seek precisely for our culture a different fundamental factor (Simmel, 1997: 65; GSG 14: 400).

What might this “different fundamental factor” be? The texts gathered here may help us to find an answer. Before considering their proposals, we would like to provide a better foundation for our assumption. Two dimensions of his work and attitude particularly attest that Simmel sought to determine such an idea of culture: his involvement in the journal *Logos*, and his program of “philosophical culture”.

In 1909, Simmel was invited by Heinrich Rickert and Max Weber to contribute to a new journal founded by students of Rickert and Wilhelm Windelband: *Logos. Internationale Zeitschrift für Philosophie der Kultur*. In the context of an increasing division of scientific labour, and in “close contact with the sciences of culture”, this journal aimed to “deepen the philosophical consciousness of the motives that act in the whole culture”, in order to “give sense and meaning to cultural life”. In a “non-dogmatic” spirit (but in a neo-Kantian tone), the journal gave room to the “most different orientations of philosophy, provided that they see in culture as such a problem for philosophy” (*Logos*, 1910: I-III). This is undoubtedly the case for the philosophy of Simmel, who made the possibility of “influencing the overall spirit of the journal” (GSG 22: 752)<sup>4</sup> a condition for his participation. Indeed, he became its main contributor, publishing eleven articles between 1910 and 1917. Three other texts were published posthumously. Richard Kroner, who edited the journal between 1913 and 1915 (with Georg Mehlis) and between 1924 and 1933, said that Simmel considered *Logos* to be “*his* journal”.<sup>5</sup>

Simmel therefore plays a leading role in the founding phase of a philosophy of culture which is not only an epistemology of sciences

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<sup>4</sup> Letter to Rickert of 15/12/09. He said the same, in substance, to Max Weber (GSG 23: 755).

<sup>5</sup> Gassen and Landmann, 1958: 230 (Kroner’s emphasis). On the history of *Logos*, see Kramme, 1995 and Homann, 1994.

of culture, but has a practical horizon. Many of his papers in *Logos* offer perspectives on the problem of individuality and its formation: “Der Begriff und die Tragödie der Kultur” (*Logos* II/1, 1911), “Michelangelo. Ein Kapitel zur Metaphysik der Kultur” (*Logos* I/2, 1910), “Die Wahrheit und das Individuum. Aus einem Goethebuch” (*Logos* III/1, 1912), “Goethes Individualismus”, (*Logos* III/2, 1912). These last two papers are preparatory texts for the *Goethebuch* of 1912, of which Simmel said that it was published for a “cultural purpose”, as “Goethe, as an entire existence and value, is a good that has not yet really been appropriated by the German people” (GSG 23: 148-149).<sup>6</sup> But that the philosophy of culture should be, lastly, a philosophy which cultivates, is shown best by Simmel’s recourse to the expression *philosophical culture*, which he coined in the early 1910s. It supplies the title of a collection of essays (*Philosophische Kultur. Gesammelte Essays*) that were first published between 1905 and 1911, which Simmel reworked and prefaced in order to demonstrate a “unity of purpose”, as he wrote to Husserl (GSG 22: 941). Another editorial decision indicates the high significance that Simmel attached to the expression *philosophical culture*: the collection of essays that presented his work to the French public in 1912 was entitled *Mélanges de philosophie relativiste. Contributions à la culture philosophique* (Simmel, 1912). This compilation gathered texts which were written over a period of twenty years and whose objects are even more disparate than those in the German collection. “Philosophical Culture” began to define and show the unitary intent of the whole work.

It is in a section called “Zur Philosophie der Kultur” that the essay on the “tragedy of culture”, first published in *Logos*, found its place in *Philosophische Kultur*. The philosophy of culture is subordinate to philosophical culture. The emphasis shifted from the theoretical to the practical dimension, so much so that Simmel believed it original enough to deserve a new expression. This one sounds a bit flat and deceptive: *philosophical culture* does not seem to

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<sup>6</sup> Letter to Maximilian Harden of 12/12/12.

designate an authentic culture, but rather an erudition in the field of philosophy; neither does it sound like a true philosophical point of view, but rather like a specific use for the transmitted contents of philosophical doctrines. According to the introduction of the eponymous volume, however, *philosophical culture* is at the same time a “concept of philosophy” and a “form of culture” (GSG 14: 165-166).

