



Dissonância

revista de teoria crítica

ISSN: 2594-5025

Instituto de Filosofia e Ciências Humanas

Universidade Estadual de Campinas

www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica

Título	Simmel, Marx and the Radical Concept of Life: A Hegelian Approach
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Fonte	<i>Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica</i> , v. 2 n. 2, Dossiê Marx & Simmel, 2º semestre de 2018
Link	https://www.ifch.unicamp.br/ojs/index.php/teoriacritica/article/view/4317

Formato de citação sugerido:

GANGAS, Spiros. “Simmel, Marx and the Radical Concept of Life: A Hegelian Approach”. *Dissonância: Revista de Teoria Crítica*, v. 2 n. 2, Dossiê Marx & Simmel, 2º semestre de 2018, p. 167-197.

SIMMEL, MARX AND THE RADICAL CONCEPT OF LIFE

A Hegelian Approach

Spiros Gangas¹

ABSTRACT

Canonical interpretations of Simmel's work correctly place his sociology and philosophy under the neo-Kantian epistemological paradigm. Yet, it is often assumed that Simmel's work operates solely at some unbridgeable distance from Marx and the latter's Hegelian heritage. Simmel's 'Hegelianism' is all too often held to repel synthesis in favor of 'tragedy'. At best, Simmel's metaphysics is seen as a skeptical opening of the Spirit to individuated forms of authentic ethical valuations. In this essay I shall argue instead that Simmel's prolific, and often contradictory, writings invite affinities to the "Hegel-Marx" constellation of normativity. I will thus: a) briefly discuss Simmel's relationism through a normative lens, with emphasis on the notion of 'reciprocity' (e.g. Papilloud) in modernity; b) consider Simmel's category of Life from a Hegelian lens. Aided by Marcuse's reading of Hegel I shall argue that Simmel's critique of normativity need not be seen as an outright rejection of 'universality' but, rather, as a claim to differentiate 'universality', mediating it with 'individuality', a project tied to modern life's disjunctive logic; c) argue that

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reclaiming the Marxian project of an emancipated 'life' as an anthropological and normative nexus, requires a reconsideration of a relational process of life, which, at the same time, recovers the 'undifferentiated' *a priori* of a life free of (surplus) alienation, a concept that sustains the normative force of Marx's 'universality'. Thus, Simmel's 'practical idealism' (Leck) can potentially inform Marx's emancipatory vision. So whilst it may still be premature to identify a systematic "Simmelian Marxism", the roots of such a program lie not in debunking Simmel's metaphysics of life but in critically recuperating the 'regulative ideal' of life's movement, 'free' of coercion, alienation and moral fundamentalists of sorts.

KEYWORDS

LIFE, INFINITY, MARCUSE, MARX, SIMMEL, VALUE

SIMMEL, MARX E O CONCEITO RADICAL DE VIDA

Uma abordagem hegeliana

RESUMO

As interpretações canônicas da obra de Simmel colocam corretamente sua sociologia e filosofia sob o paradigma epistemológico neokantiano. No entanto, frequentemente presume-se que a obra de Simmel apenas opera a uma distância intransponível de Marx e da herança hegeliana deste último. Considera-se muito frequentemente que o "hegelianismo" de Simmel repele a síntese em favor da "tragédia". A metafísica de Simmel é vista, na melhor das hipóteses, como uma abertura cética do Espírito a formas individuadas de julgamentos éticos autênticos. Neste texto, argumentarei, ao contrário, que os prolíficos, e muitas vezes contraditórios, escritos de Simmel sugerem

afinidades à constelação de normatividade “Hegel-Marx”. Assim, irei: a) discutir brevemente o relacionismo de Simmel através de uma lente normativa, com ênfase na noção de “reciprocidade” (por exemplo, Papilloud) na modernidade; b) considerar a categoria de vida de Simmel a partir de uma lente hegeliana. Com a ajuda da leitura de Hegel feita por Marcuse, argumentarei que a crítica de Simmel à normatividade não precisa ser vista como uma rejeição completa da “universalidade”, mas sim uma pretensão de diferenciar a “universalidade”, mediando-a com a “individualidade”, um projeto ligado à lógica disjuntiva da vida moderna; c) argumentar que recuperar o projeto marxista de uma “vida” emancipada como um nexos antropológico e normativo requer uma reconsideração de um processo relacional de vida que, ao mesmo tempo, recupera o a priori “indiferenciado” de uma vida livre (do excedente) de alienação, um conceito que sustenta a força normativa da “universalidade” de Marx. Portanto, o “idealismo prático” de Simmel (Leck) potencialmente pode informar a visão emancipatória de Marx. Assim, embora ainda seja prematuro identificar um “marxismo simmeliano” sistemático, as raízes de tal programa não estão no desmascaramento da metafísica da vida de Simmel, mas sim na recuperação crítica do “ideal regulativo” do movimento da vida, “livre” de coerção, alienação e fundamentalistas morais.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE

