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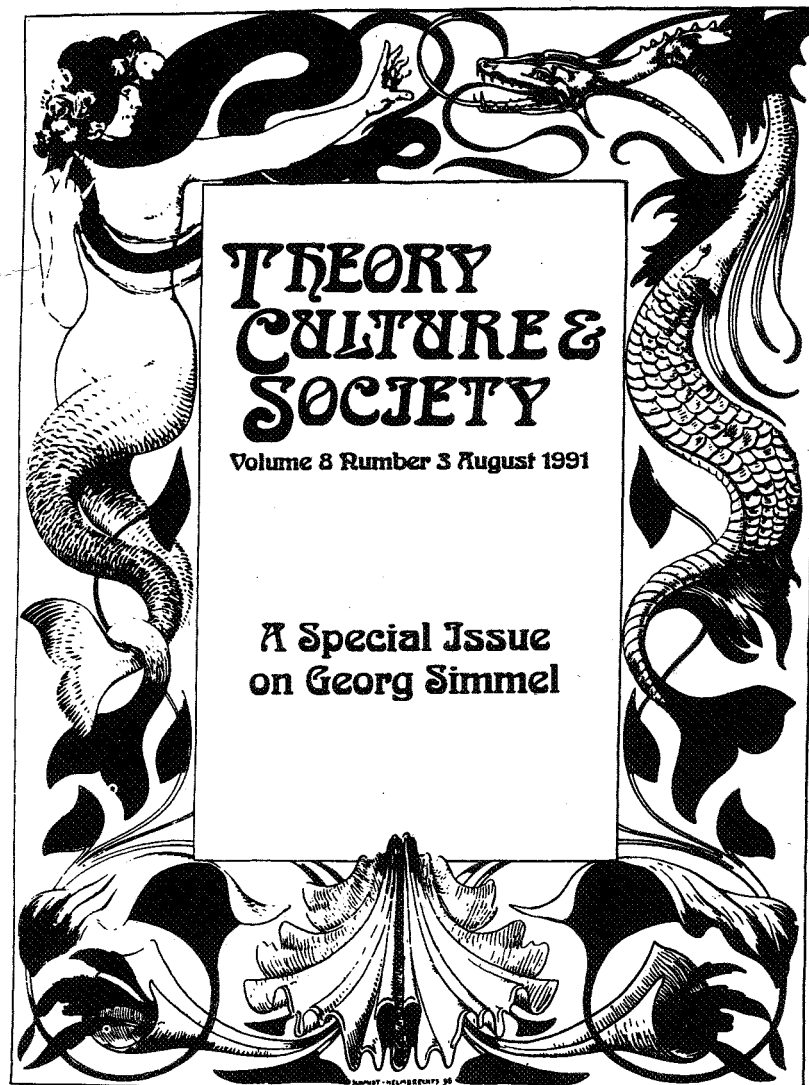
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In summer 1991, the Georg Simmel Society in Bielefeld, Germany, will begin publication of a journal devoted to the documentation and co-ordination of international Simmel research. In view of the rapidly increasing number of academic publications, the journal will attempt to foster dialogue on all aspects of Simmel's writings and influence and will comprise two principal components: the biannual *Simmel Newsletter* (ISSN 0939-2327) will contain information on current research problems, announcements of forthcoming meetings and other news items, book and conference reports, as well as short articles; the annual *Simmel Abstracts*, to be included in the winter issue of the *Simmel Newsletter* and also available on disk, will provide information on recent books, dissertations and articles.

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Causality or Interaction? Simmel, Weber and Interpretive Sociology

Klaus Lichtblau

Behind the action is the person. (Max Weber, 1985: 496)

For the fabric of social life it is particularly true: no weaver knows what he's weaving. (Georg Simmel, 1905: 18)

Max Weber had made the attempt to throw out the idea — one could almost say — and to retain only the *subjectively intended meaning* (the parallel to Sombart's 'motif'), in order to construct the historical, social world in that way. Today one can probably state that this attempt — matchless in its monumentality — has failed *in this respect*. Objectivized contexts ('objects') cannot be dissolved completely in a nominalistic fashion. (Karl Mannheim, 1929: 239)

Causality is disappointing in a certain sense: as a principle of the proportionality of cause and effect it excludes significance. If the concessions become palpable under which science guarantees the conditions of life for us, but also cuts off questions, then mythology suggests itself. For the 'really moving question' is not necessarily also the one upon the solution of which our pure ability to exist depends. (Hans Blumenberg, 1971: 48)

I

In the course of the general reflection upon the historical origin of modern sociology as an academic discipline, the mutual relationship between the work of Georg Simmel and that of Max Weber has increasingly become the focus of international research in the recent past. This interest is due in part to the current resumption of the debate over the nature and characteristics of cultural modernity and its 'postmodern' irritations and excesses. At the same time it is also the expression of an irritation with the academic self-conception of modern sociology, which has never been able to master in a satisfactory way the '*hiatus irrationalis*' between conceptual-theoretical work and empirical-theoretical research. In addition, two different traditions of sociological research and thought seem to have had

their beginnings in the works of Simmel and Weber — at least so far as the history of the response to them is concerned. The North American response by Albion W. Small and Robert E. Park on the one hand and Talcott Parsons on the other has tended more to amplify than to dampen this dissociation (Levine, 1971: xlviii ff.; Faught, 1985: 156 ff.).

On the one hand, it seems as if Simmel's microscopic analyses of the everyday social interactions and modes of cultural experience in modern life confront Weber's sociological categories and his universal-historical investigation as if they were a different world. The two seem to drift even further apart through the contrast between Simmel's preference for an aesthetically rich literary expression and Weber's insistence on a 'clear' formation of concepts devoid of any stylistic attraction. On the other other hand, a number of substantive similarities in the works of the two great thinkers and founders of modern sociology had already been discussed at an early stage in the secondary literature, which ultimately made the questions as to their specific epistemological and methodological positions increasingly acute.

In particular, there appears to have been unanimity for many decades that Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* (*Philosophie des Geldes*) (1922) must be accorded an exceptional significance for Weber's theory of occidental rationalism and the corresponding studies in cultural history and the sociology of religion. This is an assessment, by the way, which found fertile soil in Weber's professed support for the tradition of scholarly cultural analysis as inaugurated by Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* (cf. Weber, 1920: 34; Frischeisen-Köhler, 1919/20: 18; Lukács, 1958: 175; Mannheim, 1980: 313; Salomon, 1945: 606; Tenbruck, 1959: 622 ff.; Frisby, 1978: 22 ff.; Faught, 1985; Pohlmann, 1987; Lichtblau, 1988: 33 ff.). It is also a consensus that the commonalities in such analyses stem in part from a radical renunciation of the naive optimism on progress as expressed in the Enlightenment philosophy of the eighteenth century and in the industrial boom of the late nineteenth century in Germany (the *Gründerzeit*). In that sense they prepared the way for a *tragic consciousness* within German sociology (Lenk, 1964; Dahme, 1988; Liebersohn, 1988). There is an equivalent consensus in the history of dogma about moving the origin of *Western Marxism* and central motifs of the *Frankfurt School* back to the unconventional Simmel-Weber synthesis as marked out in the work of the young Georg Lukács (cf. Schnabel,

1974: 110 ff.; Frisby, 1978: 22 ff.; Beiersdorfer, 1986; Turner, 1986; Dannemann, 1987: 61 ff., 83 ff.; Scaff, 1987, 1989).