[Philosophical culture] does not in fact consist in the knowledge of metaphysical systems or the confession of faith in individual theories, but rather in a consistent attitude of mind toward all that exists, in an intellectual mobility towards the stratum in which, in the broadest variety of profundities and connected to the broadest variety of actualities, all possible currents of philosophy run<sup>7</sup> (Simmel, 1997: 35; GSG 14: 165).

*Philosophical culture* is a practice of philosophy, a living philosophizing. It names the “turning point from metaphysics as dogma to metaphysics as life or function” (GSG 14: 165) – less a metaphysics of life than a life that “metaphysicises”, that practises metaphysics.

Lastly, it is also under the name of *philosophical culture* that Simmel submitted to Rickert an ambitious academic project, the day after his formal appointment to the chair of “Philosophy and Pedagogics” at the University of Strasbourg in 1914:

I would like now to discuss a practical issue. The idea came to me that a sort of philosophical “cartel” would be possible between Heidelberg, Freiburg and Strasbourg. A south-western corner of philosophical culture might be established, if we would manage to make enough students circulate between the three universities. The offer would be at the same time so different and, in my view, so favourably complementary, that we could achieve a particularly relevant curriculum. With time we should extend the notion of “philosophical culture” and seek to

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<sup>7</sup> Translation slightly amended.

develop a philosophical-oriented cooperation between these universities in the neighbouring disciplines as well (GSG 23: 284).

Simmel indicated his intention to submit the project to Windelband and Lask (GSG 23, 285). It is not known how his colleagues reacted to this proposition. The war began a few months later and Simmel died four years thereafter, a few weeks before the armistice. In any case, the choice of using the same expression to designate the spirit of a theoretical enterprise and an academic program is highly significant.

### 3. The Strasbourg Lectures on Pedagogy

We know nothing about the forms and conditions of the planned academic program “philosophical culture”. However, we have precious testimony of how Simmel concretely considered a number of educational and pedagogical issues: the lecture’s notebook “Grundzüge der Pädagogik”, a course given during the winter semester of 1915/1916. It was published in 1922 under the title *Schulpädagogik* by Simmel’s former assistant Karl Hauter (Simmel, 1922) and included in volume 20 of the *Gesamtausgabe*.

The text is hardly known; the first reception was confined to one short review and four announcements of publication in German journals in 1922 and 1923 (Danner, 1991). In the five decades that followed its publication, the only study was submitted by Antonio Banfi, trained in philosophy of life and neo-Kantianism, who probably met Simmel during his stay in Berlin in 1911. In 1925 he wrote an essay on pedagogy and the philosophy of education in Germany, in which one finds a section on Simmel (Banfi, 1986a); in 1932 he published a fifty-page paper entitled “Il pensiero filosofico e pedagogico di Georg Simmel” (Banfi, 1986b).

Simmel’s pedagogy lessons reappeared at the end of the 1980s. Klaus-Peter Biesenbach referred to them in his dissertation in sociology on the notion of individuality in Simmel, defended in Cologne in 1988 (Biesenbach, 1988). The following year, Stefan



Danner devoted his dissertation in philosophy and pedagogy to Simmel's *Schulpädagogik* (Danner, 1991).<sup>8</sup> Donald Levine, to whom our special issue is dedicated, wrote the first paper in English in 1991 (Levine, 1991). In 1999 Klaus Rodax published a useful new edition of the *Schulpädagogik*, with a substantial introduction and a body of footnotes (Simmel, 1999). The lessons were published in 2004 by Torge Karlsruhen and Otthein Rammstedt in volume 20 of the *Gesamtausgabe*. Philipp Gonon referred to it in his published work on Georg Kerschensteiner (Gonon, 2009). The lessons were translated into Spanish in 2008 by Cecilia Abdo, with an afterword by Esteban Vernik (Simmel, 2008; Vernik, 2008).<sup>9</sup> One of the editors of this special issue devoted a chapter of his first monograph to the *Schulpädagogik* (D'Andrea, 1999: 51-80), while the other authored a few texts on Simmel's pedagogy (Amat, 2016, 2017) and translated the lessons into French (Simmel, 2020).