Vida, Infinitude, Marcuse, Marx, Simmel, Valor

Introduction²

The Marx-Simmel rapprochement has justly focused on Simmel's *The Philosophy of Money*. Simmel claims to supplant Marx's materialist epistemology with an idealist substratum that draws mostly on neo-Kantian axiology. Thus, the first and difficult chapter of Value of this important work is held often to contain important cues about the concept of capital and the abstract justification of Value, typical of social relations under commodity fetishism. Under this confounding of economic and axiological value, numerous dimensions in Simmel's exposition of Value invite a fruitful dialogue with Marx (see, indicatively, Cantó Milà 2005).

My purpose in this article is to highlight a new channel of the 'Marx-Simmel' dialogue. I shall thus take some distance from the economic aspects that could potentially bind Marx and Simmel into an overlapping political program and focus instead on Simmel's metaphysical and sociological ideas, most importantly his late *Lebensphilosophie*. This intellectual tradition, which Lukács' erudite, yet doctrinaire, *The Destruction of Reason* (1980) relegated pejoratively to 'bourgeois' philosophy, makes a modest

² I would like to express my thanks to Mariana Teixeira and Arthur Bueno for accepting for presentation in the ISA World Congress (held in Toronto in late July 2018) a shorter version of this paper. My fellow colleagues at the ISA panel on 'Simmel and Marx' and members of the audience provided me with valuable comments and challenges that I tried to consider in this updated version. I am thus grateful for their input. I also thank Thomas Kemple for drawing my attention to the 1911 Simmel manuscript on Hegel's notion of becoming. The comments of one anonymous referee have helped me to improve and clarify the argument. Last but not least, I also benefited greatly from Kostas Th. Kalfopoulos who provided me with valuable assistance on the German texts. The usual disclaimer applies here as well: I am solely responsible for the limitations and shortcomings of this essay.

reappearance in contemporary sociology. Purged from its reactionary and conservative roots and thus de-politicized and free from metaphysics, thus de-ontologized, the category of Life is rehabilitated in the problematic of “the creativity of action” (Joas 2000 [1997]).

The normative appreciation of Simmel has been hinted briefly but sharply by Steven Lukes in his book *Marxism and Morality*. In a dense passage, Lukes (1985: 96-7) brings together Marx’s well known ethical claim about the fulfillment of human potential so that a person’s individuality is actualized under socially available material conditions and expressed in freely chosen multidimensional directions. In this context, Lukes draws our attention to Simmel’s ‘individualism of uniqueness’ (*Einzigkeit*) (as opposed to that of ‘singleness’ [*Einzelheit*]), setting modernity as the framework that coordinates individual self-fulfillment with the community’s goals. Indeed, as Marx repeatedly notes, this fulfillment and enjoyment of needs is social to the extent that my projects, ambitions and capabilities bear on relations I hold with other agents. Apart from the foundational level of intersubjective coordination of individual goals, it is sociality and social relations that are invoked, certainly for Marx, at a higher level of normative concreteness, yet appearing in Simmel with hazy contours. This level coincides with capitalist modernity’s preconditions for the realization of the ‘social human being’ or the ‘universally developed individual’ (Marx 1993; Gould 1978). The sublation of the abstract disclosure, within capitalist modernity, of the ‘universally developed individual’ constitutes, for Marx, the communist desideratum.

In the following sections I shall proceed in a sort of round-about way. This means that I shall skip a direct confrontation with Marx's texts. Not only because of lack of space but, methodologically too, it may be wise to keep only in mind that Marx's texts are replete with references to life and to living labor, particularly at those points where he seeks to justify the materialist epistemology by recourse to life's confrontation with negativity (e.g. Marx and Engels 1956). Important, to be sure, are also those rhetorically highly charged evocations of unalienated life (see, for example, Marx, 1992 and Marx and Engels 1976), as well as the descriptions of the crippling of mind and body that Marx gleans from the official reports of his times, when he discusses the working-day (Marx 1990). Because this dimension of 'life' was occluded by orthodox Marxism in its entirety, it was only partially rescued by Critical Theory (Marcuse 1968; 1987) and, more obliquely, by other strands of Marxism, like the 'Praxis' group (i.e. Marković 1974). It was briefly resuscitated but with ample doses of Heideggerian irrationalism in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis (1987), refashioned as society's magmatic effervescence of the imaginary.