In that respect it is no coincidence that, particularly among theoreticians of cultural modernity who feel themselves obliged to this traditional context and the knowledge claims expressed in it, the work of Simmel and Weber is coming to occupy the centre of attention in a *comparative* perspective as part of the clarification of the fundamental conceptual premises for a sociologically significant cultural analysis of European modernity (cf. Scaff, 1987, 1989; Whimster, 1987: 268 ff.; Frisby, 1988a, b; Lichtblau, 1988, 1989/90). Both Simmel's theory of the divergent development of 'subjective' and 'objective' culture, and Weber's analysis of the objectification and generalization of relations of domination that were originally genuinely personal have come into view as pre-formulations of Lukács's critique of the reification of consciousness in bourgeois society. Simmel's theory is likewise viewed as the possibility of an irrational questioning of the culture of modernity which is due to the 'life process' itself, or better, the emergence of new charismatic personalities and social revolutionary movements. This has finally turned even the question of the status of the respective individual freedom and of the concrete margins of action for the individual within this 'autonomization' of 'social forms' into an 'iron cage' of lifestyle and the routinization of action in the wake of the 'mechanisms of rationalization' (Davis, 1973: 322; Kalberg, 1978: 7 ff.; Bevers, 1985: 140; Lichtblau, 1988: 87 ff.).

This multiplicity of substantive relations between Simmel's and Weber's works is the actual reason why even their differing views of the nature and characteristics of sociology as an 'exact' and academically conducted specialized discipline have found an increased international audience and correspondingly more attention during the past few years. For some time, there have existed attempts to determine from a comparative perspective sociology's relationship with respect to the efforts at its institutionalization as a specialized academic discipline (Dahme and Rammstedt, 1984; Rammstedt, 1985; Weiss, 1988), and to explicate its handling of the problem of the semantic ambiguity of contexts of meaning and a corresponding aesthetic-literary form of representing them (Green, 1988; Levine, 1988). By now, there are also a considerable number of studies which claim to bring a bit more light into the tangled relationship between Simmel's conception of a *pure* or *formal sociology* and Weber's plan of an *interpretive sociology*.

Two differing evaluations can be observed, which dominate these methodological discussions and at the same time clarify the aporia of such a comparison of theories. The first case draws on Simmel's epistemological investigation on *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* (*Die Probleme der Geschichtsphilosophie*) from the year 1892, which appeared in 1905 in a heavily revised second edition. Here the conception of a *science of reality* (*Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*), i.e. the *theory of interpretation and of ideal-typical concept formation* that had already begun to be developed by Simmel, is considered the model and the heuristic frame of reference for Weber's own methodological works (Tenbruck, 1958: 604ff., 1959: 622ff.; Levine, 1971: xlv, 1984: 326ff.; Schnabel, 1974: 104ff.; Bevers, 1985: 125ff.; Segre, 1987; Lichtblau, 1988: 20ff.). In the second approach, it is simultaneously pointed out that this epistemological investigation into the a priori presuppositions of history, which would become so important to Weber's work, does not in fact contain a methodological foundation of Simmel's own sociology. In that respect, his 'pure' or 'formal' sociology ought not be hastily equated to Weber's programme of an 'interpretive' sociology, since the two are based in part on completely different foundations and also pursue differing knowledge interests (Tenbruck, 1958: 604ff., 1959: 622ff.; Atoji, 1982: 5ff.; Bevers, 1985: 125ff.; Nedelmann, 1988).

The state of the debate in this area becomes totally confused if one additionally introduces the peculiar status of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* into this tissue of relationships. That work was of no less importance than *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* for Weber's self-clarification and intellectual development at the time of his recovery, yet by Simmel's own admission it is neither a socioeconomic study in the specialized sense nor does it even contain an application of his 'sociology' (cf. Lichtblau, 1986). Furthermore, Weber's infrequent remarks on Simmel's sociological method in the narrow sense remain oddly enigmatic, and should probably be held responsible in part for the current confusion in relation to the significance of Simmel's work for Weber's plan of an 'interpretive' sociology. Indeed, it can be surmised that Weber's inadequate understanding relative to the particular characteristics of Simmel's different works and their corresponding methodological approaches can be traced back to an initial insecurity on Weber's part with respect to his own sociological self-understanding, which also left its mark on his contradictory judgements of Simmel's work.

Symptomatic of Weber's irritation and lack of understanding with respect to the cognitive status and the methodological peculiarity of Simmel's work is the fact that Weber did not distinguish at all between the various types of texts among Simmel's works and their disciplinary classifications. Instead, he refers to them in a quite undifferentiated way, and incidentally, very selectively in the context of his attempts to clarify the 'logical' problems of the 'human sciences' (*Geisteswissenschaften*) or 'historical cultural sciences' (*historische Kulturwissenschaften*). These 'logical' problems of historical cultural sciences are discussed in Simmel's works only in the various editions of his *Problems of the Philosophy of History*, as well as in his later works, *The Problem of Historical Time* (*Das Problem der historischen Zeit*) (1916), 'Historical Formation' (*Die historische Formung*) (1917/1918), and in *On the Nature of Historical Understanding* (*Vom Wesen des historischen Verstehens*) (1918b). There was no such discussion in *The Philosophy of Money* and Simmel's various sociological writings, whose specific cognitive status was not perceived by Weber at all.

By contrast to Weber himself, Simmel had developed at an early date, at the latest by the publication of *On Social Differentiation* (*Über soziale Differenzierung*) (1890), a clear and precise conception of sociology as a specifically new discipline which was certainly limited in its knowledge claims. Specifically, he conceived of it as 'pure' or 'formal' science, that is to say a specific *method of research*, which stands in a relation of form to content with respect to the other human and social sciences (*Geistes- und Sozialwissenschaften*), or 'cultural studies' (*Kulturwissenschaften*) (Simmel, 1890: 1-20; cf. Rammstedt, 1988). The only important enhancement of this programme of a *formal sociology* developed in the last decade of the preceding century is represented by the 'Digression on the Problem: How is Society Possible?' in the introductory chapter of his 'large' sociology from 1908. There, Simmel underscored the a priori character of the 'pure' forms of sociation over against the 'empirical' aspects of the 'contents' entering into these forms of sociation, i.e. the motives, needs, ends and inner 'experiences' of the specific individuals (cf. Simmel, 1968: 21-30).

On the other hand, Simmel's 1917 study of *The Fundamental Questions of Sociology* (*Die Grundfragen der Soziologie*) (1970), known as the 'little' *Sociology*, contains no further categorical expansion, much less a renovation, of his sociological approach as

fully and finally formulated in 1908. Rather, it offers only a refinement of this 'pure' or 'formal' sociology for pedagogical purposes with respect to the *epistemology* of the social sciences on the one hand, and *social philosophy* or 'philosophical sociology' on the other (Simmel, 1970: 5-32; cf. Dahme, 1981: 248ff., 1984). At the time Weber was increasingly turning to sociological research and the problems of its methodological foundation, Simmel had in essence already abandoned this terrain for newer areas of work which seemed more personally important to him (cf. Troeltsch, 1922: 572ff.; Tenbruck, 1958: 593). This state of affairs documents the fact that Weber was not a contemporary of Simmel's at all, but in a sense already belonged to a new generation.

