



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

Caterina Zanfi

Volume 25, Number 1, 2021

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1083827ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083827ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Georg Simmel Gesellschaft

ISSN

1616-2552 (print)

2512-1022 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this review

Zanfi, C. (2021). Review of [Georg Simmel, *Stile moderno: Saggi di estetica sociale*, Barbara Carnevali, Andrea Pinotti (Eds.), Torino, Einaudi, 2020, pp. 437]. *Simmel Studies*, 25(1), 158–162. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1083827ar>

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

Simmel's lifetime, with the essays collected in *Philosophische Kultur* or with the first collections of translations, such as the famous *Mélanges de philosophie relativiste*, and it found expression from collection to collection, all the way to the ordered taxonomy of the *GSG*. Not even this comprehensive arrangement of Simmel's essays has put an end to the temptation for Simmel scholars to compose new selections of his works, each highlighting new possible readings of his thought. This has very recently led to the selection *Essays zur Kulturphilosophie* Gerald Hartung collected for Felix Meiner publishers, which explores a possible Simmelian precursor of the philosophy of culture. It also applies to the new, very rich collection of essays in Italian translation: *Stile moderno*, published in the Scienze Sociali series of the Piccola Biblioteca Einaudi. The twenty-eight essays (and one fable) on "social aesthetics" are edited by Barbara Carnevali and Andrea Pinotti, both known for their contributions to Simmel studies, in which they place Simmel within the theoretical framework of social aesthetics: Carnevali in her studies on social appearances and Pinotti in his research on the philosophy of the metropolis and objects. The essays are presented in five sections—"Aisthesis and Form", "The Visible and the Invisible", "Forms of Reciprocity", "Theoretical Objects", and "Modern Senses"—each of which presents five to seven essays in chronological order.

Francesco Peri's new translations compare well with the traditional Italian versions of Simmel's essays, some of which they interpret and update in a daring way. One explicit key update concerns the translation of *Koketterie* with "flirt", which, partly in response to Gabriella Turnaturi's studies, is interpreted here as a social form that is not exclusive to the seduction of a partner but found in many other social phenomena. This solution also seeks to dispense with the gendered connotations of *Koketterie*, insisting on a total reciprocity that is certainly familiar to today's readers, though perhaps not yet within Simmel's reach.

The value of the collection is not limited to the fact that it brings together, in a single volume, essays that previously were scattered across numerous publications (if they were available at all), along

with some new translations. In fact, the editors' choices propose a new interpretation of Simmel's work by bringing out the (often merely latent) traces it has left in twentieth-century European philosophy as well as the topicality of its anthropological proposals. The approach of these *Saggi di estetica sociale* is radically different from that of the *Saggi di estetica* presented by Massimo Cacciari in the 1970s, or of the collection *Arte e civiltà* edited by Dino Formaggio and Lucio Perucchi around the same time, which differ from this more recent collection in both selection and arrangement. The aesthetic perspective that dominates *Stile moderno* includes but also goes beyond the specific field of art and style: the collection's approach is concerned with a more comprehensive "aestheticization of the world", which it views from a perspective that recalls the studies in the recent volume *Georg Simmel et le champ architectural*, edited by Andrea Borsari and Manola Antonioli (Milan-Paris, Mimesis, 2020).

The ever-dynamic interaction between aesthetic and social forms to which the essays in the collection testify conveys the dynamism of Simmel's historical-aesthetic a priori, which has long been mistaken for relativism. In Italy as in France, relativism has long been the key to interpreting Simmel's philosophy. We need only recall that one of the first essays dedicated to Simmel, published in 1922 by Giacomo Perticone, was entitled *Il Relativismo*. Discarded by Cacciari as completely misleading, the relativistic interpretation of Simmel is here taken up but specified and reformulated as *relazionismo*, "relationalism." To Italian readers, this suggests its "survival" in the thought of Enzo Paci, who in moving from existentialism to phenomenology would then have benefited from the intuitions of Simmel's *Wechselwirkung*, which he inherited from the Milanese school, from Antonio Banfi to Dino Formaggio, who first introduced Simmel's work in Italy.