To argue in favor of this different avenue from Marx to Simmel and back, I focus on the most systematic Marxist reconstruction of the category of 'Life' in the early writings of Herbert Marcuse (1968, 1987, 2005a, 2005b, 2005c). Marcuse, under the influence of his apprenticeship with Heidegger and through the lens of Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie*, provided a highly original reading of Hegel's concept of Life (Hegel 1999) and opened up a space for rescuing the critical potential of this so-called reac-

tionary motif. But if Marcuse does not refer to Simmel, which is what happens in his texts, and only to Dilthey, then why all the fuss about a Simmel-Marx osmosis through the concept of Life? This is indeed a challenging question. I shall respond to it though, hoping to show that Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie* contains critical components that eschew the then reactionary *Kulturkritik*, the latter being spearheaded by Life's revolt against instrumentally congealed forms. Such motifs are indeed present in Simmel. It is, however, Simmel's impressionist method (Frisby 1992) that tends to hide these motifs. These are mingled in the kaleidoscopic constellations of 'thought-fragments' from the history of philosophy that Simmel's peculiar version of systematic, yet playful exposition, unifies and carves as an a-typical case in the intellectual niche of *Lebensphilosophie*. Additionally, it is Simmel who has engaged with the Marxist conception, at other phases embracing it (e.g. Simmel 1997, 1999c), skeptically engaging with it (Simmel 1999a, 1999b) whilst on other occasions he disparages it (e.g. Simmel 2005).

Of course, Simmel's impressionist method and philosophical eclecticism should ward off any interpretive subsumption of his thought under a single intellectual rubric. What applies for his recourse on Kant, Nietzsche, Schopenhauer and Spinoza applies too for his thoughts on Hegel. The many constellations of Hegelianism do not immediately render Simmel a Hegelian. At points, Simmel seems to distance himself from a theory of 'mediations' (Simmel 2010: 149) and progressive resolution of contradictions (2010: 151) Yet, the fact remains that Hegel constitutes an influence on Simmel that deserves reexamination.

Even during Simmel's era the Hegelian motifs in his thought were discerned (Frischeisen-Köhler 1920: 52-3) but with the caution we also advise here. Later, the neglected monograph by Petra Christian (1978) offered the first and, to my knowledge, until now the only systematic exposition of Simmel's Hegelian moments. Focusing on Simmel's relationism, Christian traverses the evolution of Simmel's thought through Kantian dualisms, culminating in the form of reciprocity, which represents Simmel's surrogate for the Hegelian emphasis on 'unity-in-difference'. Unlike subsequent scholars who excavated the all-pervasive presence of reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*) in Simmel's writings, Christian (1978: 143-6) undergirds this motif with 'free reciprocity'. This, as I shall argue in this short essay, can be gleaned from the central motif of Life that preserves itself in otherness, i.e. in form. For all his subsequent limitations, it was young Lukács (1974) who had perspicuously discerned its normative and political significance before abandoning the rich heritage of *Lebensphilosophie*. Recovering the latter's radical axiological core was the task of Herbert Marcuse, whose ideas I shall shortly discuss.

Relationism, Life, and Form

As already mentioned, Simmel's crystallized epistemology (2004) is held to be relationism. Many interpretations (Papilloud 2002, 2003; Papilloud and Rol 2004) of his thought stress the non-normative function of relationism. I shall not take up here aspects of those rich reconstructions of relationism that, unwitting-

tingly maybe, contain pointers to normative readings of Simmel. As I have argued on other occasions (Gangas 2004; Gangas 2010), such non-normative readings need to be balanced by other dimensions of Simmel's often contradictory mode of expression that point to radical layers of his normativity. Lukes, as I already suggested, did not miss these, nor did Honneth (2014: 154-8) or Chernilo (2013: 182-91). Yet, Simmel's relationism, powerfully articulated in *The Philosophy of Money*, is not incompatible with Hegel. Relationism's totality means in Hegel's system that "not a single individual among existing things has its ground only in and of itself; rather, it stands in universal "mediation" with other existing things through which it is grounded and sustained, and each of which, moreover, points in turn to another" (Marcuse 1987: 84). This restive demand for 'relatedness' that stems from the special (historically contingent) relationship of a being to 'humanity (the species)' presents itself an "ought", as a "determination" and "purpose" in need of "concrete fulfillment" (Marcuse, 1987: 132). Thus, the "species as the 'ought', is the element within which individuals move themselves and through which they relate to one another" (Marcuse 1987: 132). Relatedness is marked by an 'inner' and an 'outer' which for Hegel – like Simmel – are identical. (Unity of essence and existence as actuality). For Simmel this is the moment where we are boundary and boundary-transcending ego (the phenomenon *and* the 'thing-in-itself').

With these snippets from Marcuse in mind, the first and crucial thing to notice about Simmel's *Lebensphilosophie* is that it presents itself as a metaphysical view of unity rather than dual-

ism. Simmel, as evident from his other major works, is a critic of dualism although he, like Hegel, admits its function in the formation of consciousness and Spirit. Elsewhere (i.e. *The Philosophy of Money*) he accepts dualism strictly as a heuristic device.