Unlike Simmel, Weber had not entered the scene with intentions from the beginning to found a sociology operating as a specialized discipline to form an alternative to the older and newer traditions of a speculative and metaphysical 'social theory'. In the controversies that had erupted in the 'methodological quarrel' between Schmoller and Menger in economics, as well as in the historians' quarrels over Karl Lamprecht's works on cultural history, regarding the relationship between a genuinely historical and a purely systematic knowledge or between an 'individual psychological' and a 'social psychological' method of knowledge, Weber's own attempts to reach a new and independent solution to these unresolved problems have the character of occasional pieces, whose programmatic claims had not from the beginning intended something like a sociology operating as an autonomous science. Even the posthumously published 'Theory of Sociological Categories' in *Economy and Society* (1968) was, by Weber's own self-understanding, purely a conceptual aid for his historical-comparative investigations of universal history, and was only later hypostatized by his later disciples into an end in itself (cf. Weber, 1972b: 1-180; Tenbruck, 1959; Hennis, 1987; Weiss, 1989: 7-19). This may finally have been one of the reasons why Weber said so little about Simmel's actual *sociological* writings and was more interested in Simmel the 'logician' and 'cultural philosopher'.

In the following section, I will sharpen these 'ambivalent encounters' between Simmel and Weber in terms of the question of what significance for Weber's attempts at clarification of the 'logical problems' of the 'historical cultural sciences' in general can be ascribed to Simmel's works in the *methodological sense*. To this end, the various references of Weber to Simmel's work and

especially his critique of Simmel will be considered. Additionally, the inappropriateness of Weber's critique of Simmel will be discussed against the background of Simmel's own work, in order to clarify the question of the relationship Simmel's project of a 'pure' or 'formal' sociology has to Max Weber's 'interpretive' sociology.

II

Simmel never directly referred to Weber's work in publications that appeared during his life or posthumously. Besides his consistent practice of avoiding quotations, caused in part by his aesthetic 'attitude', the previously mentioned temporal gap between the sociological creative periods of the two authors may have also motivated this.

Weber, by contrast, refers directly and indirectly to Simmel in the various essays in his *Wissenschaftslehre*, in his writings on the sociology of religion, at the beginning of his *Basic Concepts of Sociology* (*Soziologische Grundbegriffe*) and in *Economy and Society*. Around 1908, he also began working out a critical reaction to Simmel's *Soziologie*, as announced in his essay on Knies, but, like so many of Weber's later projects, this remained a fragment, first published in 1972, in an English translation (Weber, 1972a). On the basis of Weber's own voluminous methodological discussions of the 'logical problems' of 'historical cultural sciences', and taking into account these different statements in Weber's writings directly related to Simmel's work, the following will strive to reconstruct the central critical points which Weber felt it necessary to assert against Simmel's sociological self-understanding and scientific method in general. It will be seen in the process that Weber attempted to comprehend Simmel's work with a standard that was not only wholly inappropriate to it, but also sheds some light on Weber's own theory and practice of 'interpreting'.

Let it be emphasized first that Weber attempted to define both Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* and his *Problems of the Philosophy of History* as well as his actual sociological writings with regard to their contributions to the project of an 'interpretive sociology' in the sense that Weber later pursued. Additionally, it is striking in this sense that Weber generally positively assessed Simmel's reconstruction of the epistemological problems of historiography and the theory of 'historical interpretation' he had sketched out from the *methodological* point of view. On the other hand he

treated the *Philosophy of Money* as well as Simmel's *Soziologie* with critical distance or even rejection, because of their epistemological premises, which he considered problematic. He nevertheless felt ambivalent in this connection, because it was precisely the latter two 'main sociological works' of Simmel's to which he owed so many stimuli in the *substantive* sense. Let us therefore turn first to Weber's positive references to Simmel's writings, before submitting his critique of Simmel's 'sociological method' in the *The Philosophy of Money* and his actual *Soziologie* to a detailed discussion.

Quite early, Weber credited Simmel with the achievement of having worked out 'by far the most logically developed approaches to a theory of "interpretation"', especially in the second edition of his *Problems of the Philosophy of History* (Weber, 1985: 92). In particular it is the rigid distinction between the nomological or nomothetic and ideographic or historical sciences (*Gesetzes- und Wirklichkeitswissenschaft*) which Weber draws from the works of Simmel, Windelband and Rickert, in order to underscore the distinctive character of the concept formation in the cultural sciences vis-à-vis the 'realistic' or 'naturalistic' self-misunderstandings of the historians and economists of his period (Weber, 1985: 4, 146, 237; Simmel, 1892: 41ff.; Simmel, 1905: 40ff.). Like Simmel and Rickert, Weber justifies the emphasis on the purely *hypothetical* character of the scientific 'interpretation' of historical and socio-economic processes with the argument that 'reality' as such constitutes an 'intensive infinity of *all* the empirically existing variety'. This necessarily forces the researcher into a rigid 'material selection', in order to distil a *conceived order* out of this 'heterogeneous continuum' of events, or to make it 'comprehensible' by relating it to an 'adequately' conceived and 'causally relevant' nexus of meaning (Weber, 1985: 75, 114). Similarly to Simmel, Weber emphasizes a *lower threshold of historical interpretation*, the criterion of which Simmel designates as the respective *degree of consequence* of a historical event, and Weber as its *causally relevant aspect* (Simmel, 1905: 131, 1957: 57; Weber, 1985: 233). Weber also refers positively to Simmel's emphasis on the *individual* character of 'mass phenomena', to the extent they can be reconstructed by the 'method of interpretation', as well as to Simmel's view of the necessity of specific *value relationships* that guide the researcher in the choice of material and the hypothetical construction of its meanings.

Along with Simmel, Weber advances the view that it is not only strongly characterized *historical personalities* and the motives of their actions that can be best interpreted, but also that a strongly marked *personality of the historian* himself is the best presupposition for the interpretation of individual courses of action by great historical individuals, as well as for grasping the meaning of apparently fortuitous events and mass phenomena (Simmel, 1905: 52ff.; Weber, 1985: 48, 101, 548). And just as much as Simmel, Weber views the manifestation of *social conflict* or struggle as an essential component of sociation processes, which finds expression on the methodological level in the recognition of a *pluralism* or '*absolute polytheism*'. Weber, however, sees the preconditions for a 'mortal struggle, as if between God and the Devil' in this pluralism of the various cultural 'value spheres' or 'possible points of view'. Simmel, on the other hand, relativizes that pluralism to the logical parallelism of possible value spheres or the more moderate form of a respective 'personal attitude', by which means the individual personality expresses its specific views towards the 'world' surrounding it (Weber, 1985: 463, 507; cf. Simmel, 1910: 23ff., 1918a: 30ff.). Finally, like Simmel, Weber considers the description of 'rational progress', or the various processes of rationalization which have shaped the formation of modern occidental culture, to be a major task of sociology and of a corresponding cultural theory (Weber, 1985: 525ff.; cf. Simmel, 1892: 40ff.; Weber, 1968: 147ff.).

