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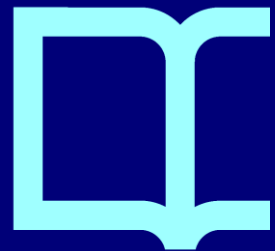
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On Simmel's Relativism and the Foundations of a Relational Approach

Abstract: This text elaborates on the idea that Simmel's relational approach was born within his sociological works, and later on became crucial for his whole oeuvre, thus becoming his worldview, his cosmovision and metaphysical principle. His relational approach structured his three interrelated programmatic texts for the field of sociology: the essay 'The Problem of Sociology' ([1894] GSG5,1992:52-61), *Sociology's* first chapter 'The Problem of Sociology' ([1908] GSG11,1992:13-62), and *Fundamental Questions of Sociology's* first chapter 'The Area of Sociology.' ([1917] GSG16,1999:62-87) A critical comparison of these three texts will allow us to trace the continuities and changes of Simmel's relational approach, which had consequences far beyond his sociological thinking.

Keywords: sociology, relationality, relational thought, relativism, Georg Simmel.

1. Introduction

Georg Simmel developed his relative/relational approach on the grounds of his sociological works. (Pyyhtinen,2009; Pyyhtinen,2010; Pyyhtinen,2016; Papilloud,2004; Köhnke,1997; Harrington & Kemple,2012; Goodstein,2017; Cantó-Milà,2005) Thus, his relational sociology was the seed of what later became the 'metaphysical principle' that structured his whole oeuvre. In this text, we shall discuss Simmel's three programmatic texts for the discipline of sociology, as he made some of his clearest statements regarding the relational character of society and even of our individualities in them. Through their analysis we shall reach an understanding of the lines of continuity and change of Simmel's relational approach within the field of sociology, and beyond.

2. The Problem of Sociology, 1894

'The Problem of Sociology' is a short text in which Simmel proposes a specific object of inquiry for the discipline of sociology, delivering a few examples, but not going much into detail regarding how to actually accomplish this proposal. At the time of its publication, Simmel

thought he had delivered a pathbreaking contribution to sociology, and thus sought to have his text translated into as many languages as possible. At the same time, he wrote a letter to his former teacher Moritz Lazarus, thanking him for having introduced him to the analytical level of the ‘supra-individual.’ (GSG22,2005:132)

The crucial points of this essay, and those which will allow a comparative discussion with Simmel’s 1908 and 1917 texts, are the following: Simmel considers sociology as an empirical science, inductive and comparative, (GSG5,1992:59-60) and claims that it emerged in the 19th century resulting from the overcoming of an individualistic perspective upon history and the humanities, which he views as characteristic of his time. This new perspective, based on focusing upon ‘social forces’ and ‘collective movements,’ has become the dominant lens within the historical and human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*): ‘the science of people has become the science of society’. (GSG5,1992:52)

Simmel highlights the great importance of this level of analysis but emphasises that it cannot constitute a discipline in its own right. (GSG5,1992:52-53) The dimension of the social is rather a ‘method of cognition’ (*Erkenntnismethode*) or an heuristic principle, like induction may be, (GSG5,1992:53) but certainly not a scientific discipline. The analytical dimension of the social is a necessary condition for the emergence of sociology as a discipline, but not a sufficient one.

Simmel claims that sociology needs be more than the synonym of a method or perspective that brings the dimension of the social into history, law or religion studies. Sociology requires a specific object of analysis, one that only sociology can claim to study. This object has to be what in society is actually ‘social.’ And Simmel identifies the ‘forms of association’ as that which is exclusively social within society, and therefore susceptible of becoming the specific object of sociology. This is this essay’s fundamental point, and the element which, despite all nuances, will remain relatively constant from 1894 to 1917.