As far as we know, and aside publications in languages to which we have no access, this list is exhaustive. It is not that much, so we rejoice the opportunity to present new studies on the issue here. As the editors of the text in the *Gesamtausgabe* pointed out, the text must be considered with some caution (GSG 20, 551-553). Furthermore, it is likely that Simmel would not have written directly on pedagogy if his obligations in Strasbourg had not obligated him to do so. However, the *Schulpädagogik* fits very well into Simmel's corpus, as some of the papers gathered here will show. If any more evidence were needed:

The relationship between subject matter and human education (*Menschenbildung*) to be produced by pedagogy presents itself as that between objective mind and life (GSG 20: 334).<sup>10</sup>

Because this relationship can take the form of a “tragic conflict”:

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<sup>8</sup> See also Danner, 1999 and Danner, 2007.

<sup>9</sup> See also Vernik, 2007.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Das von der Pädagogik herzustellende Verhältnis von Lehrstoff und Menschenbildung ist darzustellen als das zwischen objektivem Geist und Leben’.

Pedagogy is really a dualistic science and technique: its requirements always having at the same time a subjective content and an objective content, it must constantly rely on mixtures, compromises, to the recognition of this double interest (GSG 20: 336).<sup>11</sup>

The terms and problems are the same as those we find in Simmel's essays on culture. As the following essays by Philipp Gonon, Heike König, Hans-Peter Müller, Esteban Vernik and Matthieu Amat devoted to the topic will show, the *Schulpädagogik* offers some valuable development and clarifications of Simmel's philosophy and sociology of culture, as well as of his singular place in the pedagogical debates of his time. One century after Simmel's death, in a period when his work as a whole is being reconsidered, we would like this Special Issue on the *Simmel Studies* to contribute to the full integration of the Strasbourg *Schulpädagogik* into the Simmelian corpus. More broadly, one must understand that the challenge of this volume is to emphasize the practical and cultural – in the sense of educational – dimension of Simmel's thought. To that end, beyond the commentary of the pedagogy lessons, Christias Panagiotis reveals the educational issues of Simmel's development on Eros and eroticism, while Fabio D'Andrea clarifies the sense in which there is a Simmelian *Bildung*.

#### 4. Strategies for being human

*Philosophical culture* is indeed a lame definition, as it leaves itself open to easy misunderstandings, especially in a time when both culture at large and philosophy are looked upon with disdain and suspicion. Far from being a regulative ideal, the former is considered a useless burden in every form, the worst of which is that of speculative theorizing, with no clear aim in mind and scarce chances

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<sup>11</sup> 'Pädagogik ist überhaupt die dualistische Wissenschaft und Technik: Dadurch, dass ihre Forderungen immer zugleich einen subjektiven und einen objektiven Inhalt haben, ist sie fortwährend auf Verschmelzungen, Kompromisse, Doppelwährung der Interessen angewiesen.'

to yield practical results. It is odd that Simmel, for all his far-sightedness, missed the turn in collective feeling that led to the contemporary stigma on the humanities; he did not realize that, in spite of his convictions and good intentions, both ideas would fail to convey the active and pragmatic sense of urgency that was one of the brightest stars in his own value constellation.

And yet Simmel was right in his concern, as it was often the case with his intuitions and diagnoses. Perhaps he loved philosophy too much to accept its waning role in twentieth-century Modernity; perhaps he was already thinking beyond disciplinary boundaries and lost touch with a reality that was not – and is not – able to do without categorizing, neither in knowledge creation nor in politics nor in everyday life. The fact is, however, that he conceived *philosophical culture* as the only way he could think of to concretely cope with

the deepest problems of modern life [that] flow from the attempt of the individual to maintain the independence and individuality of his existence against the sovereign powers of society, against the weight of historical heritage and external culture and the technique of life (Simmel, 1903: 103).