This is a good point to explore the tensions Simmel's concept of Life as if seen solely under the prism of *Lebensphilosophie*. This happens, I think, for two reasons: first, if we focus on Simmel's pathos for non-dualism, the exposition of his metaphysical grounding of Being in Life contains elements that are unmistakably Hegelian or neo-Hegelian. We read, for example, in an explicit reference to Hegel that the idea of sublation as a "higher synthesis" finds its deepest fulfillment in the "relationship between life and death" (Simmel 2010: 70). This reference to death brings us to the second reason, which has to do with Heidegger's acknowledgment on the influence late Simmel (i.e. the Simmel of *Lebensphilosophie*) exerted on his thought. This Heideggerian load does not, paradoxically, preclude a synthesis with Marx. This, I argue, is rendered possible (and plausible) if we follow young Marcuse's Heideggerian interpretation of Hegel's concept of Life. Marcuse's *Hegel's Ontology and the Theory of Historicity* as well as his essays on labor and phenomenology provide the opportunity of interpreting Simmel's category of Life within the rationalist framework wrought by Hegel and Marx.

Before we proceed with the details of this detour from Simmel to Marx via Marcuse, a few clarifications on the concept of Life may prove useful. Schematically recapitulated, we can suggest that major 'types' of configurations of Life, are roughly

– and for the purposes of this short essay – distinguished as follows:

- a) In Max Weber's writings life tends to be conceived as an irrational force marked by contingency. Precisely because of the latter aspect, Weberian methodology discards the Hegelian concept and opts instead for value-relevant distinctions on reality's complexity from which ideal types can be abstracted and thus enable the researcher to approximate reality. However, this reality remains, ultimately, inaccessible. In this fashion Weber severs the heuristic normativity of the Kantian 'thing-in-itself', pushing it into historicism.
- b) To counter the relativist and decisionist implications of Weberian methodology, Max Scheler conceived life phenomenologically. In the antipodes of Weberian relativism, Scheler sought to deduce life's *a priori* hierarchy of value-modalities, a project transformed in his late thought from a phenomenology of emotions to a crypto-Hegelian philosophical anthropology. This is an important strand that deserves reexamination, but it shall not concern us here.
- c) A third cluster that I shall follow is the one that stems from Hegel and Marx. For the former I shall not say much in terms of textual support, since the rest of my essay deals predominantly with Marcuse's interpretation of Hegel. The problem of life bears on an Aristotelian legacy in Hegel and can be condensed in an ontology of Life as motility and dialectical realization of freedom in

history. With Marx elements of this approach survive throughout his work. Evidently, this is why Marcuse was attracted to the concept of Life, hoping to sublimate it in a materialist philosophy of history, upgraded with idealism's discussion about values. This sublation is particularly felt in young Marx's recourse to species-life and species-being. In fact, the very axiological surplus against alienation in capitalism is a conception of labor as life-activity. Marcuse explores these vitalist, so to speak, threads in Marx and likens the dynamic of life to the problem of labor.

- d) And Simmel? Where would he stand in this classification? On the one hand, if seen solely through Henri Bergson's vitalism then surely Simmel's life-philosophy becomes no more than a *Kulturkritik* version of Bergsonian 'élan vital'. It is thus tethered to the irrationalism that irritated late Lukács. On the other hand, if compressed in the bourgeois *fin de siècle* reactionary attacks on rationalism as late Lukács deemed, from Schelling to Hitler, then there is little point in pursuing this discussion any further. Probing deeper though into Simmel's sociology and philosophy enables us to unearth Hegelian motifs in his late life-philosophy that prove recalcitrant to the 'irrational' interpretation of *Lebensphilosophie*. Drawing on contingency, in concert with the intellectual trends of the times, Simmel offers, I shall argue, a neo-Hegelian conception of Life as motility and becoming through 'form', this time encompassing normative

dimensions into an individuated enrichment of life's-content under the shape of a 'free' social form.

It is worth revisiting it therefore because Simmel's concept of Life eschews the Weberian position which sees life as irrational (Oakes 1985) and is lacking Scheler's rigid foundation of life on an *a priori* hierarchy of value-modalities. Rather, as I shall suggest, although voiced in this tradition which includes also Bergson and later Heidegger, Simmel's metaphysics of life retains Hegelian elements that bring him, inadvertently, close to Marx too.

