

# David Frisby's – "Simmel's Streetscape of Modernity"

## Editor's Foreword

When editing the essay, I started by consulting the copy that Frisby had posted to me for the Greek *Streetscapes of Modernity* and the relevant notes in the Athens David Frisby Archive held in Athens. The texts only required some careful organization. The completion, construction and addition of references, endnotes, and the "Works Cited" section were largely informed by the David Frisby Archive held in Athens.

The editing process has not been marked in the text at all. Above all, I tried to avoid any interference that would disturb the discussion and distract the reader from Frisby's own thoughts. For example, editors often provide footnotes with various details and information; given that the essay is presented as autonomously as possible, there was no reason to burden it with additional subtext. As such, with the exception of the following record of English editions of Simmel's work that includes Frisby's contributions to the field, any further analysis of the essay is offered in a different, independent document. For the article see "David Frisby's *Streetscapes, 'Textscapes', and Sociology as Adventure*" at: [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_489626\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_489626_en.pdf)

Valuable information on English translations of some Simmel texts cited here may be found in Kurt H. Wolff's 1969 "Simmel's Writings Available in English," and Frisby's updated 1991 and 1994 "Bibliographical Note on Simmel's Works in Translation." Since the publication of these records, Frisby further enriched the English translations and editions of Simmel's writings. For instance, "Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben" ("The Metropolis and Mental Life"), "Berliner Gewerbe Ausstellung" ("The Berlin Trade Exhibition"), "Exkurs über den Fremden" ("The Stranger") and "Das Abenteuer" ("The Adventure") may be found in Frisby and Featherstone's *Simmel on Culture*. In 2008, following the essay's 1905 publication and 1955 reprint in the *American Journal of Sociology*, Frisby included Simmel's "Zur Soziologie der Religion" ("On the Sociology of Religion") in the 18<sup>th</sup> volume of Suhrkamp's *Georg Simmel – Gesamtausgabe*. Finally, parallel to the 1989 German edition of Simmel's *Philosophie des Geldes*, Frisby has offered us numerous editions of *The Philosophy of Money* that the reader may consult in the revised DF-Publications List published in the DF-website of the University of Glasgow (see "David. P. Frisby – The Works" at [http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media\\_489627\\_en.pdf](http://www.gla.ac.uk/media/media_489627_en.pdf)). The 2004, 3<sup>rd</sup> enlarged edition of *The Philosophy of Money* was published with a new Introduction.

## REFERENCES

- Frisby, D. and Meyer, I. (Eds.) (2008)  
— G. Simmel, *Englischsprachige Veröffentlichungen 1893-1910. Georg Simmel – Gesamtausgabe*, Vol.18, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp.
- Frisby, D. and Featherstone, M. (Eds.) (1997)  
— *Simmel on Culture*, London, Sage.
- Frisby, D. and Köhnke, K.C. (Eds.) (1989)  
— *G.Simmel – Philosophie des Geldes for Georg Simmel – Gesamtausgabe*. Volume 6, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp.
- Frisby, D.  
— (Ed.) (2004) *The Philosophy of Money*. 3<sup>rd</sup> Enlarged Edition with a new Introduction, London, Routledge.  
— (1993) "Bibliographical Note on Simmel's Works in Translation," in Frisby, D. (Ed.) *Georg Simmel: Critical Assessments*, Vol.3, London: Routledge, pp.384-6.  
— (1991) "Bibliographical Note on Simmel's Works in Translation," *Theory, Culture & Society*, 8(3):235-41.
- Simmel, G.  
— "A Contribution to the Sociology of Religion." *American Journal of Sociology*, 1905, 11(3):359-376, Reprinted by *AJS* 1955, 60(6):1-18.
- Wolff, K.H. (Ed.), (1969)  
— *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, New York, The Free Press.

**David Frisby**

***Simmel's Streetscape of Modernity***

**(2010)**

Edited by Georgia Giannakopoulou, 2017

(Originally published in Greek in Giannakopoulou, G. (Ed.) (2012) *David Frisby – Streetscapes of Modernity*, in memoriam David Frisby. Thessaloniki, Nisides)

**David Frisby**

***Simmel's Streetscape of Modernity***

*We will only learn to know and love what is new in the world city through what is visible and comprehensible, through the transformations of phenomena in the street.*

Max Raphael (1910)

*The adventurer [...] deals with the incalculable element of life just as we otherwise usually relate to the securely calculable (for this reason, the philosopher is the adventurer of the mind).*

Georg Simmel (1909)

*At the moment in which a person becomes astonished at the everyday they become a philosopher. In researching and musing over the nature of this everyday they attain the knowledge that they – know nothing.*

Karl Jentsch, review of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* (1908)