In his 1894 essay Simmel asserts that it can no longer be doubted that there are no general laws of history. (GSG5,1992:60) However, he adds, the endeavour of formulating laws will seem less chimerical if sociology focuses on a much simpler and specific object of inquiry, such as the forms of association. (GSG5,1992:60-61) Following this line of thought, Simmel proposes that sociology can become (in relation to the human and social sciences) what geometry already is in relation to the natural ones: a science that grounds its object on an abstraction from reality

that separates forms from contents, and thus extracts/abstracts ways of relating to each other from the reasons, motives and interests that lead us to do so. (GSG5,1992:54-58) Examples of forms of association already mentioned in his 1894 text include: super and subordination, competition, imitation, opposition, division of labour, constitution of hierarchies or parties (GSG5,1992:55).

3. The Problem of Sociology, 1908

The monograph *Sociology* was published 14 years after the essay 'The Problem of Sociology' had seen the light of day. Innumerable essays, the two editions of *Philosophy of Money* (1900 & 1907) and the second edition of *Problems of the Philosophy of History* had been published in between. (GSG9, 1997; Simmel, 1977) And yet Simmel kept the memory of his 1894 very much alive in his sociological monograph. On the one hand by giving its first chapter the same title of his programmatic essay. On the other hand, and most importantly, by remaining considerably faithful to the original proposal for the discipline of sociology, and by even keeping parts of the original essay in the chapter. Thus, as many other parts of *Sociology*, (Rammstedt in GSG11,1992:877-906) this chapter was actually written on the basis of an older text. However, and despite the continuity in the proposal for an object of sociology, the changes are not to be underestimated. They add many nuances and some significant shifts to the brief text of 1894. Furthermore, they elaborate on the initial 1894 proposal, arguing the case in a more complete and consistent way.

As we know from his correspondence, the young Simmel had very high expectations regarding the impact that his essay 'The Problem of Sociology' (1894) would have for the emerging discipline. (GSG22,2005) In 1908 he already knew better and did not take the success or the theoretical clarity of his proposal for granted. He paid more attention to epistemological questions and sought to develop a more solid basis for his arguments. Thus, while his 1894 text begins by stating how in the 19th century the individualistic perspective has been overcome by the emergence of the analytical dimension of the social, his 1908 text prepares the grounds for this argument by asking for the reasons of the emergence of the analytical dimension of the social precisely in the 19th century.

Simmel frames this thought by bringing social Darwinism into his reasoning, and yet by distancing himself from it at the same time. Thus, in the first paragraph of 'The Problem of

Sociology' (1908), he argues that human knowledge may very well have developed from the practical needs of survival, but it has long become freed from its subordinate position in relation to these needs.¹ Knowledge has become an independent 'realm,' which is still connected to practical needs, yet not subordinated to it. Knowledge (science) and practical needs are in a relation of reciprocal effects (*Wechselwirkung*) with each other. (GSG11,1992:13) The 'practical power' that the masses attained in the 19th century is, according to Simmel, the trigger for the scientific questioning of the relationship between the collective (the mass, society) and the individual. With the rise of modernity, the incredible growth of the cities, the industrialisation, the monetary economy, and the creation of the German state, the awareness of the living together of great numbers of people despite all their differences brought the concept and conceptualisation of society to the foreground. Simmel claims that, through the concept of society, one can think of a heterogenous group of people as belonging together because the focus is not set on their individual particularities, but on their structural common traits. This happens through a perspective which is shaped by a predominance of distance in relation to proximity. Social classes thus become an example of 'masses', as groups of undifferentiated people who build 'society' with 'us.' The concept of social class makes sense viewed from this distanced perspective, not zooming on each singular person but looking at the whole, at the mass. Through this new 'social' perspective, the relational idea becomes possible 'that each individual appearance is defined by an immensity of influences from their surroundings.' (GSG11,1992:14) And this happens synchronically and diachronically (thus rethinking heritage). People cannot be viewed and understood as isolated but in a relation of reciprocal effects with each other, with those who coexist with them, with those who lived before them, and those who will live after them.

