

Current Perspectives on *The Philosophy of Money* On the 100th Anniversary of Georg Simmel's Death (1858–1918)

Georg Simmel is widely considered one of the most innovative and original thinkers of modernity, and his work has had a great impact on the development of philosophy and sociology in the first half of the 20th century. After World War II, Simmel's influence declined and remained of interest mostly to historians of ideas. However, after the crisis of 2008, he became hugely popular in academic circles, not only as a 'classic' but also as a relevant thinker for today. In recent years, his perspectives on relational ontology and economic anthropology are treated at many global conferences as the most adequate and flexible theoretical descriptions of the social. Simmel worked out a very specific perspective and developed tools in which he surveyed phenomena from a social aspect. He left an outstanding legacy which, in addition to his sociological contributions, consisted of philosophical investigations, studies of culture and impressions of the modern social world. These remain relevant today. For this reason Habermas gave Simmel the moniker of *Zeitdiagnostiker*.

With the 100th anniversary of Simmel's death next year, we decided to examine whether Simmel's theoretical approach indeed bears relevance for the contemporary world. We focused on Simmel's arguably most important and influential work, *The Philosophy of Money*, his treatise on modernity, the nature of money, and forms of life pertaining to capitalism. Simmel considered it his *magnum opus*, which launched a new epoch, and provided a prophetic vision of future world. We decided to re-read this book as a manifesto of the post-modern world of financial or hyper-capitalism. Simmel saw money as the most striking symbol of the dynamism of modern life. His delineation of the money economy in its analytical and historical dimensions showed that the modern universe of values functions as a market—a realm of mediated desires objectified in the specific form of economic value, resulting from long standing and intense social exchange. The money form is not only the result of abstraction but a real limit of the rationalization process; a moment when abstraction transgresses the previous form of social life. The opposition between neutral economic forces and the inner essence of life reaches a climax in money as a form of pure existence.

Besides its compelling subject matter, another reason to take Simmel's book seriously today is the architecture and method of its argumentation. In the dense texture of its text is found an exceptionally imposing and comprehensive narrative which intertwines philosophical, sociological and anthropological considerations. We propose that the continuing

relevance of *The Philosophy of Money* relies on its multidimensional dialogue. It is neither a historical nor an economic document but rather a conceptual manifesto that conceptualizes the current and the future world.

Simmel's main goal was to revive theory building by reconstructing a 'great' theory on the modernization process and the relation between social and economic realms. From today's perspective, his relational social ontology fits well with the dynamic of the modern financial economy as a potential space for post-human subjectivity. Its analysis of the interplay of intellectual abilities and desire in the evaluation of objects and their economic calculation are crucial for understanding the essence of cognitive aspects of capitalism. Do Simmel's views on the role of exchange, commodities and desire in a capitalistic economy remain relevant in late, neoliberal capitalism? Is his neo-Kantian perspective of any significance for contemporary philosophical critique? Can Simmel's original linking of money and intellect still shed light on problems in the contemporary theory of subjectivity? What does 'money is the form of modern life' mean? Finally, after the 20th century linguistic turn in the humanities, what does the relation between money and the linguistic sign mean?

In July 2017, a group of interdisciplinary scholars met for a day-long seminar at the European Solidarity Centre in Gdańsk to discuss the initial outcomes of their work on these questions. The interpretations they presented were inspired by a wide range of theoretical interests such as classic questions about the paradigm of modernization (Andrzej Karalus), the status of Simmel's theory of value and the idealization (Maria Gołębiowska) and the claim that money has provided life with the power of capitalism to transcend the bounds of the human species (Bartosz Kuźniarz). We continued with a more strategic/conceptual reading of Simmel's critique of economic reason in terms of the meaningful relationship between desire/intellect and individualization, comparing it with the Marxian tradition (Mikołaj Ratajczak). Some authors' original approaches placed Simmel's thought in unexpected contexts which included those of De Saussure's and Wittgenstein's philosophy of language (Andrzej Leder), Freud's libidinal economy (Barbara Markowska) and Heidegger's analysis of Dasein (Piotr Augustyniak). The collection of texts presented is the result of their collaborative research on the legacy and continued relevance of Simmel's *magnum opus*. We would like to read Simmel as the first sociologist of modernity whose ideas have currently gained at global significance.

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