I

The title of Georg Simmel's probably most cited work "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903)<sup>1</sup> suggests that it is concerned with the impact of the modern metropolis upon our inner, intellectual, sensory and emotional life. The often quoted reference to the dramatic increase in nervous life engendered by metropolitan existence seems to confirm such an interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Yet, the very fame of the essay, and the frequency of almost automatic recourse to this essay when writing about the metropolis, creates the possibility of fetishizing it as a self referential closed system of valorization. Such fetishization destroys the openness of an essay that is full of unresolved tensions. The structure of this, as of other essays by Simmel, displays an incomplete dialectical form in which antinomies are released at the outset of the essay without being resolved at their conclusion. This is one reason why we should not treat Simmel's essays as hermetically sealed entities. Not only does the form of Simmel's essays allow him to set in motion the intersection of so many themes within a single essay, but the openness of the essay form enables him – as one of his students Siegfried Kracauer pointed out<sup>3</sup> – to proceed from any single point in his work and arrive at any other. Rather, each of his essays, and certainly the one on the metropolis, could be regarded as what, in another context, Benjamin referred to as a "field of force" that extends beyond its boundaries (just as Simmel maintains that the impact of the metropolis extends far beyond its actual borders). In what follows, therefore, in the exploration of Simmel's *streetscape* and *cityscape* of modernity, we will draw upon material from across his work.

Simmel views one of his tasks as being to investigate “the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products, into the soul of the cultural body”.<sup>4</sup> One of the critical features of “specifically modern life” is the modern metropolis, the point of concentration and intensification of the features of modernity just as the modern money economy is the site of extensification of the experience of modernity. But the modern metropolis is not merely the focal point and site of modernity; it is also the site of the money economy and its consequences for “modern life”. In this sense, the metropolis is crucial in its own right as a focal point of modernity but, in addition, it is also the central focus of the money economy and its generation of features of modernity. The metropolis and the mature money economy are both sites of *circulation* of individuals, traffic, commodities, and money. The focus upon circulation, exchange and consumption that is evident in Simmel’s interpretation of the metropolis and the money economy is, at the same time, a focus away from production, even though circulation, exchange and consumption are linked in roundabout ways with the sphere of production. This is significant not least because, if our reading of Simmel’s essay on the metropolis identifies it with the specific urban site of Berlin, then the absence of production denies what was hidden to visitors to Berlin but which to a significant extent was responsible for the city’s wealth. His point had already been made forcefully by Walther Rathenau in 1899, when he proclaimed that Berlin’s claim to be a world city was based upon “the factory city that no one knows in the West [of the city] and which is perhaps the greatest in the world.”<sup>5</sup> We will return to this dimension of the city later.

For the moment, let us return to “the inner meaning of the specifically modern mind.” Although the essay on the metropolis is rightly taken as an analysis of aspects of urban modernity, it is not the only location for reflections upon modernity. Over a decade earlier, in an essay on art exhibitions (1890),<sup>6</sup> Simmel detected “a strange contradiction in mental life (*Geistesleben*)” between two tendencies. On the one hand, there has been a weakening in our capacity for strong impressions emanating from the fact that, “the receptivity of the modern person has become increasingly refined and nervous, their senses have become increasingly sensitive so that... they can only cope with the pale semi-faded hints.”<sup>7</sup> The opposite coexisting tendency is characterised by,

the need for great excitements, the dissatisfaction with the small stimulations and joys of the day... in which nature only still gives us satisfaction on the North Sea and in the highest peaks of the Alps.<sup>8</sup>

These contradictory aesthetic tendencies in modern life crucially affect the individual in the modern metropolis not merely aesthetically but,

in the bodily realm, too, the over-excitement of the nerves leads, on the one hand, to *hyperaesthesia*, the unhealthy accentuated impact of every impression, and, on the other, to *anaesthesia*, the equally unhealthily reduced receptivity.<sup>9</sup>

Yet, this is not the only anticipation of features of the mental life of the metropolis. The art exhibition in the metropolis is so set out that a multitude of diverse artistic products confront one another in a confined space. There is a profusion of contradictory impressions and equally contradictory judgements on artistic works of,

approval and disapproval, admiring amazement and disparaging mockery, indifference and emotional investment. [They] follow in rapid sequence in the mind of the visitor, and thus... fulfil the conditions of modern enjoyment – to allow the most diverse things to pass through our senses in the smallest amount of time and space.<sup>10</sup>

Such a contradictory stance creates the blasé attitude, the blasé person that is later to constitute one of the key figures in Simmel's streetscape of urban modernity.