The project of “a sort of philosophical ‘cartel’” – the first and last he had the chance to put forward as full professor before the war and his death – followed in the wake of years of meditation and research that took various forms which have been misjudged as directionless meanderings or amateurish whims, with no perception of their inner coherence. Simmel *lived and behaved* beyond categorizing, and was therefore alien to the academic establishment and treated as such. He believed in the intrinsic logic of research that had nothing to do with disciplines and procedures, and was but another form of the “law of the individual”, as “the true character in whose form every organic life, and above all psychic life, proceeds [as] growth from one’s own root” (Simmel [1918] 2010: 147). Accordingly, he pursued his fundamental questions through art, philosophy, sociology and many other fields, deemed himself a

philosopher and died an educator, which today could be regarded as a global failure, as indeed happened for most of the last century, when Simmel was forgotten and his works ransacked.

Instead, we are dealing with a stubborn Simmel renaissance that has yet to come to terms with his qualitative diversity, and still tries to picture him as an “acceptable, presentable, respectable” thinker – as *Supertramp* sing in their lovely *The Logical Song* – albeit somewhat eccentric; and yet cannot do without him, without his troubling insights (D’Andrea, 2004) and the feeling that perhaps, just perhaps, he was right and “a life that “metaphysicises” is possible and may offer some sort of solution to the current, unending crisis.

By thinking as usual it is hard to come to grips with anything like “a living philosophising” because it appears to be an oxymoron and is perceived as absurd, even though everyone does it to some degree, day after day. Theory and practice have been construed as alternatives since the beginning of the Western world, and are just another illustration of the need to build and consolidate dichotomies which is at the core of the exclusive paradigm. This is exactly what Simmel stood against, not as a question of principle, but more likely because it was not in him to adhere to such a costly way of thinking and understanding. *Wechselwirkung* is the perpetual movement that connects things and people, states of matter and of mind that are usually believed to be pure and untouched by one another; it is the main tool that could allow us to go beyond irreconcilable oppositions. Just as Beck recently wrote: “Instead of an either/or, I am looking for a new both/and: a way of bringing two contradictory postures [...] into equilibrium” (2009: 49-50), Simmel devoted his last writings to describing and clarifying “something which intellect can only call the overcoming of the duality by unity, but which is in itself a third principle beyond duality and unity: the essence of life as the transcendence of itself” ([1918] 2010: 13).

This is not to be understood as mere theory. It has to do with a way of confronting the world that could restore shared regulative ideals both on a collective and a subjective level, thus allowing men

and women to pursue their *Bildung* within society in harmony with the third apriori:

That each individual, by virtue of his own quality, is automatically referred to a determined position within his social milieu, that this position ideally belonging to him is also actually present in the social whole – this is the presupposition from which, as a basis, the individual leads his societary life, and which we may characterize as the universal value of the individual (Simmel 1910: 389).

The commitment to subjective development goes a long way back in Simmel's work, and shapes it as a constellation of ideas and strategies that could help “maintain the independence and individuality” of the inhabitants of Modernity. He focused on the relational and qualitative canvas of society, forever woven by *Wechselwirkung*, on the crucial importance of the subjective role in choosing what to become interested or involved in; on the difficulty of exercising it in the new panoramas of Modernity, where lip-service is given to autonomous and critical thinking, but social structures and processes push in an entirely different direction. To better understand the contradictory character of the “both/and”, he defied academic limitations and studied what was considered unworthy of attention, opening up new perspectives on issues that afterwards became mainstream features of our time: the in/out movement of fashion and the dynamic balance required by the strange circumstance that “the fact that the individual, with respect to certain sides of his personality, is not an element of the group constitutes the positive condition for the fact that he is such a group member in other aspects of his being” (Simmel 1910: 381).

Meanwhile he searched for ways to transform all of this into praxis. *Philosophical culture* and the last lessons on pedagogy issue from an uninterrupted striving to reach-out-beyond dichotomies, boundaries, conventions: theory and practice, subject and object, reason and emotion and much more should be understood and

lived differently to ensure the fertile interplay of individualities that forms sociality and society.

We hope that the continuity and coherence in Simmel's trajectory that culminates in his becoming an educator in Strasbourg will be apparent in the essays that follow...

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