Weber takes a critical if not hostile view of the thesis advanced by Simmel and Karl Lamprecht that this process of the increasing prevalence of the model of instrumentally rational action in the most varied areas of society, interpreted as *rational progress* and *social differentiation*, must necessarily be accompanied by an increasing differentiation of the subjective culture of inner 'experience'.¹ In this connection, with a glance at Karl Lamprecht's writing on cultural history, Weber criticizes the existence of an 'allegedly determinate and uniform succession of the various "impressionisms" in the social psyche'. He also asserts the objection to Simmel's 'impressionism' that the increasing significance of 'emotional nuances' need not necessarily contain at the same time an increasing differentiation in the forms of 'experience' itself. The 'race for sensations' and 'the intellectually interesting' which are characteristic of modern culture should, in Weber's view, be conceived rather as the 'product of diminishing power to master

everyday life inwardly' and of a spreading 'aesthetic twilight mood' in the *fin de siècle* (Weber, 1985: 7f., 518f.; for a discussion of Simmel's 'impressionism' see Frisby, 1981; Böhringer, 1989). Weber does partially concur with regard to the view that there is a *progressive social differentiation and rationalization*, to the extent it is connected with the idea of an increase in *rational social organization*. Before naively transferring a pattern of differentiation borrowed from biology to sociocultural processes, however, he insists on a clarification of the question:

how in the early stages of human social differentiation the realm of purely mechanical-*instinctive* differentiation should be assessed in relationship to that which is individually and sensually comprehensible and further to that which is consciously and rationally created. (Weber, 1985: 461, 473, 576f.)

This reservation, implicitly also directed against Simmel's theory of social differentiation, can also be sharpened into the methodological question of what is the relationship in Simmel's *Soziologie* between the *subjectively intended meaning* and that *objectively valid meaning* which 'interpretive sociology' attempts to reconstruct in the form of an empirical checking of the researcher's *adequacy of meaning* by the causal relevancy of his interpretations. Of course, Weber himself admits that Simmel's book on *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* deserves the merit of having 'clearly separated the objective "interpretation" of the *meaning* of a statement from the subjective "interpretation" of the motives of a (speaking or acting) person'. On the other hand, he later repeatedly accuses Simmel of causing the intended and the objectively *valid meaning* to 'blur deliberately', especially in *The Philosophy of Money* and *Soziologie*, whereas Weber would 'sharply distinguish them' (cf. Weber, 1985: 427, 541).

The apparent contradiction between Weber's first statement from the year 1905 and his later judgement from the years 1913–20 can be resolved in the following sense. Simmel was concerned in the quoted passage from *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* only with the distinction between the interpretation of a *sentence's meaning* independently of the context in which it was first uttered and the interpretation of the *intentions* of the speaking and acting persons. In the second case, however, Weber accuses Simmel of not having sufficiently distinguished within his 'sociological method', in the narrower sense, between the interpretation of the *motives* of the

social actors and the *objective context of meaning* reconstructed by the researchers, in which a statement or an action appears both 'adequate to the meaning' and 'causally relevant' (cf. Levine, 1984: 328–34; Nedelmann, 1988: 13ff.).

This central objection that Weber raises against Simmel's 'method' can be supplemented and expanded by a series of further critical points, which Weber lodged against *The Philosophy of Money* and his *Soziologie* and which are directly connected to this main argument of Weber's. Weber additionally not only accuses Simmel of treating actual *problems of being* (*Seinsprobleme*) as *problems of meaning* (*Sinnprobleme*), that is, ultimately metaphysically, but also of drawing *illustrations* and *analogies* for 'interpreting' sociologically relevant facts from the most diverse spheres of meaning. To be sure, Weber also recognizes the *heuristic* value of uncovering 'parallelisms' between the most various 'causal series' and 'contexts of meaning' in the sense of the construction of 'comprehensible images' of events. Unlike Simmel, however, he views the 'comparison of "analogous" events' as only one of *several* means of 'attribution' and therefore merely a 'preliminary stage' of the actual work of an 'interpretive sociology' – that is, the formation of 'sharp concepts' and 'pure types' of 'causal relevance'. By contrast, he claims that for Simmel the 'analogous' side of a concrete phenomenon that is being cited is elevated to its 'actual nature' and therefore ultimately abstracted from its causal conditionality (Weber, 1972a: 160ff., 1985: 14, 26ff., 124, 232; on the positive evaluation of Simmel's 'brilliant images' in *The Philosophy of Money* see Weber, 1920: 34).

In reproaching Simmel's investigation of cultural philosophy and sociology for its causal irrelevance, Weber is attempting at the same time to strike at the heart of Simmel's 'sociological method'. Already in 1905, Weber had pointed to the problematics of the 'remarks on the concept of society and the duties of sociology scattered throughout his [Simmel's] various writings', and in that connection had quoted for the first time the corresponding critique of Simmel's positions by Othmar Spann (Weber, 1985: 93). In his fragmentary manuscript on 'Georg Simmel as Sociologist and Theoretician of the Money Economy' from 1908 (English trans. 1972a), Weber renews this appeal to Spann's critique of Simmel, seconding it 'in many essential points', although Spann had not been able to take account of Simmel's 'large' *Soziologie* of 1908, which Weber credited with 'a few notable, though not fundamental modifications with respect

to Simmel's earlier stances that had been criticized by Spann'. Additionally, Weber launches an attack of his own on the central and fundamental concept in Simmel's 'method', which Spann had already scrutinized critically: the principle of *interaction* (*Wechselwirkung*) which Simmel conceived of as the 'global regulative principle' (cf. Simmel, 1890: 13ff.; Weber, 1972a: 162f.; Spann, 1905, 1907: 178ff.).

Weber, of course, recognizes that for Simmel sociology is a science concerned with the *interactions between individuals*. Nonetheless, this concept of 'interaction' appears deeply 'ambiguous' to him, since a 'relationship that is not somehow mutual . . . [is] scarcely constructible within physical reality in the most literal sense and as a *general* phenomenon'. Therefore, Weber reaches a conclusion he considers devastating for Simmel's sociology, that this idea is so abstract in its concept and broad in its contents 'that it would require the greatest artificiality to conceive of an influence of one person by another that would be purely "one-sided", i.e. not containing a certain element of "interaction"' (Weber, 1972a: 163).²

The thrust of Weber's argument becomes even clearer when we include the criticisms raised by Othmar Spann against Simmel's 'formal' sociology, objections to which Weber referred approvingly several times.³ Spann had anticipated at a very early date a central problem of Simmel's 'speculative atomism', to which Simmel did not provide a satisfactory answer until 1908 — the question that remained to be cleared up: 'How is social science as a science of *complexes*, whose elements are already subject to universal research, possible at all?' Spann considered Simmel's 'solution of this preliminary epistemological question' by means of the 'global regulative principle' of *interaction* 'unsatisfactory in its implementation and contradictory and metaphysical in its construction' (Spann, 1905: 310; for a discussion of Simmel's 'speculative atomism' see also Böhringer, 1976). Spann criticizes Simmel's view that in principle there can be 'laws of events' only for the smallest part of the physical world. He argues that in the context of such epistemological premises it can no longer be plausibly shown in what form an 'independent law' could then be formulated for the 'complex as such' and the 'totality' of social phenomena. The 'sublimation of the concept of society' to a *mere name for the sum of all social interactions* is therefore said to be a necessary consequence of Simmel's 'formal' sociology, which makes *social science* 'impossible' as an *independent science*.