More general features of modernity were also highlighted elsewhere. Simmel detected a,

general tendency of modern thought with its dissolving of substances into functions, the rigid and the permanent into the flux of restless development.<sup>11</sup>

Much later, this tendency is no longer confined to thought, but is part of a historical process as,

the contemporary historical dissolution of all that is substantial, absolute and eternal in the flux of things, in historical mutability, in a merely psychological reality.<sup>12</sup>

Such tendencies are also to be found in Simmel's only "definition" of modernity whose "essence,"

is psychologism, the experiencing and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life, and indeed as an inner world, the dissolution of fixed contents in the fluid elements of the soul, from which all that is substantive is frittered and whose forms are merely forms of motion.<sup>13</sup>

Such a modernity is conceived and experienced as an inner world that is in flux and whose substantive contents are themselves dissolved in motion. This is suggestive of Benjamin's shift in modernity from concrete, historical experience (*Erfahrung*) to inner, lived-experience (*Erlebnis*). Implicit here, too, is that the process of dissolution of experience results in fragmentation.

Such tendencies identified by Simmel in other explorations of modern life can also be read as features of the modern metropolis. The dramatic increase in "nervous life" takes one of its forms in the contradiction and oscillation between *hyperesthesia* (over-excited nerves) and *anaesthesia* (reduced nervous receptivity). The blasé

person, associated decisively by Simmel with the metropolis, experiences the rapid oscillation between association and dissociation with things. The more general features of modernity identified by Simmel such as the dissolution of substance into function, as the transposition of permanency into flux, the substantial into a merely psychological reality, and the experience of the world as an inner world in flux are all recognisable in the metropolis and in the mature money economy that is located in the modern metropolis.

## II

We are now in a position to look in detail at Simmel's explorations of the "mental life" of the modern metropolis. This metropolis is characterised by a widening gap between its objective culture, viewed as a conglomeration of external forces, and the individuals circulating within it. Elsewhere, Simmel argues that this objective culture has been, and remains a male dominated culture, and he poses the question as to whether a female culture is possible totally separate from the male dominated objective culture. His unsatisfactory answer is the home as the site for such a female culture. The metropolis as site of *circulation* of individuals, traffic, monetary instruments and images is also a site of *acceleration* in such interactions not merely individually but with one another. The metropolis is a site of tension and contradiction between diverse elements that include the increasing dominance of objective (male) culture over subjective culture; the predominance of the (abstract) intellect over feeling in the metropolis; the increasing mastery of social and economic relations by calculability and the diminution in the spheres in which the fortuitous and the arbitrary hold sway; the ongoing dialectic (also in the money economy) of differentiation (of individuals) and dedifferentiation (the process of levelling in the metropolis and the money economy) that is also epitomized in the field of fashion whose habitus, above all others, is the modern metropolis; the necessity for modes of social (and bodily) distance in metropolitan interactions set against forms of proximity; the dialectic of inside and outside evident in the location of both the stranger and the cosmopolitan in the metropolis; and the dialectic of quantity and quality apparent not merely in monetary transactions, but also in the role of sensations, stimulations and shocks in the modern city.

The starting point of much of Simmel's analysis of the "mental" or "inner" life of the metropolis – like his exploration of the money economy – is upon "seemingly insignificant traits, which lie upon the surface of life" since,

from each point on the surface of existence – however closely attached to the surface alone – one may drop a sounding into the depth of the psyche so that all the most banal externalities of life finally are connected with the ultimate decisions concerning the meaning and style of life.<sup>14</sup>

These surface phenomena present themselves to us *sub specie momenti* – viewed from the aspect of the immediate moment – whereas their connections to deeper forces enable them to be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*, from the aspect of eternity.

And although Simmel elsewhere writes a series of satirical pieces published under the title “Snapshots *sub specie aeternitatis*” in the leading German art nouveau journal *Jugend*,<sup>15</sup> pieces that are located in the aesthetic sphere, he would surely have agreed with Wittgenstein’s assertion that not merely in the aesthetic domain but within thought itself it is possible to view things *sub specie aeterni*.<sup>16</sup> At all events, Simmel’s exploration of the “inner life” of the metropolis takes up seemingly insignificant surface phenomena in a manner quite different from that of the other social scientists invited to contribute to a series of lectures on the metropolis in the winter of 1902-3 in Dresden. Indeed, his approach proved so different that the organiser of the lecture series (that was to coincide with the first major municipal exhibition in Germany and, more unusually, from a positive perspective of the city) felt obliged to give an additional lecture to redress Simmel’s metropolis as a world of theatre, opera and cultural and intellectual offerings to the public.<sup>17</sup>