In regards of the relational perspective which we are seeking to distil here, Simmel claims that the dimension of the social is strengthened by, and simultaneously strengthens, modern relativism (individuals thus becoming the nodes in which social circles meet, and personalities the particular way in which this happens). (GSG11,1992:14) Relativism is continuously growing stronger in Simmel's theoretical thinking, and, as his text from 1917 will show the clearest, it is the anchoring point of his oeuvre and, in his eyes, the cosmovision of his time.

The centrality of this new perspective brings a new danger with it (and here the 1908 text crosses paths – and arguments – with its previous version from 1894): the acknowledgement that all what we are, say, think and do happens within society and immersed in relations of

reciprocal effects is only a step away from thinking sociology as an all-encompassing discipline. The centrality of this perspective, however, does not bestow sociology with the status of an independent discipline any more than psychology becomes an all-encompassing discipline through the fact that all the contents from all other disciplines dealing with the earth, the stars or life are thought within individual human minds. (GSG5,1992:53; GSG11,1992:15)

In order to delineate what sociology could be, Simmel remains faithful to his general definition of society from 1894, arguing that ‘society exists where several individuals enter into relationships of reciprocal effects.’ (GSG11,1992:17)ⁱⁱ What leads people to enter into these relations of reciprocal effects are their motives, goals, desires, needs, and these ‘contents’ are the objects of study of diverse already-existing disciplines. The ‘forms,’ however, which these relations adopt, are what in society is actually social, and these forms can (and should) become the object of sociology.

Forms and contents do not exist but together; it is an analytical abstraction what leads us to differentiate the one from the other and concentrate on the first in the case of sociology. (GSG11,1992:20) However, this abstraction helps Simmel distil what makes humans social beings and, furthermore, give an account of this sociability based on relational grounds. Simmel claims that people next to each other do not constitute a society. They become one when they enter into relations of reciprocal effects with each other – in a direct or indirect manner. (GSG11,1992:18) If this happens, people are no longer ‘next to each other,’ but ‘with each other/ against each other/ for each other/ through each other,’ and therefore society. Society is relational, or it is nothing at all.

In both texts (1894 and 1908) Simmel argues that one form can embody many different contents, and that the very same content could be embodied within the most diverse forms. (GSG5,1992:54-55; GSG11,1992:20-22) This argument is also present in the 1917 version of the text. (GSG16,1999:83-84) For him, this points at the rigorousness and appropriateness of the analytical separation of forms and contents.

In the first chapter of *Sociology*, Simmel argues that the concept of society has two different meanings, which should be strictly separated from each other for scientific purposes. On the one hand society may mean the complex of associated individuals, the ‘socially formed human material.’ On the other hand, it may mean the sum of the forms of relation through which society

becomes possible in the first sense. (GSG11,1992:23) Here again Simmel uses the analogy with geometry to differentiate between both meanings of society as one would differentiate between the two meanings of the concept of 'sphere':ⁱⁱⁱ on the one hand, in the mathematical sense, the geometrical form; on the other, any concretely formed matter in the shape of a sphere.

The appropriate concept of society for sociology is the one referring to the forms of association. Sociology as a perspective, as a mode of thinking and approaching the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*), works with the concept of society as the 'human material' (*Menschenmaterial*). In an embryonic form we find a similar thought in his 1894 text. (GSG5,1992:54). Therein Simmel also differentiates between the 'material' and the 'form', but material is equated with the contents, and thus the dimension of 'materiality' (in the sense of matter) is missing in 1894 when compared to 1908.^{iv}