'Simmel – Hegel – Marx' *sub specie vitalis*

A critical juncture in Simmel's Hegelian strategy is Chapter 1 of his *The View of Life*. In defending a non-dualistic metaphysics, Simmel provides us with a remarkable and Hegelian, I think, reformulation of 'true infinity' as opposed to 'bad infinity'. He writes that:

A purely continuous Heraclitic flux which lacks a definite and persisting 'something' would not contain the boundary over which a reaching out is to occur, nor the subject which reaches out. But as soon as 'something' exists as a unity unto itself, gravitating towards its own center, then all the flow from within its bounds is no longer agitation without a subject; rather it somehow remains bound up with the centre; it represents a reaching out in which this form always remains the subject, and yet which proceeds nonetheless beyond this subject (Simmel 2010: 9).

Simmel associates this dialectical movement with the strategy of eliminating an external teleology from philosophy and from life itself. In *The Philosophy of Money*, he argues in favor of thought's movement, which resembles the circle where "every point is a beginning and an end, and all parts condition each other mutually" (2004: 115). This mutual conditioning should not, I think, be seen as a capitulation to an indeterminate openness; rather, it refers to a relation of 'complete mutuality' which Simmel calls 'genuine' or 'immanent infinity' (2004: 119). Hegel, too, conceives the 'spurious infinite' as a 'straight line' which transcends 'its determinate being' going to the 'indeterminate' (Hegel 1999: 149). Opposed to this, 'the image of true infinity, bent back into itself, becomes the *circle*, the line which has reached itself, which is closed and wholly present, without beginning and end' (Hegel 1999: 149 [original emphasis]). Moreover, within this context of underscoring life's transcendence as a process that is bound to a center rather than overflowing into an indeterminate goal, Simmel introduces a historical dimension to life's (free) flux. This happens when Simmel refers to 'critical enlightenment' as the intellectual period which has accomplished this historical move (Simmel 2010: 17).

When Simmel advances the motif of transcendence immanent in life, he essentially talks about its 'motility', which is constitutive of its being. 'Motility' is a key category in Marcuse's reading of Hegel's ideas about Life as these are articulated in the 'Greater Logic' and in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*. In Marcuse's reading, 'motility' means the 'development, the unfolding of the in-itself, the outward display of what is implicit in the latter; in

this process being becomes for-itself what it already implicitly is” (1987: 178). As Marcuse’s passage comments on Hegel’s Aristotelian heritage, it implies in effect that human beings *must be capable* of referring to themselves and must contain and sustain their determinations. These determinations though presuppose others for whom I posit my individual being as something that initially cannot be truly self-subsistent. We shall see shortly that this conception of Life’s motility brings to the fore the imperative of intersubjective recognition, a motif that its closest partner in Simmel’s sociology is reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*).

Simmel’s expressions are close to this notion of ‘motility’, although the term ‘Bewegtheit’ does not seem to be utilized. Simmel writes: “the innermost essence of life is its capacity to go out beyond itself, to set its limits by reaching beyond them; that is, beyond itself” (2010: 10). Life’s own bifurcation into ‘form’ and ‘transcendence of form’, therefore, is a systematic Simmelian trope in line with Hegel’s well known formulation about the ‘bifurcation’ of the Spirit in order for it to acquire self-consciousness (Hegel 1977a: 89). In fact, Simmel recognizes this process of Life when he refers to the fact that “self-consciousness – the subject that makes itself its own object – is a symbol or real self-expression of life” (2010: 163, aphorism 19).

In Marcuse’s reading Hegel, Life is the form of Being that sustains itself only by generating difference (motility) and reabsorbing it in its unity. Thus, Life’s ‘Ought’ is the “motility of beings seeking to regain their lost adequacy” (Marcuse 1987: 128). Marcuse goes even further in the normative reading of Life. The axiological moment in the individuality of beings (i.e.

good/bad/true/beautiful/right) is not a whim, as if an “evaluative predicate” (1987: 129), but, rather, constitutes the “ontological determinations of beings themselves” (1987: 129).

We quoted earlier from Simmel a long passage about Life’s flux and the ‘centre’ that binds it. The image of axial rotation figures as the scheme through which Life ‘enables’ each sphere of the Spirit (aesthetic, economic, legal etc) to function in an autonomous mode. This was the pattern of irreconcilable value-conflicts imputed to Simmel. Thus far, therefore, Simmel’s model cannot be seen as too distant from Weber’s value-pluralism or, even, Luhmann’s system’s autopoiesis. Yet, neither Weber nor Luhmann posit some sort of meta-code or meta-value that will coordinate these distinct and autonomous spheres. With Simmel, I argue, the case seems to be different. In Chapter 2 of his “View of Life”, Simmel considers economy as the system *par excellence* that ‘detaches’ itself from the axle and stamps its bearers and contents with its own logic. Simmel considers this logic ‘violent’ (2010: 59), independent of the ‘will of its subjects’. This motif of reification (or even of a *Gestell* in Heidegger’s critique of instrumental reason) is seen as abstracting from “real meaning” and “genuine demands of life with such ruthless objectivity and demonic violence” (Simmel 2010: 59).