Simmel’s analysis went in a very different direction toward a focus upon the intensification of nervous stimulation in both internal and external life. The dramatic increase in nervous life that Simmel associates with the development of the modern metropolis is an increase that is both accelerating and continuous. The bombardment of our senses by external stimuli reacts upon our own senses – explored in a later essay on the sociology of the senses, but focusing largely on vision – in such a way that we are forced to defend ourselves from this onslaught. The varied stimuli that we confront in the modern metropolis contrast with the seemingly permanent and habitual impression of rural life (though the rural had *its* modernity which Simmel does not explore). Instead of the latter, we confront the “rapid crowding of changing images,” the “sharp discontinuity of the single glance” and the “unexpectedness” of onrushing impressions. The “crowding” of images is most apparent in the busy thoroughfares of the metropolis and “with every crossing of the street.” The multiplicity of images concentrated in confined space are of the architecture of the street, its pedestrians, its varied forms of traffic, its multiple representations of the world of commodities in advertising, and so on. The shift from single snapshots to camera frames and the early astonishment at moving images (for instance, of a train entering a station). But, more generally, the single glance is often the most we can afford our fellow passersby. We have to take in others as quickly and most often as anonymously as possible. The shock of the “unexpectedness” of onrushing impressions distinguishes the metropolis from rural life. But it has a greater significance in the permanent anticipation that we will confront the fortuitous at every step in the metropolis. At first sight, the multifaceted and multi-media images of the streetscape suggest a chaotic image of the urban streetscape to be found in Ludwig Meidner’s drawings of the street (and the images of the street by other German expressionist artists).<sup>18</sup> Individuals are rushing past, towards and into one another, various forms of traffic are upon us and even the buildings lining the streets seem to be collapsing upon us. Yet, what looks like a chaos is the result of myriad individuals going about their affairs according to the logic and rhythm of their appointments. What looks like chaos is composed of countless journeys to meetings, to work, to

school, to shopping, to see friends and the like. In other words, individual time logics are being undertaken that criss-cross one another in the busy spaces of the urban streetscape.

The speed of fleeting momentary interactions governed by the diverse temporal agendas of individuals and traffic systems clashes with the spatial channels and spatial streetscape through which they pass. The complexities of these webs of interaction are only possible through “the strictest punctuality in promises and services.” Such exactitude is necessary because of,

the aggregation of so many people with such differentiated interests, who must integrate their relations and activities into a highly complex organism. If all clocks and watches in Berlin would suddenly go wrong in different ways... all economic life and communication of the city would be disrupted for a long time.<sup>19</sup>

The impersonal interactions in this calculative and calculated time complex create complex visual fields in the metropolis, including those that appear unstructured and chaotic. But the speed and multiplicity of social and economic interactions suggest that the individual observers of this apparent chaos are themselves in motion. In other words, there is not merely a proliferation of images in the metropolis, but also the observers of such images are themselves a dynamic element (including observers themselves as part of the images of others) in the streetscape. This runs counter to a focus upon the buildings and monuments from a static, stationary position such as was advanced in several works by Hermann Maertens, whose precise calculations of the optimum distance from buildings and monuments necessary for their full aesthetic appreciation were taken up by city planners such as Camillo Sitte.<sup>20</sup>

Here, however, in Simmel’s metropolis, the sensory foundations of mental life are dominated by responses to a dynamic discontinuity of multiple fleeting perspectives. These responses, Simmel argues, require greater amounts of consciousness being utilised compared with rural existence that relies upon much less change in mental impressions. In contrast, in the city “with each crossing of the street, with the tempo and multiplicity of economic, occupational and social life” greater psychological response is required. That response is not characterised by “the steady rhythm of uninterrupted habituations” as in a rural context but rather by a distance, an indifference, a rapid calculative response. And all this takes place in the metropolis in the context of an acceleration of “the rhythm of life and sensory mental imagery” itself.

The relationship between stimuli and sensations that is implicit in tracing the modern metropolitan psyche of its individual members back to the “intensification of nervous stimulation” is recognised by Simmel as more complex. In his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel seeks to clarify the relationship between stimuli and sensations. External stimuli must reach a certain level to bring about a qualitative change in the impact upon our sensations that occur when reaching,



the so-called threshold of consciousness: external stimuli that affect our nerves are unnoticeable below a certain strength; but when this threshold is reached the stimuli suddenly evoke sensations, and the stimuli's merely quantitative increase brings about an effect of qualitative determinateness.<sup>21</sup>

In the metropolis, this threshold of consciousness is one that is constantly being renewed with the bombardment of stimuli, be they visual, audible or tactile, and the endless shock of ever-present confrontations.<sup>22</sup> The qualitatively new consequence of exposure to sensations in the metropolis is the metropolitan personality itself. And in particular, the creation of a barrier to the (over)exposure of sense stimuli that is the metropolitan intellect:

The reaction to metropolitan phenomena is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality. Intellectuality is thus seen to preserve subjective life against the overwhelming power of metropolitan life.<sup>23</sup>

