

Editorial

Vincenzo Mele

Volume 21, Number 1, 2017

URI: <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1041334ar>

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7202/1041334ar>

[See table of contents](#)

Publisher(s)

Georg Simmel Gesellschaft

ISSN

1616-2552 (print)

2512-1022 (digital)

[Explore this journal](#)

Cite this document

Mele, V. (2017). Editorial. *Simmel Studies*, 21 (1), 11–14.
<https://doi.org/10.7202/1041334ar>

Cash Legacy

In a famous aphorism contained in *Simmel's Posthumous Diary* Simmel wrote: "I know that I shall die without intellectual heirs, and that is as it should be. My legacy will be, as it were, in cash, distributed to many heirs, each transforming his part into use conformed to his nature: a use which will reveal no longer its indebtedness to this heritage"¹. This statement can be regarded as a more general consideration of the relations between the present and tradition, the cultural works handed from the past within the context of modernity. In this sense, it exhibits many affinities with Nietzsche's criticisms of the 'excess of history' of his time, in which he stresses the importance of the oblivion enabling dynamic action aimed at the future. In this statement Simmel is even more radical than Nietzsche: it seems that – at least for his own cultural and intellectual heritage – Simmel excludes any possible continuity or appropriation.

Things went differently. Even if the aphorism acutely foresaw the actual fragmented reception of his thought, we cannot deny the achieved status of Simmel as a classic. Thanks mainly to Otthein Rammstedt's fundamental work of publication of *Gesamtausgabe*, Simmel assumed the role that probably – if this quite pessimistic aphorism corresponds to his deep conviction – he thought it was impossible to be achieved for his scientific and philosophical production. Last year the coming of the last volume (the 24th) was celebrated and decades of works have been completed successfully. Simmel's works have now become officially *oeuvre* and his presence *monument* (in Nietzsche's sense).

¹ *Aus dem nachgelassenen Tagebuche*, in *Fragmente an Aufsätze aus dem Nachlaß* edited by G. Kantorowicz, Drei Masken, München 1923, pp. 3-46, quoted in L. A. Coser, *Masters of Sociological Thought*. New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977, pp. 198-199.

When I discussed with Rammstedt the future of *Simmel Studies* (*SiStu*) and the project of re-launching the journal “new series”, I could not keep this aphorism out of my mind. Generally speaking, all scholarly journals having “studies” in the title (*Kant Studies*, *Max Weber Studies*, etc.) conventionally have the goal of transmission of the author’s heritage, in order to ensure dissemination and continuity of thought. How to pursue an intellectual heritage of an author who said he would have none? How to avoid the opposite danger of the museum – Simmel as an innocuous member of the “Western canon” populated by “dead white men”? My opinion is that the problem of appropriation and continuation of a tradition can be posed for all authors in general but in the case of Simmel assumes a special relevance.

Simmel academic anti-conformist attitude is well known in the secondary literature and it was not a secondary factor to his career’s difficulties. It is just worth remembering that he has been one of the first German professors to admit women to his classes during the Wilhelmine Period, acknowledging the importance of a distinguished “female culture”. Paradoxically Walter Benjamin said he saw in Simmel “a precursor of cultural bolshevism” – the term used in the Nazi jargon to stigmatize the cultural and artistic Avant guard movements.

If Simmel was without doubt a canon breaker and a cultural innovator, it would be contradictory to conceive *SiStu* as a journal exclusively dedicated to the custody of the monumental tradition of his work. It is time now to take seriously Simmel’s words and start spending the enormous “cash legacy” he left to us, going *with* Simmel *beyond* Simmel. It can be more faithful to Simmel’s spirit the project of building a *third space* between the mere preservation of an heritage and the nihilistic dispersion of a cultural tradition.

How to translate this project in the concrete practice of a scholarly journal?

There are several innovations that we are introducing in order to answer the challenges of Simmel's "cash legacy". Some regards the *form* of the journal, others the *content* of the issues.

Firstly, *SiStu* "new series" goes digital. The journal will be available not only in print version but also in digital format on *Érudit* (erudit.org). *Érudit* is a non-profit interuniversity consortium platform whose mission is the dissemination (in open access after 12 months) of a wide range of scholarly publications. Since *SiStu* intends to be a global forum for the scientific research inspired by Simmel – peer-reviewed by an international editorial board from Germany, France, England, Spain, Italy, North and South America, Russia, Japan, China, Taiwan – we will progressively move toward English as the main publishing language, except for Simmel's inedited material (that will be published in German). We know that this choice may be disputable but we thought it is a necessary sacrifice in order to make *SiStu* the effective organ of international Simmel scholars around the world.

Along with these formal innovations, we would like to propose also "cash legacy" special issues dedicated to Simmelian topics that are drastically relevant in contemporary sociological, philosophical and aesthetical debates. Each one of these special issues will hopefully be edited by one or more specialists and collect articles coming from a call for papers and/or a dedicated international symposium. A provisional list of topics for special issues are:

- *The Exhibition Principle* (a special issue dedicated to the actuality and utility of Simmel's conceptual tools for analyzing contemporary International exhibitions, relying mainly on his essay on Berlin's commercial exhibition, 1896).

- *1918. Ways Out of the Great War* (a special issue dedicated to the positions of the European sociologists and social

philosophers on the ways for overcoming the political crisis of the continent at the end of World War I).

- *The Culture of Things* (a special issue dedicated to develop Simmel's intuition about the domination of the cultural things in everyday experience).

More topics are possible and they have actually been planned. Some of these issues will start from a topical Simmel's intuition trying to actualize his thought, even drawing from other conceptual traditions: going *with* Simmel *beyond* Simmel. We are aware that this is a very ambitious project. *SiStu* redaction cannot achieve anything without the contribution of the editorial board and the participation of the larger scholarly community. However, we believe this is the challenge that the re-launch of the journal in the new millennium is putting in front of us.

Vincenzo Mele