Here thus, we detect again the scheme of “axial rotation” as a neo-Hegelian substitute for ‘true infinity’. The idea of axial rotation is already present in Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit*. According to Hegel: “The essence (of Life) is infinity as the sublation of all distinctions, the pure rotation on its axis, peacefulness itself as the absolute restless infinity, independence itself, in

which all distinctions of movement are dissolved” (Hegel 1977b: §169; quoted also in Marcuse 1987: 231). For Hegel, action takes the movement of “a circle which moves freely by-itself in a void [...]” (Marcuse 1987: 279). This non-foundationalism is not at all alien to Simmel’s thought. In fact, Simmel’s relationism adheres to this powerful imagery of a circular movement with no recourse to a stable point. (See Simmel 2004: 115.)

Parenthetically, we can note that, as we know, Simmel ascribes to money the capacity to appear as independent of life’s movement – and having had the knowledge of the systematic exposition of this notion in *The Philosophy of Money* – a next step is to consider if ‘true infinity’ can be decoded in the writings of Marx. In Marxian scholarship the Hegelian distinction between ‘bad infinity’ (straight line) M-C-M’ and ‘true infinity’ (circle) has been applied in Marx’s theory of freedom. For example, David McNally (2003) proposes a systematic crystallization of the contradictions of capital in line with ‘bad (spurious) infinity’ and at odds with ‘true infinity’. This Hegelian imagery is present in Marx but, additionally, raises the thorny issue, for all those who scrutinize Simmel’s obscure thoughts on value in *The Philosophy of Money*, of the level of abstraction at which Simmel is operating in. Is his true infinity of money – as the crystallization of relational *Wechselwirkung* – the epitome of the logical exposition of capital? Or is there an axiological surplus that transcends the value of money by recourse to the mysterious ‘third’ realm which mediates Value with Being? This ‘third something’ cannot be taken up here (see, D’Anna 1996) but it is a problem that Adorno’s disciples in Germany (Backhaus 1992;

Reichelt 2011) have taken up in the context of the dialectical exposition to the problem of the value-form.

I have thus far argued that if we start with “Life” then the shift from an irrational metaphysics to a radical idea that can be rendered compatible with emancipatory social theory via Marcuse’s recourse to the concept of ‘life’ is no longer an implausible undertaking. The brief but crucial reference in *One Dimensional Man* (1964: 10) to ‘life’ as the *a priori* of social theory in its commitment to the idea that life is worth living and possible to be made worth living gives us a hint of a different, non-reactionary, codification of ‘life’. Systematically, this radical semantics of Life is found in Marcuse’s *Hegel’s Ontology and the Theory of Historicity*. Simmel addresses tangentially this problem when he examines the problem of an irreducible contingency of the fact that our being is haphazardly ‘thrown’ in a historical setting although as a possibility it is tied to all possible history. It is important that for Simmel this problem of contingency is particularly felt with respect to the ‘waste’ of talents, of potential, of the fulfillment of human capabilities, as it were, that stem from the fact that human beings have been ‘thrown’ into a specific sociohistorical milieu rather than in some other. The ‘belated and only relative adaptation’ (2010: 77) to the possibility of fulfillment and individual flourishing is what continues to justify the promise of a compensation after death. Simmel’s remarks on “immortality” as a notion that is relevant to human species (2010: 83-4) bear, surprisingly enough given the metaphysical tone of the exposition, on this Marxian claim. Moving even further, Simmel in a covert critique of pessimism and De Sade

argues that “if all its forms of existence should collapse tomorrow,” the actuality of what has happened cannot be made not to happen. He even talks about the realm of the “idea”, enriched in its content by artistic, religious and philosophical ideas (Hegel’s Absolute Spirit) in a “temporal emergence of the timeless, an infinite extension, relieved from all contingency” (2010: 89). For Marcuse, Marx attempts to solve precisely this problem. To render life not entirely free of alienation (this is impossible as it would signal the elimination of necessary labor) but of ‘surplus-alienation’. This is also the stark difference between a death marked by a sense of utter deprivation, subjugation and intense lack of fulfillment and, conversely, a fulfilled life, where the social self’s multifaceted capabilities actualize and come into fruition.