It is presumed that this intellectuality is sufficiently strong to withstand the shock experiences of the metropolis. At all events, intellectuality, "calculating exactness," abstraction and distance characterise a range of interactions within the metropolis. Such stratagems seek to counter the shock experience of confrontation with the ever-new in the metropolis and the money economy. Although without referring to the metropolitan experience, Simmel reveals that in the case of,

electric shock treatment, it has been observed that frequent repetition may turn the result into its opposite and again into the opposite of the opposite. It is an everyday experience of major and typical importance that almost all pleasure-affording stimuli can, after an original increase in pleasurable sensation, lead to its arrest and even to positive pain.<sup>24</sup>

As Andreas Killen has argued, in the broader context of Berlin as "electropolis" around 1900, with its neurasthenia (which Simmel refers to on several occasions) and urban neuroses and his exploration of the increase in nervous life, "Simmel confirms the centrality of the constellation of electricity, shock, and nerves in turn-of-the-century discourses on the metropolitan self."<sup>25</sup>

The electrifying experience of being in the urban crowd was certainly one of Baudelaire's sensations, as Benjamin later indicated, but it was Simmel who drew broader consequences for metropolitan experience from the momentary shock and the momentary sensation:

In the bustle and excitement of modern life [...our] lack of something definite at the centre of the soul impels us to search for momentary satisfaction in ever-new stimulations, sensations and external activities [...] entangled in the instability and

helplessness that manifests itself as the tumult of the metropolis, as the mania for travelling, as the wild pursuit of competition and as the typically modern disloyalty with regard to taste, style, opinions and personal relationships.<sup>26</sup>

If the intellectuality and calculability that predominates in the personality of the calculating individual and generates “the highest *impersonality*,” the endless search for new sensations creates “a highly *personalised subjectivity*.”

For Simmel, “there is perhaps no psychic phenomenon... so unconditionally reserved to the metropolis as the blasé attitude.”<sup>27</sup> Such a condition is also to be found in urban children Simmel declares. The two sources of the blasé attitude are the endless changes in stimulations and the blunting of discrimination in the money economy. In the first case, there is “an incapacity... to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy” after being bombarded with rapid and contradictory stimulations that tear the nerves. In the second case, objects – money and consumer commodities, for instance – “appear to the blasé person in an evenly flat and grey tone,” reflecting the colourlessness and indifference of money.<sup>28</sup> It is in the metropolis that we are offered such a plethora of commodities to be purchased, images to be consumed, experiences to be gained that everything becomes devalued. There seems to be no limit to “the fillings in of time and consciousness” that the metropolis offers, whether it be the more obvious forms of commodity consumption, associated with the department store, for example, or the display of commodities as in the world exhibitions and consuming commodities that are at a standstill, as it were, removed from the process of circulation.<sup>29</sup>

In one of the very few pieces specifically on Berlin – “The Berlin Trade Exhibition” of 1896<sup>30</sup> – Simmel maintains that the search for new impressions, sensations and amusements not only manifests itself in the metropolis but also in its representations as a world city in world exhibitions. Such exhibitions serve as a distraction from the sphere of production and complex division of labour in favour of consumption of various impressions. This world of consumption of commodity representations has generated its own temporary architectural structures and forms.

Within the metropolis there is another transformation of the relationship between production and consumption. If the modern economy creates increasingly abstract relations with others (as functions rather than individuals, for example), then this also applies to the relationship between producers and consumers. The latter are now anonymous, unknown personally by producers (in contrast to customised production and early shopping). However much this may be the case, Simmel does not reflect upon an opposite relationship, namely that consumers in the city can be unaware of the *sites* of production too. The anonymity of this production, outside the vision of many, suggests another aspect of anonymity. To conceive of the city as a site of endless circulation and rhythms of circulation fails to recognise the extent to which the sites and spheres of production are hidden from view. Contemporaries such as Walther Rathenau maintained with some justification that Berlin’s claim to be a world city rested upon this “factory city” that was absent from so many people’s

mapping of the city. Of interest in this context is the absence too of such sites of production in Walter Benjamin's characterisations of Berlin (with the exception of a radio talk on a visit to the Borsig steel factory). Berlin was a centre of a state bureaucracy but it was also a major industrial, a capital of electrotechnical industries (such as AEG and Siemens). As Killen has pointed out, the new technologies of the onset of "rationalized" capitalism in the 1890s were also associated with new neuroses.<sup>31</sup> The neurasthenia that Simmel refers to in his study of money was viewed by some to be related to another neurosis that was extensively discussed in the later nineteenth century: agoraphobia. Its first major analyst, Carl Westphal, worked on agoraphobia in Berlin in the 1870s. In "describing this condition as stemming from fear of open spaces, Westphal forged a clear link between the domain of psychopathology and Berlin's spatial and social topography."<sup>32</sup>