In opposition to that, Spann insists on the *uniform*, not purely *gradual* effect of social formations, which are likewise also accessible in principle to a *law-based causal analysis*. In that respect, he views even Simmel's concept of *interaction* as only the *special case of a double causal relationship*, in the sense of a 'mutual relationship of dependency between two quantities', whose 'exact causal-theoretical determination and justification' is a desideratum in Simmel's sociology. The same applies to the formulation of a 'material concept of society' because of Simmel's excessively abstract and unsubstantively formulated principle of interaction. Spann concludes his critique of the inadequacy of Simmel's epistemological foundation of the social sciences with the postulate that it remains to be shown how the individual interactions and complexes of phenomena can be constituted as *specifically social* at all, with respect to the premises advocated by Simmel (cf. Spann, 1905: 310–35, 1907: 189–220, 1923b: 25–46).

In what follows I demonstrate that these objections raised by Weber and Spann against Simmel's 'method' only represent his starting-points for an epistemological foundation of the modern social sciences in a completely inadequate way, and largely miss their mark. I will show that Simmel solved the criticisms raised against his methodological approach by means of a logically consistent *theory of interpretive understanding* (*Verstehen*), both in the second edition (Simmel, 1905, 1977) of his study of *The Problems of the Philosophy of History* as well as in his 'Digression on the Question: How is Society Possible?' from 1908 (Simmel, 1959, 1968). And he did this in a way that not only proves Weber's and Spann's criticism of him obsolete, but is also more capable than Weber's own approaches of satisfying the demands that we are compelled by the current state of knowledge to place on the foundation of 'interpretive sociology'. Finally, I will clarify the specific knowledge interests Simmel pursued with his carefully measured out and well reflected *trisection* of 'cultural sciences' (*Kulturwissenschaften*) into an *epistemology of the historical and social sciences* and the respective underlying *empirical scientific* correlatives on the one hand, and the *theory of cultural modernity* explicated in his *The Philosophy of Money* on the other.

III

In order to illustrate the difference between the basic epistemological positions of Simmel and Weber, it is worth taking a brief

look at the history of the concepts of *causality* and *interaction* which they employ as 'global regulative principles'. It must first be stressed that Weber's insistence on the inescapable necessity of causal analyses in the area of the 'historical cultural sciences' no longer possessed any direct persuasive power as such at the beginning of the twentieth century. Following the revolutionizing of the *world view of natural science* around the turn of the century, the suitability of the causal category for the fundamental conceptual reconstruction of physical processes had been called into question. The crisis of the mechanical world view is owing in part to the insight from the physics of elementary particles as developed by Max Planck and Albert Einstein that the interactions between 'elementary quantities' or quanta on one hand, and 'matter' on the other, cannot be reconstructed along the pattern of cause and effect. Rather, all that can still be described are the constant relationships of changes in time in the sense of a fundamental *relativity*, that is, a 'dependence of phenomena on one another' (Ernst Mach). By completely cutting through the relationship between *causality* and *adherence to laws*, which was still constitutive for classical mechanics, Weber does react to the foundational crisis of the modern scientific world view. At the same time, however, he dissolves the concept of causality into a pure juridically inspired *problem of attribution* for the 'historical explanation' of phenomena which are always only *comprehensible individually* (on Weber's positive reference to Gustav Radbruch's concept of 'adequate causation' (1902) see Weber, 1985: 269ff.).

The understanding of causality in the mechanistic world view was already an extrication of the *causa efficiens* from a more encompassing understanding of being, such as was still self-evident for Greek antiquity and the European Middle Ages. The Aristotelian tradition that still prevailed in that era distinguished between four *different* types of 'causes', which were inwardly connected within underlying teleological world view: the *material*, the *form*, the *motive force (causa efficiens)* and the *end (telos)*. According to this thought, the originator (or the *causa efficiens*), which is identical with the modern causal concept, was not the only presupposition for the 'being of that which has been created', but rather it was embedded into the context of the *structural totality* shaped by an overarching concept of purpose (cf. Gadamer, 1967: 196f.).

By reaching back to interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) as the basic category for his thought Simmel not only follows the relativistic world view of modern physics, but also consciously seeks to connect

with an older tradition of thought. The latter always conceived of itself as an alternative to the modern predominance of the causal category, and not coincidentally, it rehabilitated the fourfold significance of the Aristotelian concept of 'cause' in that respect. In the etymological respect, the concept of 'change' (*Wechsel* — also meaning a draft, or promissory note) in the sense of the *exchange of goods* is one of the oldest German commercial terms. In Kant's philosophy, the concept of 'interaction' is explicitly equated with that of the *community*, and as an *analogy of experience* it is determined according to the principle of the *simultaneous being of substances in space* (cf. Kant, 1924: 302ff.). In the Romantic philosophy of nature, the concept of interaction is called upon for describing an *organism*, in which the whole *precedes* the parts, so that the 'endless interactions' of the parts cannot be interpreted as a causal relationship, since any effect is always already the cause of its own attainment.

Friedrich Schleiermacher finally attempted for the first time to make this idea of a fundamental *simultaneity* of the elements of an interaction fruitful in a genuinely social-philosophical form for his own philosophy in the context of his 'Theory of Social Behavior' (Theorie des geselligen Betragens) from 1799. As part of this theory, he defined society as an 'interaction winding through all its participants, but also completely determined and completed by them' (Schleiermacher, 1984: 169; for the history of the concept 'interaction' see Christian, 1978: 110ff.).

Simmel puts his own concept of 'interaction' into the theoretical context transmitted to him via Dilthey, by holding fast to the fundamental *boundlessness of all events*, by conceiving of these events *constantly as connected* by a variety of interactions, and by subjecting an analysis of these interactions to the *principle of simultaneity*. This preference for *synchronism vis-à-vis diachronism* distinguishes his approach fundamentally from a causal analysis in a Weberian sense, because the traditional concept of causality is necessarily dependent on the idea of a temporal succession in the sense of an afterwards (cf. Kant, 1924: 283ff.). The interaction, on the other hand implies a coexistence, which can be captured and described in the *mode of 'magnificent simultaneity'* (Friedrich Schlegel).

This determination of Simmel's fundamental principles has a variety of implications and consequences for his *method of interpreting*, which can only be treated summarily and in passing within the bounds of this investigation. First, according to Simmel, a

description of historical events 'as they really happened' is fundamentally *not* possible for epistemological reasons. In that respect, *historical understanding*, like *any* kind of knowledge, is 'a transfer of that which directly exists into a new language' which 'follows only its own forms, categories and demands' (Simmel, 1905: 40ff.). Even the relationship between 'cause' and 'effect' is substituted in that way by the *logical form of a mutual relationship* or an 'interaction', in which 'the present has an effect on the past at the same time as the past on the present' (Simmel, 1919: 191; cf. Christian, 1978: 125). Historical understanding according to this view designates an intelligible level that is identical neither with the isolated acts of consciousness on the part of the historian nor with the 'motives' of 'historical individuals'.