The last chapter of Simmel’s “A View of Life” provides additional insights into the possibility of reconstructing Simmel as a Hegelian philosopher of life. A noteworthy turn in Simmel’s argument in favor of the ‘individual law’ makes clear that individual law is not a subjective, even less an arbitrary, relationship of the individual to the Ought. Rather, the stream of life suffuses the individual with the ethical life of the relevant social and historical setting. Simmel justifies this accordingly: “For the individuality that lives in the form of the Ought is not something ahistorical, nonmaterial, or only consisting of so-called character. It is much more determined by, or includes as an ineluctable element, that this person is [...] a citizen of a specific state” (2010: 143). Simmel’s abstract language is not always helpful, as for instance in the cryptic requirement of “a firmly individual-

ized life” existing as an “objective fact” (2010: 142). Yet, one cannot fail to discern elements of historicity which creep into Simmel’s exposition of “individual law”. Simmel, surprisingly for some, rejects the individualism of uniqueness as mere incomparability but rather qualifies it as a mediated “objectivity of the individual”. In fact, Simmel moves very close to the idea of a fully moral individualism within the force exerted by a *Sittlichkeit*. (He refers to the role of the individual [even the antimilitarist] as a citizen] p. 142-13 on the ‘Law of the Individual’ in Simmel, 2010]). And, maybe, it is no mere coincidence that he recovers the social ethics as the manifestation of Reason in history, in the Hegelian sense. Simmel recalls Hegel’s triadic dialectical scheme that culminates in synthesis. Interestingly, Simmel recognizes in Hegel that the moment of ‘synthesis’ can take the shape of the ‘public institution’ (*öffentliche Institution*), which balances and reconciles different partial interests. Since each determination requires its completion through what negates it, Hegel, for Simmel, conceives the world as an absolute becoming (*absolute Werden*) (Simmel 2016: 19-21).

For Simmel, “flowing relations, functional and holistic linkages” belong to “life unity”. Simmel – in a gesture towards Hegel, I think – visualizes the “individualizing framing and conceptual fixing of objective contents” as part of the “world history of the Spirit” (2010: 146). If this gesture towards a philosophy of history sounds characteristically at odds with Simmel’s impressionism it needs to be remarked that Simmel had expressed admiration for Hegel’s philosophy of history. Interestingly enough, this is a testimony by Georg Misch (Dilthey’s son-

in-law whose anti-Heideggerian reading of Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* Marcuse seemed to approve [see Benhabib 1987] in a letter addressed to Oswald Spengler (see Spengler 1966: 81).

If we rethink Simmel's three moments of Life (as 'life', 'more-life, 'more-than-life') then we notice that the Hegelian concept of Life as reconstructed by Marcuse supplants it with an important axiological core that is only implicit, yet not wholly absent, in Simmel. Rethinking the 'is-ought' dichotomy we can recollect Marcuse's idea that for Hegel the 'is-ought' relation is precisely what 'concretizes' beings. Without the 'ought' – which, of course, 'is not a norm beyond beings or a Grundnorm' – “the movement of actuality would come to a halt” (1987: 130). For Marcuse:

The Concept in itself is not only judgment, difference, but unity which is always already implied by judgment (the significance of the predicate when taken in its *live fullness*). The concept is the mediating middle which mediates, holds, and joins together the divided extremes of difference – the individual and the universal, existence and intrinsic being, 'what is' and what 'ought to be' (Marcuse 1987: 130 [emphasis added]).

We observe that 'live fullness' of the predicate anchors the dialectical exposition of the categories in the movement of living individuals and contains a claim to their “fulfilled” destiny, itself the very possibility of 'motility' and of Being's historicity. (This, I think, is what is condensed in Marcuse's defense of the *a priori* value that life is and should be made worth-living in the first pages of *One Dimensional Man*.) And, consequently, this implies the idea of motility as freedom.

Life exists initially as ‘diremption’ from objectivity, as ‘pain’ and ‘need’ (Marcuse 1987: 158). Unlike the stone which does not experience ‘pain’, Life turns against objectivity to ‘appropriate it’ and make the world’s objects ‘correspond’ to Life (as ‘habitability, enjoyability, usefulness, applicability’ [ibid.]). Marcuse contends that for Hegel, “the world seized on by Life becomes itself Life [...] the seizure of the world is ‘its transformation’ into living individuality” (Marcuse 1987: 159). Thus, life posits the individual living form and its external objectivity as “form” (ibid.), and this process figures as the trope that suffuses Simmel’s *Lebensphilosophie*. Seen through this hermeneutic lens, Simmel’s life-philosophy turns into a covert, immanent, so to speak, critique of its reactionary permutations. The ‘ascent’ of life beyond itself is “not something added” to it externally but rather it is “genuine, immediate essence”. For Simmel, the “objective something” (2010: 60) stems from Life’s self-movement. For Hegel too, Life “is only actual as form” (Hegel quoted in Marcuse 1987: 236).

I suggest that there is another reason for revisiting critically the concept of ‘Life’ and disconnecting it from reactionary *Lebensphilosophie*. The Hegel-Marcuse connection gives rise to a radical notion of life, which though carries the ‘originary’ (Simmel, Heidegger) dimension but unlike both –less so Simmel– adds a critical thrust against alienation. As Marcuse writes: “[Life] is an originary unity which is itself alive, which allows beings to spring forth from it, which sublates and carries all individuations and partial determinations within itself and lets them proceed forth” (1987: 210).