Simmel emphasises the necessity of keeping sociology clearly bounded, as the risk of becoming the science of everything and nothing that has to do with our social existence could endanger its disciplinary character, and the accurateness of its analyses. (GSG11,1992:29-31). Thus, while sociology, as he defines it, needs work intuitively, i.e. inductively (not in a metaphysical sense of 'intuition'), (GSG11,1992:29) Simmel argues it is only the case for sociology's early stages, leading to solid results in the long run. This can be achieved if the desire for all-embracing explanations of all historical phenomena is tamed and restricted from becoming the aim of sociology. Following the rules of the game of science, division of labour is necessary. Hence Simmel argues that historical phenomena can be approached from three different standpoints: from the individual existences (who are the real carriers of the 'state of affairs'; i.e. of reality), from the forms of reciprocal effects (which are indeed performed and consummated on an individual level,^v but which, in this case, would be observed from the perspective of their being together), and finally from the conceptually formulated contents of events and conditions, viewed from the perspective of their objective meaning. (GSG11,1992:29-30). Thus, sociology in its disciplinary sense corresponds to the second of these perspectives of approaching historical phenomena, our social life and condition. Of course, Simmel is aware and acknowledges that reality is one, and sees these lines as drawn in order to make analytical work possible. (GSG11,1992:36) Yet he rushes to add that this does not mean that we can completely tame the wish to overcome them, or that the artificiality of the boundaries of discipline and perspective will not be challenged by each concrete phenomenon we may endeavour to study.

Another important difference between the perspective adopted in 1894 and the one adopted in 1908 relates to the synchronic and diachronic analyses of forms and contents. While in 1894 Simmel focuses merely on the synchronicity of the analytically separated forms and contents, in his 1908 text he acknowledges the importance of time, above all when he emphasises the processual character of society and argues that the processes of association do not constitute or lead to society but **are** society. (GSG11,1992:24) In this way, relationality enters into the conceptualisation of the object of analysis itself, i.e. society, thus turning it into a continuous process.

This point will become even more relevant in 1917, as will the parallels that Simmel saw between sociology and the sciences of life in relation to an important difficulty and challenge which they both share: It is easier to observe and analyse forms that have crystallised into solid 'institutions' like the state, the church, the industrial division of labour or the forms of family organisation, than fleeting relations that do not leave any traces behind. (GSG11,1992:32-33) These inconspicuous relations are society 'status nascens.' Not in a historical sense, but they are society being born and reborn in each moment, in each instant, anew from these fleeting connections. Just like in the sciences of life, in which the continuous microscopical-molecular processes are the real thing, the same happens within society when people – and now it comes, that famous passage – 'write to each other or lunch with each other, find each other agreeable or disagreeable, when gratitude creates an unbreakable and durable bond, when people ask each other the way or dress and adorn themselves for each other' (GSG11,1992:33). All these fleeting or durable, conscious or unconscious, solid or feeble relations are the real stuff society is made of, i.e. what society is. The heart of Simmel's relational approach resides here: in the processual character of his conceptualisation of society, and in the way in which he reckons the subtle weaving of invisible social threads that bind us together in the most diverse ways.

Finally, Simmel in 1908 is still convinced (as he was in 1894) that sociology is an exact science (GSG11,1992:39). In fact, he will remain convinced of this fact until the end, as 'The Area of Sociology' (1917) proves. (GSG16,1999:84-85) Sociology, as a social science, needs identify a group of 'problems' it can give answers to. As all exact disciplines, Simmel argues, sociology too is bound by two philosophical areas: epistemology on the one side, and metaphysics on the other. (GSG 11,1992:39-41) This thought is new in 'The Problem of Sociology' from 1908. There is no equivalent in its previous version. The first philosophical area (epistemology)

embraces the conditions, the basic concepts of sociological research, which cannot be found on the grounds of sociology itself (or of any other exact science for that matter). The second philosophical area (metaphysics) seeks to calm the dissatisfaction regarding the fragmentary results of our scientific endeavours by means of speculation, striving to complete the dead angles of our results, turning them into wholes, and dealing with questions regarding the value of the individual in relation to society, addressing their relationship in a way sociology cannot.