Second, even in any ordinary example of reciprocal action or interaction a play of projection and rejection between the acting and the experiencing individuals occurs. We always see the *other* only in the mirror of our own generalizations and typifications, and we gain our *self image* conversely only through a 'generalized other' (cf. Simmel, 1968: 24ff.).

Third, this 'global regulative principle' in Simmel's 'method of interpretation' is furthermore deeply connected with his cultural philosophy, adopted from the aesthetic works of Baudelaire, that described *modernity* as an *eternal present*. In this respect then, Simmel's decision in favour of the category of interaction against that of causality owes something to the substantive results of his own analyses of modern and contemporary culture (cf. Frisby, 1981, 1985).

In rejecting all 'realistic' or 'naturalistic' reifications of 'ideal-typical' concept formations, Simmel was therefore no less rigorous than Max Weber. Unlike Weber, he additionally goes so far as to dissolve the 'external' successions within the empirical world of phenomena into a simultaneity or timelessness of 'inner contemplation'. Even so-called 'historical interpretation' is therefore only the expression of a logical process for Simmel, in which the difference between ego and non-ego, subject and object, as well as present and past is first *constituted*. By means of the example of his concept of *historical interpretation*, I will illustrate this commonality in the initial questioning between Simmel's attempt at an epistemological foundation of historical studies, on the one hand, and his quasi-transcendental constitutional theory of the forms of sociation, on the other. Then I will attempt to characterize the status of the

sociological a priori within Simmel's attempt to ground modern sociology, and the latter's logical relationship of that attempt to Weber's programme of an 'interpretive sociology'.

IV

Simmel starts from the fundamental *circularity* of human knowledge, according to which *external events* can only be symbolically interpreted by analogy to 'inner experience', and *inner events* conversely only by analogy to temporal-spatial, i.e. 'external' determinations. The two analogy formations do not enjoy a relationship of mutual 'cause' and 'effect', but occur *simultaneously* or produce one another *mutually*, and thus behave *correlatively* towards each other (Simmel, 1905: 20f., 1922: 534ff., 1968: 567f.; cf. Lichtblau, 1986: 64f.). This *mode of the simultaneous* characterizes in his view not only *current* actions and events, but also the *historical interpretation* of past events. The two types of understanding thus differ only *in degree* (cf. Simmel, 1957: 44, 64). Interpretation as such always contains a process of psychological *reforming, concentration and reshaping* of the 'acts of consciousness in others', yet it should not be understood as a pure 'projection'. Rather, it designates a 'completely idiosyncratic synthesis of the category of the general with the simply individual', which now takes the place of the *causality* of 'psycho-mechanical events' in describing those *reasons* which are based on the 'logical relationships of their contents' (Simmel, 1905: 30ff.). Of course this form of interpreting meaning also connects with the *motives* of the persons who are acting, but it subjects their analysis to the *a priori demands of thought*, through which the transmitted events are first formed into a *historical context*. The work of a historian, which Simmel did not compare to that of an artist by mere coincidence, concentrates the *singular* – hence also the 'subjective motives' insisted upon by Weber – into a *structure of meaning*, which:

often was not present at all in the consciousness of its 'heroes', by unearthing meanings and values in its material that shape this past into an image worthy of presenting to us. (Simmel, 1905: 41, 45ff.)

With respect to what was *really experienced*, the categories of history thus represent *a priori categories of the second order*, as it were, the analysis of which constitutes the actual object of an epistemology of 'scholarly history' (Simmel, 1905: 50f.). In this

sense, the difference between 'subjective' and 'objective meaning' asserted by Weber against Simmel is consciously 'sublated' in Simmel's theoretical analysis of the constitution of historical thinking within the framework of a *synthesis of the fantasy*. For, according to him, a reconstruction of the possibility of historical interpreting moves on a logical level situated *beyond* this dualism.

Nevertheless, Simmel does take up the problem of *historical individuality* and the fundamental issue of the *possibility of understanding other minds* as part of his a priori grounding of historical studies. The latter in particular were extensively discussed in his later works *The Problem of Historical Time* (Vom Problem der historischen Zeit) and *On the Nature of Historical Understanding* (Vom Wesen des historischen Verstehens) (for translations see Simmel, 1980). There, Simmel repeats his view that the *process of understanding* as such constitutes *something completely timeless*, and cannot therefore be described in the form of a causal relationship. For him, 'historical' is the epitome of an event that is unambiguously determined in its *date*, and thus is accorded the 'character of individualization', which results solely from its position within the context of meaning reconstructed by the historian. Simmel, however, denies the character of the temporal to that context, because any time-span conceived in that way is subject to the law of causality. The historical concept of *duration*, on the other hand, expresses a *unity of understanding* whose individual elements determine each other *correlatively*, i.e. in a hermeneutically conceived mode of *mutual* 'interaction' (cf. Simmel, 1957: 44ff., 71ff.).

What is fundamental for Simmel's theory of historical understanding, then, is not the difference between *cause* and *effect*, or between *subjective* and *objective* meaning, but that between 'I' and 'You' in the sense of the constitutive 'relationship of one spirit to another'. This relationship already *finds* a 'fragmentary outline' of itself in the practice of the lifeworld, and is to be analysed by epistemology solely with respect to its a priori premises. The categories of *You* and *understanding* prove identical in this process; in them, the *condition humaine* is 'expressed once as a substance, as it were and once as a function — an elemental phenomenon of the human mind . . . it is the transcendental foundation for the fact that the human being is a *zoon politikon*'. Those categories are therefore 'about as decisive for the construction of the practical and historical world as are the categories of *substance* and *causality* for the physical world' (Simmel, 1957: 67f.).

In the introductory chapter of his large *Soziologie* (1968) from 1908, Simmel attempted to make this *transcendental* nature of understanding and the implicit fundamental conceptual difference between 'I' and 'You' fruitful for an a priori foundation of the social sciences. In this way he hoped to be able to provide a definitive answer to the question Othmar Spann had still raised against his 'formal method', of how *society* can be possible at all as an *objective form of subjective souls* (cf. Simmel, 1968: 21ff.). Animated by a corresponding attempt by Max Adler (1904), Simmel now made an effort to show that an a priori design occurs in the most varied forms of social interaction which always places the contents of these interactions, that is, 'drives', 'motives', subjective 'experiences', and 'purposes', into a context of sociation. These concrete 'contents' come under consideration in Simmel's sociological approach only in the sense that they have already entered into this quasi-transcendental *shaping*; that is to say, they have been *synthesized* or *sociated* to an extent by a corresponding *social* a priori. A fundamental conceptual difference between the 'subjectively intended' and the 'objectively valid meaning' has thus in fact become *irrelevant* not only for Simmel's metatheory of history, but also for his sociological analyses of the various forms of social 'interaction' — and Max Weber rightly emphasized this. The only *difference*, or better, the 'original difference' that therefore still plays a part in Simmel's a priori formal foundation of sociology, is the difference between 'I' and 'You' built into the act of interpretation itself, which as a *primeval phenomenon* lies *beyond* the conflict between 'subjective' and 'objective'.⁴