In Life's potential Marcuse sees the ideal of historicity and embeddedness of 'Dasein' in the community and in the authentic possibilities of human existence. But because the fundamental position of the individual life is relatedness and the latter has both a spatial and temporal horizon of possibility, Marcuse raises the question of social systems as "valuable" although these may render the realization and concretization of certain values impossible (Marcuse 2005a: 22-3). A key moment of this value is "labor as life-activity" (see also Marcuse 200b: 96). We cannot elucidate these points further. Certainly, Simmel, despite his scattered intimations about *Sittlichkeit*, lacks any robust conception of the social 'form' that shall do justice to life's contents. In reconceptualizing the problem of indeterminacy under the rubric of Life's movement, Simmel seeks to replenish in modernity the diverse spheres of life's contents (ethical, intellectual, aesthetic, religious etc.) under a new theory of Spirit. This Hegelian sojourn by Simmel to the realm of the Spirit was noticed also by Max Adler (1984: 189-91; see also Racinaro 1985), although canonical interpretations of Simmel undergird Spirit's immanent tragedy (see, for example, Léger 1989). Additionally, Marcuse (2005c, 128) recognizes the role of play as a human activity that cannot be regimented, namely, as the (socially and axiologically) mediated 'throwness' of man's capacity for freedom into a world no longer dominated by compulsive labor. (Affinities between 'play' as a systematic form of sociation across Simmel's *oeuvre* and Marx's expectations of a mediated labor by 'play' as an ontological mode of owning the contents of

the world, non-coercively, outside surplus-alienation would, in general, deserve further scrutiny.)

Concluding Remark

Simmel lectured on Lotze's philosophy at the University of Berlin in year 1886-7. Thus, he may have been influenced by Lotze's dynamic monism (Lotze 1888: 274) in the very reciprocity that became later Simmel's surrogate for unity-in-difference. Simmel comes close though to something akin to a social logic of life's incessant movement, when he addresses – in Hegelian fashion – the problem of coordinating mechanism with teleology. This happens when Simmel, distancing himself from Proudhon for whom the suspension of each and every authoritative relationship (mechanism) is a condition for the free and immediate coordination between individuals (teleology), visualizes the sublation of authority and subordination through the modality of reciprocity (*Wechselwirkung*). Here Simmel has to be quoted at some length because the potential linkages to Marx receive a characteristically Hegelian resolution. Thus, contra Proudhon, Simmel suggests that in a reciprocal form,

[w]e would then have an ideal organization, in which A is superordinate to B in one respect or at one time, but in which, in another respect or at another time, B is superordinate to A. This arrangement would preserve the organizational value of super-ordination, while removing oppressiveness, one-sidedness and injustice. [...] All groups in which the leader changes either through frequent elections or according to the rule of succession [...] transform the synchronous combination

of superordination and subordination into their temporal alternation. In doing so, they gain the technical advantages of superordination while avoiding its personal disadvantages. All outspoken democracies try to attain this by means of brief office terms or by the prohibition of re-election, or both. In this fashion, the ideal of everybody having its turn is realized as far as possible. Simultaneous superordination and subordination is one of the most powerful forms of interaction (Simmel 1950: 285).

In his original and rather eccentric fusion of Marx with Kant, Kojin Karatani (2003: 182-4) rescues such anarchist dimensions, and beyond the proposal of Local Exchange Trade Systems, recommends non-hierarchical models of administration in politics, not far removed from Simmel's proposals for a partial moderation of superordination and its bureaucratic discontents. (This anarchist reading of Kant and Marx is worth exploring further but this is not possible in the context of this essay.)

Through this lens my discussion aimed to validate the brief but sharp estimations, first by Vieillard-Baron (1989: 12-3) who connects Simmel to Hegel's rationalism, since even the most banal and seemingly superficial aspect of reality is likened to the universal, and second by Leck (2000: 312) who reads in Simmel's microsociology a 'practical idealism' that served as a foundation for the utopian Marxism of Ernst Bloch. And, as Marcuse (1987: 245) recognizes for Dilthey's *Lebensphilosophie* (i.e. that it continues at the point where Hegel left it), so we can surmise that with Simmel modernist life-philosophy carries further the affirmation of individuality, as the true *a priori* of an (individual) life worth-living. Realigning the concept of Life

along radical tracks, from which it was derailed, it was the merit of Marcuse and Simmel to have positioned emancipatory contents into the very core of this elusive, yet indispensable for social science, concept.

Received on 31/10/2018, approved on 20/12/2018 and published on 27/02/2019

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