This dynamic city, with its large industrial base and its long, wide modern streets was a potential location for neuroses. The increasing rationalisation of production in the 1890s and the dynamic of economic growth required an expanding precision of its elements, a synchronisation of temporal and spatial dimensions, a calculative orientation to things, not least to economic and other transactions. All this required a new orientation to the modern world:

One may characterize the intellectual functions that are used at present in coping with the world and in regulating both individual and social relations as *calculative* functions. Their cognitive ideal is to conceive of the world as a huge arithmetical problem, to conceive events and the qualitative distinction of things as a system of numbers.<sup>33</sup>

This precision, measured in the "abstract time" of clocks, takes up more and more of individuals' lives "absorbed by such evaluating, weighing, calculating and reducing qualitative values to quantitative ones."<sup>34</sup> This calculative world is also an ever more insecure one: "capitalism... made work as a whole – and therefore its content too! – much more insecure and... subordinated it to many more fortuitous constellations than existed" earlier.<sup>35</sup>

These calculative intellectual functions that generate both precision and insecurity in the money economy and the workplace are, of course, present in the metropolis too. Indeed, Simmel views intellectuality as an essential preservative of subjective life. But as so often in Simmel's analysis, what appears as a positive consequence comes out at a price. Intellectuality in the metropolis generates indifference and a matter-of-factness in relation to people and things manifested in such phenomena as commitment to merely formal justice or interest in others only in relation to their "objective" measurable achievements. In other words, attitude to others uninfluenced by personal relations. It is not merely that we pass fellow individuals by with the briefest glance or avoidance of eye contact. More radically, Gerhard Mattenklott has suggested that this urban eye,

could be that of a *hunter*: highly mobile and yet motionless; alert but not disturbed; encompassing everything, but itself never grasped. It is the ideal eye of the city dweller and the sociologist... In order that the physiognomical gaze... should not be continually caught up in individual contents, it must immunize itself against sympathy or aversion: *a cold eye*.<sup>36</sup>

This possibility suggests, as Hannes Böhringer has argued, that we are constantly being socialized in the metropolis into a form of alienation.<sup>37</sup> The strategies for *self-preservation* by metropolitan dwellers exist on a scale that extends from reserve, through indifference, aversion, repulsion, latent antipathy to actual antagonism. This is a scale of increasing otherness in which one of the dimensions of *sociation* is *dissociation*.

Yet the inner modes of distancing ourselves from others are complemented by material manifestations of *differentiation* and identity. We represent ourselves, reveal ourselves to others in urban interactions and, socialized into recognising difference and identity in the metropolis, we are able to *read* others not merely through our “mental” strategies but also our body life. Of crucial importance here is presentation of self through facial changes and, as we have seen, through the eye. Such an eye is relevant for reading the faces in the crowd, for interaction in public transport systems that enforce close proximity and simultaneous strategies for achieving mental and bodily distance.

Our need for modes of self-assertion and differentiation are necessary in the metropolis, not least because of the brevity of most of our contacts with others. Our reading of others in the city is partly facilitated by a phenomenon located decisively in the metropolis, namely, fashion.<sup>38</sup> Our modes of external self-presentation in the signifiers of fashion and fashion systems – assiduously read and practised by the fashion addict – stand in a close relationship to metropolitan modernity with its increasing “turnover-time,” its reflection of the “‘impatient’ tempo of life,” its transitory nature which “gives us such a strong sense of presentness” and the dialectic in which it “emerges as if it wishes to live for eternity” but in which, at this moment of emergence the seeds of its own death are located. Fashion appeals especially to those preoccupied with social mobility, social strata who abound in the metropolis. The aesthetic veil of newness clothes both ourselves and the commodities that we desire. And along with fashion, there are other markers of self representation in modes of eccentricity, and “the specifically metropolitan extravagances of mannerism, caprice and preciousness.”<sup>39</sup>

The metropolis, Simmel insists, “grants to the individual a kind and amount of personal freedom”<sup>40</sup> not available elsewhere. This theme is treated more fully in Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money*, with reference to the mature money economy. But its focus remains the same, namely the individualism associated with the expansion of the division of labour and the attendant provision of seemingly endless sensations, commodities and, on the other hand, the increasingly threatened development of *individuality* in the context of a widening gap between objective and subjective

culture. The massive expansion of objective culture, whose location is the modern metropolis with its “buildings and educational institutions... the wonders and comforts of space – conquering technology... the formation of community life, and... the visible institutions of the state” is overwhelming the subjective culture of creative individuality. The result is “the atrophy of individual culture through the hypertrophy of objective culture.”<sup>41</sup> As Simmel points out in this context, “it is by no means necessary that the freedom of the human being be reflected in their emotional life as comfort.”<sup>42</sup>