As compared to Weber's approach in this respect, Simmel's analysis of the *sociological* a prioris contains a completely *autonomous* theory of interpretation which was taken up quite productively not only by his student Martin Buber, but also by the 'Chicago School of sociology', and became fruitful for a *dialogic social philosophy* or an *interpretive sociology*. In the variant of an interpretive sociology that Max Weber represents, by contrast, he no longer discusses the act of 'interpreting' as reconstructed by Simmel and his successors. Instead, he presumes the possibility of interpretation as if 'selfevident', in order to functionalize it for his real cognitive interest — that of 'causal explanation'.⁵

Simmel, by contrast, would like to show two things with his analysis of the a priori preconditions of interpretation and the original difference implied in it. First, according to him, all the

possible reference points of a sociological causal analysis, that is, both the 'social actors' and the 'social constructs', are to be conceived of as the results of *simultaneously* occurring interactions, which alone constitute them as *relative* interaction units at all. Simmel had developed and presented this train of thought already back in 1890 as part of his attempt to overcome 'speculative atomism' with the epistemological means of that very same 'atomism'. On the other hand, the 'original phenomenon' of *interpretation* itself is explicated as the *specific form of an interaction*, by means of which the 'subjects' of interpretation and the possible 'points of attribution' of a causal analysis are first hermeneutically constituted, as it were.

Simmel expresses this line of thought most succinctly in his discussion of the 'first sociological a priori'. There he alludes to the thought he had already asserted in his epistemology of history, that we can always interpret 'external' events *symbolically* only according to 'inner' analogies and vice versa, and that both of these analogy formations are performed in the *mode of the simultaneous*, that is to say, in the form of a *hermeneutic circle* or of an *interaction*. In this connection, Simmel says that we can never grasp another person in his full *individuality* or *uniqueness*, but instead always create a more or less *general image* of him, or *typify* him, since a *real knowledge* of him would presume an equality of subject and object, or of ego and non-ego that never exists in reality. Conversely — and in this view Simmel follows not only the poet but also the neurologist — we ourselves are only:

fragments not just of the general human being, but also of ourselves. . . . This fragmentary quality, however, completes the view of the other into something that we ourselves never are purely and completely. He cannot see only the fragments lying next to one another that really exist, but just as we supplement the blind spot in our field of vision, so that one is not even aware of it, similarly we make of this fragmentary data the completeness of his individuality. . . . This fundamental procedure, although it is seldom carried out to perfection in reality now takes effect within the already existing society as the a priori of the further interactions that unfold between individuals. . . . Certain suppositions emerge from the common basis of life, through which people catch sight of each other, as if through a veil. (Simmel, 1968: 281f.)

But it is precisely this veil, however, which Simmel invokes with its indirect allusion to Plato's famous metaphor for the eyes, which is at the same time what makes 'society' in the sense described by

Simmel possible at all. For the pure immediacy and simultaneity of understanding oneself and others represents a logical limiting case, which may of course be possible as a mystical 'experience' or in the gazes of lovers as a language of the eyes, but which is completely irrelevant to those everyday interactions that constitute the central forms of sociation.⁶ In this connection, Simmel also frequently uses the metaphor of *detours* in order to indicate that we can neither conceive and know ourselves nor understand the other in his immediacy through pure self-referentiality, because that is *both near to and far from us*. These detours and 'deviations' from the immediacy of self-relationship and of an understanding of others are also what constitute the actual object of Simmel's formal sociology as well as of his cultural theory as sketched out in *The Philosophy of Money*. In this context, he occupied himself particularly with those 'detours' which the individual must put up with in pursuing his subjective purposes and valuations, in order to attain his actual 'final goals'. The extent of such detours indicates the degree of *social differentiation* in each case, the increase of which Simmel generally evaluated as *cultural progress*. He compared these increasing 'distances' to taxes which the individual had to pay to 'society' in order to pursue his own motives and purposes (cf. Simmel, 1890: 42ff, 1922: 480ff.).⁷ Precisely these 'detours', 'distances' and *forms* which shape individual action acquire a specific *socializing or sociating function* that can be described according to Simmel as a completely new and *genuinely autonomous nexus of meaning*, without any 'causal attribution' to subjective 'motives' being required for the *understanding* of these 'immeasurable contexts'. The real place where, according to Simmel, individuality in a qualitative sense can still unfold in the culture of modernity is less the sphere of the 'social' than that of artistic, erotic and religious 'experience', in which the 'modern soul' is able to preserve and build up its particularity (cf. Simmel, 1922: 529ff.; Lichtblau, 1988: 54ff., 89ff.).

V

In concluding, we still must discuss Weber's charge that in Simmel's works 'problems of being' are often treated as 'problems of meaning', and that the latter thereby give expression not only to a *metaphysical* but also to an *aesthetic need*. Now Simmel himself repeatedly pointed out that every 'exact' specialized science possesses both an *upper* and a *lower limit*. Beyond these there lies, on

the one hand, the *epistemology* of a specialized science based on a priori assumptions and, on the other, a corresponding *metaphysics*. In the case of history an attempt is made to satisfy this 'metaphysical need' with the *philosophy of history*, while the same is done in the case of 'pure' or 'formal' sociology with 'philosophical sociology' or *social philosophy* (cf. Simmel, 1892: 71ff., 1905: 112ff., 1922: v-ix, 1968: 20f., 1970: 29ff.).

Within such a metaphysics *beyond* exact science, Simmel actually does attempt to provide an answer to the question of the meaning of life and the inner contents of the underlying 'ultimate' values. According to Simmel, the basis for the legitimacy of such an enquiry is that the 'empirical' (*wirklichkeitswissenschaftlich*) approach necessarily loses sight of the *totality of life*, because it breaks concrete events and the sum of their interactions down into a number of *fragments*. Unlike Marx and the 'universalist' stance of Othmar Spann, Simmel has long since abandoned the hope that this lost totality of life could be reconstructed by means of a specialized science. His own sociological analyses are thus consciously 'conceived as examples in their methods and, in their content, only as fragments of what I must consider the science of society' (Simmel, 1968: 14).

He attempts a philosophical clarification of the *value* of sociation for the *further development of individuals*, and he has a metaphysical need for the *unity of an overall view*, which would condense the abbreviation of phenomena in a purely *symbolic* manner. The attempt is owed to that deep 'dissatisfaction with the fragmentary character of detailed knowledge' which later logically *led him away from* sociology in favour of a more intensive concern with the fundamental problems of metaphysics, aesthetics and the philosophy of religion and life. To reproach him for this is not only improper but also inadequate, because Simmel always indicated precisely where his respective works are logically situated *within* and *beyond* the mode of knowing characteristic of a specialized discipline.