As an example of a question that emerges at the threshold of sociology and epistemology, (GSG 11, 1992:47) Simmel proposes in his digression ‘How is society possible?’ to think about the necessary conditions that need be given in each human mind so that we may become social beings (*Gesellschaftswesen*). What are these a priori conditions that let society appear as an objective form to our subjective souls? (GSG 11, 1992:41) This is Simmel’s question in his digression, and of course not in the sense of preconditions within a time sequence, as ‘causes’ for society, but as parts of the process of synthesis which we call society. (GSG 11, 1992:45-46)

4. The Area of Sociology, 1917

In 1917, a year before his death, Simmel publishes his last work on sociology: *Fundamental Questions of Sociology*. After the publication of *Sociology* in 1908, Simmel hoped and claimed to turn away from sociology and devote his efforts more in the direction of philosophy and aesthetics. However, in this reworked version of his texts of 1894 and 1908, we find a substantially different (and last) version of his programmatic text for sociology – thus his sociological elaborations did not stop in that period but continued evolving along with his philosophy of life. Despite following quite close (in some paragraphs even literally) the 1908 text, ‘The Area of Sociology’ includes some twists that are of great importance in order to understand the evolution of Simmel’s thought at the end of his life, and particularly, Simmel’s last thoughts about sociology. In this text Simmel’s relational approach has reached its zenith, and we can find in it the most complete and mature version of Simmel’s relational sociology.

Simmel begins his 1917 ‘The Area of Sociology’ in a very different way than his 1908 ‘The Problem of Sociology.’ He cuts the thoughts regarding the evolution of the sciences from practical needs (a language he grew increasingly distant from) and starts instead by stating that sociology’s status as a science is highly contested. (GSG 16, 1999:62) If we view this assertion

in relation to the story of this chapter and its earlier versions, it seems highly significant that he begins his last text on sociology by acknowledging that what he had proposed twenty-three years earlier had not led to the consolidation of the discipline. And yet, in 1917 he still considers his ideas and proposals valuable, and, as we shall see, although he introduces important modifications to the original proposal, at the end of his life Simmel remains mostly faithful to the idea of sociology as the study of the forms of association.

The chapter begins by stating that sociology lacks a clear definition, a sum of concrete problems (scientific problems) which are not already the object of another discipline. Furthermore, sociology even lacks a clear concept of society that helps marking the object of study in a way no other discipline has focused upon before. (GSG 16, 1999:62) Simmel argues that, for some, the concept of society is a mere abstraction that contains no 'real object' beyond the individuals that compose it; for others, society is everything, as all that humans do and are takes place within society, and therefore no discipline dealing with people can escape dealing with society in one way or the other. (GSG 16, 1999:63)^{vi} Therefore the concept of society is either too little or too much, but certainly not enough to embody the object of a scientific discipline.

At this point Simmel focuses on the issue of abstraction, criticising the idea that anything beyond the apparently unique real existence of individuals is a speculative abstraction and unreal. It is of great importance to focus upon this point, since, as we shall remember from the two earlier versions of the text, Simmel had therein undoubtedly conferred upon individuals a dimension of 'reality' or 'existence' which was superior to that of social forms and configurations. The only existing (last) reality had been individuals, and only through a social perspective and an exercise of abstraction one could identify the social forms as fit objects for sociology. However, in this 1917 text, we can observe a significant change: Simmel views the gradations of 'reality' with a different lens. There are no more or less 'real' things, but different distances and different resulting realities. Thus, from a certain perspective (from a certain relation of proximity/distance) we see molecules, traces of paint or a complete picture; we see cells, individuals, or collectives. And they are all 'real'. Simmel illustrates this point by arguing how collective concepts cannot be thought of as being the same (or less) than the sum of the individual units that compose it. (GSG 16,1999:64-65) They are what we see when we observe things from a certain (distant) perspective.