Nonetheless, the metropolis affords freedoms not found in rural and small town existence, freedom from “the pettiness and prejudices” of the latter. Indeed, the metropolis is the site of freedom not merely through the freedom derived from expanding and multiplying social circles but also through the transcendence of its boundaries such that “any given city becomes the seat of *cosmopolitanism*.”<sup>43</sup> The cosmopolitan is thus another figure to be found in the metropolis. The metropolis extends its effects well beyond its boundaries. Its “*inner life* overflows by waves into a far-flung national and international area.”<sup>44</sup> The extension of the metropolis beyond its own boundaries secures an individual freedom not merely of mobility and away from philistinism and parochialism but also a freedom to develop our own way of life. Yet even within Simmel’s own lifetime, cosmopolitanism shared with the role of the stranger “dangerous possibilities,” ones that became much more acute in Nazi Germany and Stalin’s Soviet Union.

### III

Simmel’s essay on the metropolis contains few figures in the metropolitan streetscape beyond the blasé person, the fashion addict and the eccentric person. Elsewhere, relevant figures include the stranger, the poor, the adventurer and the prostitute.<sup>45</sup> By implication, the highlighting of calculability in the metropolis also suggests the figure of the calculating individual. And if we ask what the figure of Simmel as an author might be, none of these figures is applicable. Yet when Max Weber read his *Philosophy of Money* for insights into the spirit of capitalism and when he subsequently defended his central arguments on the Protestant Ethic, he did draw a contrast between systematic capitalism and adventure capitalism.<sup>46</sup> In the course of these discussions, he praised Simmel’s essay on the adventure,<sup>47</sup> which he saw as outlining a figure *not* concerned with “systematic bourgeois capitalism.” The possibilities for individual freedom in the metropolis extended to the adventure as a mode of experience torn out of everyday life. So although Simmel does not refer to the figure of the adventurer in his essay on the metropolis, such a figure readily exists as a counterpart to the calculating individual.

But there is another reason for drawing attention to the adventurer in the context of the metropolis. A case for viewing Simmel as a sociological *flâneur* was made in my first monograph on Simmel.<sup>48</sup> The range of largely though implicit urban settings for his essays and shorter reflection on social interaction in everyday life suggest that Simmel took in the most varied constellations of interactions or forms of sociation. So just as the adventurer is the hidden counterpart figure to the rational

capitalist actor in Weber's substantive study, the figure of the *flâneur*/adventurer may be the hidden figure in Simmel's methodological orientation. The adventurer is significant for Simmel, not least because he identifies the philosopher with the adventurer to the extent that he identifies the philosopher as the adventurer of the mind.

The metropolis is the site of both calculability *and* fortuitousness. The world of calculation, indifference and abstraction is matched by chance, the fortuitous, the incalculable. The aesthetic dimension of the adventure, with its escape into another world in which security is replaced by insecurity, by an absolute presentness accords with a particular mode of interpreting the world that is far away from the routinized calculations and ostensibly organised rational economic universe. The aesthetic mode of interpretation is predicated upon the fact that,

the essence of aesthetic observation... lies in the fact that the *typical* is to be found in what is *unique*, the *law-like* in what is *fortuitous*, the *essence*... of things in the *superficial* and *transitory*... To the adequately trained eye, the *total* beauty, the *total* meaning of the world as a whole radiates from *every single point*.<sup>49</sup>

Such assumptions stand as the very opposite to those of the world of calculability that seeks to banish the fortuitous, the insecure, the superficial.

The experience of the adventure<sup>50</sup> is dissociated from the everyday world, however temporary. The most general forms of the adventure are that "it has dropped out of the context of life," existing "outside the usual continuity of life." The adventure is:

The exclave of the life-context, that which has been torn away [*das Abgerissene*], "something alien, untouchable, out of the ordinary," "an island in life which determines its beginning and end according to its own formative powers."<sup>51</sup>

It is thus a "closed entity," momentarily detached from the mundane everyday world, an entity with a definite beginning and end. The adventurer surrenders to the moment, to a fragmentary incident, to a world *sub specie momenti*. The adventure's time consciousness is that of,

*unconditional presentness*, the quickening of the process of life to a point that possesses neither past nor future and therefore contains life within itself with an intensity that, compared with the content of what has gone before, is often relatively indifferent.<sup>52</sup>

The adventurer resists the world of calculability and indifference and creates a realm "above" life in contrast to it. The adventurer, Simmel declares, and this should be seen in the context of the adventure, the erotic adventure, the intellectual adventure, and the affinities with gambling on chance:

The adventurer is... the most powerful example of the unhistorical person, of the contemporary essence. On the one hand, he is determined by no past... on the other the future does not exist for him.<sup>53</sup>

Thus the adventure encapsulates both the experience of modernity as immediate presentness and the promise, however momentary, of an “eternal” presentness.