Here Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* assumes an outstanding importance for his cultural-philosophical and metaphysical interpretation of the *fragments of modernity*. He had characterized that work's logical position clearly enough *within* and *beyond* the range of validity of a *scientifically* organized economics. Reproaching him in this context for not differentiating clearly enough between 'determinations of fact' and 'valuations' is like carrying coals to

Newcastle. For Simmel had always said unambiguously that he was concerned in his *Philosophy of Money* with tracing the *primeval phenomena of value* as such. Therefore he was also engaged in a clarification of the premises which determine the *nature of money* and *meaning of its existence* on the one hand, and at the same time with a presentation of its effects on the 'inner world', i.e. on the *vital consciousness* (*Lebensgefühl*) of individuals, on the *concatenation of their fates* and on the *development of general culture* (cf. Simmel, 1922: viff., Frisby, 1978; Lichtblau, 1986, 1988: 37ff.). Thus, Simmel consciously conceived of his 'philosophy of money' simultaneously as an *aesthetic theory*, and incidentally also determined his concept of *social formation* by analogy to the aesthetic concept of form (cf. Davis, 1973; Hübner-Funk, 1976, 1984; Ritter, 1976; Böhringer, 1984; Boella, 1986; Frisby, 1989).

Similarly to a 'self-contained' *work of art*, the *objectivity of values* crystallized and symbolized in money appeared to him as a social construct which has *consumed the motions of its becoming within itself* and has become 'indifferent' to them when understood according to those *purely immanent determinations* (cf. Simmel, 1957: 73). And like the consideration of art, the 'philosophy of money' also proceeds from an apparently purely peripheral individual example, in order to 'do justice to it through its expansion and extension to the totality and the most general case'. In the sense that 'its entire practical meaning lies not in itself but only in its conversion into other values', money thus becomes pure *indifference*, the most general expression and the *symbol* of a culture in which things and people have lost their autonomy and now determine their relative value *mutually* (Simmel, 1922: viii, 98ff., 584f.).

Max Weber attempted to judge Simmel's work according to a standard which is simply inappropriate to the uniqueness of this oeuvre. It is a different question, however, whether Weber himself stringently adhered in his *own* research work to the methodological postulates summarized in his 'theory of science'. Doubts as to the 'freedom from value judgments' of his historical analyses arise, for instance, when Weber constructs a *heroic age* of modern capitalism in order to emphasize the *decadent* and *derivative* character of the contemporary culture surrounding him (cf. Weber, 1920: 20f., 55f., 203f., 1985: 139). Doubts also come up when he describes the overall course of the occidental rationalization process over against the 'organically prescribed circulation of life' as an *ever more devastating senselessness* (Weber, 1920: 570f.). Justified doubts are

likewise in order as to whether Weber actually maintained the difference he postulated between *ideal* and *real types* strictly in his material sociology, or whether he is not describing something like a *realization of values* here, that is, a crystallization of the *subjective* 'value relationships' into *objective* 'contexts of meaning' or *objective constructs* (cf. Mannheim, 1929: 239ff.; Habermas, 1981: I, 263; Levine, 1984: 333ff.; Bevers, 1985: 132ff.).

Finally, one must also be dubious with respect to his postulate that neither symbol-rich *illustrations* nor *analogy formations* nor *quasi-aesthetic categories* may be employed in 'historical cultural sciences'. For Weber repeatedly employed a meaning-laden literary topos in order, for instance to characterize a central methodological problem of his study of Protestantism: the metaphor of *elective affinities*. With his novel of the same title Goethe intended to create a *chemical allegory* which he based on the constellation of Otilie, Eduard, Charlotte and the Captain. The neologism 'elective affinities' therefore denotes in this context a *constraint of natural law*, so to speak, or a *magical attractive power of love* which threatens to destroy the moral and legal foundations of the bourgeois institution of marriage.

Weber criticized Simmel not only for basing his works on a 'sociologically amorphous' concept of *interaction*, but also for making use of the 'problematic', 'aesthetically charged' methods of *analogy formation* and *symbolic interpretation* of the 'correlations' between 'inner' and 'outer', or 'psychic' and 'social' facts in the *Philosophy of Money* and his sociological writings. Now, in order to characterize an *aporia not soluble causally* ('magnificent simultaneity'), Weber himself repeatedly makes use of a literary topos that has been decoded in Germanist studies as a *mythical mode of thought* ever since Walter Benjamin's ground-breaking study of Goethe's *Elective Affinities* (cf. Benjamin, 1980: 123ff.; Buschendorf, 1986). Is it perhaps a coincidence that this 'mythical shadow play', which Weber was able to make metaphorically fruitful for research into the cultural history of ascetic capitalism and the genesis of the modern professional ethos, is additionally oriented toward the *model case of a collapsing marriage*? By the way, Talcott Parsons elegantly 'solved' or better, evaded this symptomatically overdetermined problem by translating *Wahlverwandtschaften* as 'correlations' rather than the more accurate 'elective affinities', thus favouring an expression more closely connected to Simmel's than Weber's terminology (cf. Weber, 1976: 90). Is this not

perhaps *also* a symptomatic shift within his own 'discourse of the other'?

Translated by Mark Ritter.

Notes

1. Simmel first systematically developed his theory of social differentiation in the work of the same name from 1890, and later based both his *Philosophy of Money* as well as the 'large' *Soziologie* (1968) of 1908 on it (see Lichtblau, 1984).

2. For the sake of clarity, I have taken the liberty of quoting from a scarcely legible reproduction (due to multiple copying) of the German-language original manuscript. This has been circulating 'unofficially' in the scholarly world for years, and was kindly provided to me by a colleague. The original, currently held in the Max Weber Depository at the Bavarian State Library in Munich under the call number 'Ana 446', will soon be published in the *Max-Weber-Gesamtausgabe*.

3. The problematic nature of this positive reference to Spann's critique of Simmel lies of course, in the fact that Weber's own 'methodological individualism' was later likewise harshly criticized by Spann's 'universalism' (cf. Spann, 1923a, 1925: 149-67; on Weber's later dissociation from Spann's 'universalistic method' cf. Weber, 1985: 557f.).

4. Here I consciously emphasize the fundamental conceptual 'elective affinity' between Simmel's approach and the difference-theoretical deconstruction of classical metaphysics by Gilles Deleuze (1968) and with Jacques Derrida's meditations on 'différance' (1968, 1974: 44ff.). Here one is concerned with the same model based on a constitutional logic of an origin of all differences from an *original difference* which as such can no longer be derived from anything else. Such a model also plays an important part in Heidegger's thought and has recently been injected into sociological discussions by Niklas Luhmann. On the corresponding 'elective affinities' between Luhmann's autopoietic systems theory and French structuralism as inspired by Ferdinand de Saussure's foundation of modern linguistics, see Lichtblau, 1980: 249ff.

5. Therefore, the idea that Simmel's 'sociological method' in the sense described above, and not Weber's 'methodological individualism' was the most suitable starting-point for the development of a genuinely 'interpretive sociology' was the unanimous opinion that connected the participants in a discussion of Werner Sombart's paper on 'Interpretation' (Das Verstehen) at the Sixth Congress of German Sociologists in Zürich, bearing in mind the other differences expressed there (cf. Sombart, 1929). Considering this, one of the most interesting questions in the framework of a sociological analysis of the recent history of sociology is the problem of why after 1945 it was Weber's work and not that of Simmel which was hypostatized as the real origin of the tradition of an interpretive sociology.

6. On the significance of a specific language of the eyes in this sense, cf. the lucid analysis in Simmel's 'Sociology of the Senses' [*Soziologie der Sinne*] (1968: 484ff.).

7. On the significance of the expression 'pathos of distance' which occurs in Simmel's works and its 'elective affinity' to Nietzsche's critique of culture, cf. Lichtblau, 1984.

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