He argues this point with his famous example of the Greeks and the Persians at the Battle of Marathon. In relation to this example, it is interesting to realise the parallels between 'The Problem of Sociology' of 1894 and this 1917 text. In 1894 Simmel sought to illustrate the issue of abstraction with individual examples, in his last text he turned towards collective concepts in order to do so.^{vii} Thus, in 1894, Simmel argued how disciplines filter/abstract from reality their objects of interest and analysis, for otherwise science would be a 1x1 reproduction of the analysed object, claiming that historians do not depict everything Maria Theresia or Friedrich the II did all day long. They focus on what they consider relevant from a historical viewpoint: thus, whether they combed their hair or declared war is not equally deserving of the historians' attention. (GSG5, 1992:56-57) In 1917, Simmel's attention was also directed at the issue of abstraction, but instead of focusing on the lives of single individuals, he focused on two groups of people, two collectives: the Greeks and the Persians, claiming that if the statement were true that only individuals are 'real,' historical knowledge should concentrate on each Greek and each Persian, their life stories, their behaviour during the battle, their thoughts. Yet this immense amount of work would not lead to an understanding of how the Greeks and the Persians behaved at the battle, as we cannot know the history of Catholicism, or the women's movement by focusing on each person that was or is part of it. (GSG 16, 1999:64-65) The Greeks and the Persians are a collective synthesis whose reality cannot be denied in favour of single individuals. And individuals happen to be a synthesis too, as people are not the last apprehendable elements either. The indissoluble unity of individuals is not the result of knowledge but of experience. (GSG 16, 1999:65) We cannot completely know an individual (not even ourselves, as Simmel had already claimed in 'How is Society Possible?'). Cognitively we only apprehend fragments, traits, and when it comes to reality, who would want to decide whether the colour molecules or the whole painting are more or less real? Maybe reality is also, in a way, relational – relative to the distance from which we observe it, know it, experience it.

The question regarding where to draw boundary lines and create concepts resides in the distance from which 'reality' is observed. Thus, Simmel claims that reality or truth are relative, not in the sense that they are arbitrary, but in the sense that from a certain distance we see something, which is true, and from a different distance we see something else, which is true as well. From each distance, there is only one truth to be found. But this truth is relative to the observing distance and exists or stands in a relation of reciprocal effects with a certain distance/proximity from the observed reality.

Hence, from a certain distance, we see individuals, and from a further distance we see society, with its forms and contours and our possibilities to apprehend or misapprehend them, but no less entitled to be apprehended than single individuals. Individual and society do not relate to one another like reality and abstraction, but rather like two resulting syntheses that emerge through a more or less distant observation of reality – a reality we can only know in a mediated form (through a relation of proximity and distance).

Another important shift we can find in 1917 relates to the idea of sociology as a discipline and its boundaries. In 1894 Simmel had a clear proposal regarding what sociology should be as a discipline: i.e. the study of the forms of association. In 1908 he kept that strong point in the core of his work but introduced the idea that any exact science (as he viewed sociology) was bounded by two philosophical areas (epistemology and metaphysics) that necessarily covered issues that were related to the discipline, and yet could not be tackled within the discipline itself. In 1917 this suggestion gained importance and became one of the three problem areas that Simmel identified as belonging to sociology. And here resides the main difference of 1917 in relation to 1908 and 1894: In the previous texts, sociology was the study of the forms of association (1894) and, later on, ‘pure sociology’ was the study of the forms of association surrounded by two philosophical areas: epistemology and metaphysics. In 1917 Simmel presents sociology as a discipline that deals with different groups of problems, and identifies three approaches to sociology, three conceptualisations of sociology, according to the concrete group of problems it addresses. First, general sociology, which is a reconceptualization of that which in 1894 and 1908 he had depicted as ‘sociology as a method.’ Thus, he proposes ‘general sociology’ as an approach to sociology that does not focus upon the forms of association, but which, based on the general definition of society (which he still shares in 1917 arguing that society is *Wechselwirkung* among individuals, GSG 16, 1999:82), focuses on social life in all its dimensions. (GSG 16, 1999:79-82) The second problem area is the one that Simmel identifies with the narrowest and most proper way to consider sociology, which remains the study of the forms of association. (GSG 16, 1999:82-83) Finally the third problem area deals with questions related to society, which lie before and beyond the specific area of sociology, which are of a philosophical nature related to epistemology and metaphysics (as Simmel had already suggested in 1908). This third area could be called philosophical sociology, and is more dependent on cosmovisions, convictions and valuations of each scholar than the other areas of sociology. (GSG 16, 1999:84-87)

'The Area of Sociology' is not all about differences with the previous texts. It also confirms and strengthens arguments and views which Simmel already developed in his earlier texts, above all in 1908. For instance, Simmel's emphasis regarding the processual character of society becomes clearer and stronger in the 1917 text, arguing how society should be viewed as a process and not as a static entity: association instead of society. (GSG 16, 1999:69-70) Furthermore Simmel claims, as he had done in 1908, that the ephemeral relations that do not leave crystallised forms behind are as substantial and constitutive for society as the institutionalised, durable, and stable forms of association. In fact, the first make the second possible, and are as important to society as the reciprocal effects between cells and other microorganisms are to life.

