



Arnold Simmel's Memory

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Special Issue dedicated to Otthein Rammstedt, sociologist and editor of the Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe

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ARNOLD SIMMEL

As we mourn his death, and celebrate the life and work of Otthein Rammstedt, among those who should express gratitude and admiration for this remarkable man and his work there should be some descendent of Georg Simmel. As one of two still surviving grandsons, and the one who had some contact with Rammstedt, and some acquaintance with sociology, I am eager to play that role.

A popular image of “intellectuals” ascribes to them a life of quiet solitude, retired from the “real world” of economic and political necessities. The notion of an intellectual with entrepreneurial skills is, I imagine, not consistent with that public image. It may be hardly conceivable to those for whom work is primarily –or exclusively– tolerable drudgery, the necessary means for grub and survival. I have a prejudice that the contrary view of work as self-fulfilling was perhaps an especially strong element in the ideology of a certain class of German intellectuals, who were not necessarily all that economically comfortable, who may even have disdained thoughts of money or “merely” economic activity. But we have reason to know that intellectual entrepreneurs have played a vital role in the promotion and, indeed, in the survival of intellectual life. We may have been somewhat enlightened by a certain volume about “The Philosophy of Money”, but in all practicality we have been given the example of Otthein Rammstedt.

For many of us economic concerns are a bit of a distraction from the work we are really interested in. But the task Otthein Rammstedt, gave himself required a level and intensity of both economic and managerial skills that are not commonly found among intellectuals. We are lucky that he found the focus of his activity in the task that culminated in the publication of the

twenty-four volume compendium of the life's work of Georg Simmel. As appropriate, this work is not a minimal recitation of literary biography, history or critique: Much can be learned from it about the social and academic history of the period of my grandfather's life and his particular social environment. When we think of what it took in terms of intellectual organization, research, finding collaborators who had both the skill and expertise, interest, competence and patience to re-direct the normal flow of thought and work, the specifically entrepreneurial work of finding finances and dealing with a variety of economic issues not to mention the practical problems of personal and business relations – and all this with a focus on the integrity of the work and its final outcome – it becomes apparent how crucial this central person, Otthein Rammstedt, was for the success of this collaborative effort that he initiated, directed and completed.

Besides gratitude for his work, I enjoyed my relatively few encounters with Rammstedt, though he became “Otthein” rather late in our acquaintance. And I should also express my admiration and gratitude for the work of Rammstedt's late wife Angelika, some of which dealt with persons and relationships which were unknown to my generation of Georg Simmel descendents.

Finally an almost improper irrelevance. My computer's eagerness to correct my spelling must have had some difficulty with “Otthein” and suggested “Outthink”. Peculiarly appropriate to one who had to overcome the thousands of objections raised by others or himself in the process of a work that took many years and many collaborators