The title of the editors' preface, "L'estetica sociale: Simmel ritrovato," seems to pick up on and update the discourse initiated by Bruno Accarino in a 1989 article published in *aut aut*, also entitled "Simmel ritrovato." Accarino publicized the complete works of

Simmel, a project then just begun, and urged a systematic study of Simmel's formalism. More than thirty years later, Carnevali and Pinotti's collection finally proposes a reading of Simmel's philosophy of forms, a reading that makes sociological and aesthetic approaches converge in a coherent philosophy and frees Simmel both from the disciplinary enclosure in sociology and from the "long misunderstanding" that sees him as an impressionistic and asystematic "aesthete philosopher" who by aestheticizing reality ended up "derealizing" it and thereby anticipated the positions of postmodernism. The "formal" perspective is thus combined with the "sensory" perspective as a tool for interpreting social phenomena, especially those linked to urban landscapes, their objects and rituals, and to sensitive experiences, be they visual, auditory, olfactory, or social rituals linked to food, as well as in a broader sense to sympathy and antipathy understood as a "taste for others."

The preface and the introductions to the five sections not only lay out the criteria for the selection of the essays, they also trace Simmel's often elusive philosophical method back to the history of German philosophy. The antecedent critics have explored most, the editors note, is undoubtedly the Kantian one: it provided Simmel with the spatial model of the principle of reciprocity and the reference of the a priori, which he conceives no longer in a static but in a historical-aesthetic manner. The collection, however, also highlights two paths less travelled by Simmel studies, namely Goethean morphology and Hegel's philosophy of "objective spirit," which Simmel defines in more precise terms as the "objectual" spirit (*Spirito oggettuale* in Italian, *dinglicher* or *gegenständlicher Geist* in German), which is externalised not only in law, ethics and the State, but also in architectural and design objects like bridges, doors, vases, or frames. Yet the references in Simmel's thought are not exhausted by such a genealogy or by its posterity within German philosophy. Carnevali's introductions recognize Simmel's heritage in the sociology of Pierre Bourdieu and, especially, in the philosophical anthropology of Hans Blumenberg, who develops the theme of

human visibility, or in historical anthropology, which collects Simmel's reflections on the mimesis he observed in its typical manifestations of modern and metropolitan life.

It is precisely on the analyses of the new urban lifestyles that the editors' concluding observations focus, situating Simmel between Weber's nostalgic *Entzauberung der Welt* and the irony of Blumenberg's *Zivilisationskritik*. On the basis of Gregor Fitzzi's recent studies (*The Challenge of Modernity*, New York, Routledge, 2019), they attribute to Simmel an ambivalent and complex vision of the city that cannot be reduced either to Romantic anti-capitalism nor to an anticipation of the Frankfurt school's critical theory. The city is not only the place of the discolouration (*Entfärbung*) of the world but also a site of liberation, one able to give rise to colourful individual forms, such as the "Virzuletto" (*Grülpchen*), the protagonist of the very short "Fable of Colour," (published in Italian in C. Portioli, G. Fitzzi, *Georg Simmel e l'estetica sociale*, Milano-Udine, Mimesis, 2006, pp. 289-290), which provides the collection with a light and witty conclusion.

MILOŠ BROČIĆ, DANIEL SILVER

Miloš Bročić, Daniel Silver, "The Influence of Simmel on American Sociology since 1975", *Annual Review of Sociology*, (forthcoming).

Our forthcoming article in the *Annual Review of Sociology*, "The Influence of Simmel on American Sociology since 1975," revisits questions Donald Levine, Ellwood Carter, and Eleanor Miller Gorman posed nearly fifty years ago when they published the last major review of Simmel's influence on American sociology. At the time, Simmel's position in the discipline could still be described as marginal. Levine et al. (1976a, p. 813) noted that while Simmel was