5. Conclusions

At the end of his life, Simmel's relational thought, his so-called relativism, was at its zenith. Diachronic and synchronic relations, and the complex web they weave through reciprocal effects, had become his way of understanding all phenomena he ever approached and analysed: society, individuality, life and culture. He furthermore thought that this relational cosmivision was the way of his time of approaching any kind of knowledge or science, from physics, to medicine or biology to sociology. There were constant elements in his view of the discipline of sociology, too, like the fact that he considered it an exact science that had to deal with a coherent and specific group of 'problems,' and like any other science (natural or social) it needed be in close relation with philosophy in order to find answers to questions such as: What can we know? How can we know it? What does this knowledge tell us about us, about our relations with each other, the world?

Simmel envisioned a sociology which focused on relations, fleeting and durable, and worked at enough of a distance from particulars so that it could identify and analyse relational forms and their constellations. Viewing society as a process, and not as a static entity, leads us to realise its strength, the strength of the relations that make us into an 'us,' but also its fragility: it cannot be taken for granted, it can be suspended, and it can be (and necessarily will be) continuously changed and born anew.

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GSG 22 (2005) *Briefe 1880–1911*. Ed. Köhnke, Klaus Christian. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.

i It is interesting that Simmel should discuss the relation of knowledge and the practical needs of survival at the beginning of his text. In his 1894 essay, he argued that the turn towards the social had led us to search for the causes of the most individual and particular achievements (like a work of art) in the evolution of the species. (Gattungsevolution, GSG 5,1992:52). In many of his texts, Simmel draw lines of distance and proximity with the evolution of the human species and the distancing of this species from what it is necessary and/or beneficial for its survival. Also in the *Philosophy of Money* he came to discuss aesthetic values and their relation (marked by an increased distance) of what is good for human survival and that which is later on considered 'beautiful.' (GSG 6, 1989: 44ff)

ii Furthermore he argues that the unity of 'society' in an empirical sense is nothing more than the interrelation, the reciprocal effects (*Wechselwirkung*) between its elements; in the same way that a body is a unity because of the exchanges of energies that take place between and within its organs. (GSG11,1992:18-20)

iii The analogy with geometry is present in all three texts, however it is significantly more present in his 1908 one. In the text from 1917 we find it only once.

iv The dimension of materiality became more relevant in the whole of Simmel's oeuvre as time went by, and in the case of sociology, even if it does not enter into the specific realm of 'pure forms', it gains importance, too, and becomes one of those areas which sociology needs cover and dialogue with.

v In his 1908 'The Problem of Sociology,' Simmel makes this point remarkably clear and on several occasions: 'all social processes and instincts have their place in souls, association is a psychological phenomenon (...)' (GSG11,1992:35,37). He thus seems to confer upon the reality status of individuals, or individual souls, a different quality than to the relations or reciprocal effects. We shall see how this perspective changes in 'The Area of Sociology' of 1917. However this does not mean that he does not see fit to scientifically focus on the forms of association, as linguistics focuses on the forms and laws of a language, independently of the fact that without human souls languages would not be possible. (GSG11,1992:37)

vi At this point of the text Simmel uses the same analogy he had used back in 1908 claiming that one cannot through everything humans do and think into a pot and label it 'sociology.' (GSG11,1992:14 ; GSG16,1999:63)

^{vii} In fact, he ‘recycled’ an example he had already used in Problems of *Philosophy of History* (Simmel, 1977:116)