Yet there are too many ambiguities in the experience of the adventure – fertile as the concept is – for it to fully accord with the activities of *flânerie*, but its analysis does begin to address the issue as to how we can investigate the mundane everyday world. At all events, the adventurer responds positively to the fortuitous, to the world conceived *sub specie momenti* opposed to the domination of both the money economy and the metropolis by the world of calculation and indifference. The adventure is not merely “a foreign body in our existence,” but also “a form of being inside” it. For Simmel it was a short step from a “philosophy of the adventure” to “philosophy as adventure.”

There are two further figures who reveal the contradictory world of modernity’s cityscape: the cosmopolitan and the stranger. As we have seen, the cosmopolitan does appear in Simmel’s analysis of the metropolis as a positive figure whose experience transcends that of the specific location of a particular metropolis. Elsewhere, in an essay on religion in 1898, he makes reference to “the cosmopolitan person’s general love of humanity.”<sup>54</sup> This positive conception contrasts with his contemporary Werner Sombart’s notion of the cosmopolite [the *Allerweltmensch*] as a restless, abstract, universal person, whose restlessness was to figure more dangerously in Sombart’s contrast between hero [*Held*] and trader [*Händler*].<sup>55</sup> Simmel’s conception of cosmopolitanism in metropolitan centres is not merely conceived as beyond prejudices and petty philistinism but also as permitting expressions of ourselves that are different from those of others. Potentially, the cosmopolitan – in this respect at least, like the adventurer – is also a counterpart to the calculating individual’s indifference, aversion and repulsion.

In other respects, however, the cosmopolitan stands in relationship to the figure who does not appear in the metropolis essay and whose spatial location is more fully drawn, namely to that of the *stranger*.<sup>56</sup> One implication of Simmel’s analysis of metropolitan interactions that we face and confront one another largely as strangers, and we for our part are strangers for others. The nature of this otherness is explored in an article on the stranger that appears as part of Simmel’s examination of spatial relations in society. In his *Soziologie* (1908), the substantial sociology of space chapter is accompanied by three briefer *excursi* on sociology of the senses, the social boundary and the stranger.<sup>57</sup> All three are relevant to any exploration of the metropolis, all examine spatial behaviour of social interaction, forms of social distance and forms of social and spatial differentiation. The role of the stranger as the person who comes today and stays tomorrow creates a position that is both inside and outside the community. This ambiguous position opens up the possibility for a

distinctive social objectivity compared with those rooted in the community. It is a role that has its dangers:

One can... characterise objectivity as freedom... This freedom, which allows the stranger to experience and to act equally both in a close relationship and from a bird's eye view does, of course, contain *many dangerous possibilities*.<sup>58</sup>

The stranger's objectivity consists of "distance and nearness, indifference and involvement," opening up the possibility that it is the stranger who is held responsible for and castigated for upheaval and disturbance in the community – the Other, the outsider/insider.

It would be possible to add other figures in the metropolis, for example, through a contrast between the blasé person and the fashion addict and eccentric (retaining their resistance to the dull grey hue of the money economy and the metropolis). We could also ask whether the inner consequences of the metropolis and its networks of interactions are instances of pathologies or are forms of alienated existence into which we are socialized, as in the reification of social relations in monetary transactions and the creation of a world of "otherness" through the mediation of abstractions, the functionalization of social relations and the tendency for the culture of human beings becoming a culture of things. We could explore further the creation of neurasthenia, hyperaesthesia, amnesia and agoraphobia that Simmel merely touches upon in his works. And if we assume that Simmel is writing largely about Berlin, in his essay on the metropolis, then we should ask how far Berlin is an exemplar, is typical of metropolitan inner life in modernity. Do the features of modernity reproduce themselves in a similar way in Berlin and Vienna, or London and Paris? And, as Deborah Parsons has asked, what of other capital cities such as Rome or Madrid?<sup>59</sup> And this is only a European focus. Other world sites, including those of earlier imperialist expansion, are also worthy of study, not least their "inner lives."<sup>60</sup>



## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> The original article, "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben" is available in Simmel's collected works (the 24-Volume *Georg Simmel – Gesamtausgabe*, hereafter GSG). See G. Simmel, *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901-1908*, GSG 7, R. Kramme, A. Rammstedt and O. Rammstedt (Eds.), Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995, pp.116-131.
- <sup>2</sup> For a fuller analysis of the context and significance of Simmel's essay, originally a lecture, see D. Frisby, *Cityscapes of Modernity*, Cambridge: Polity, 2001, Ch.3.
- <sup>3</sup> See S. Kracauer, "Georg Simmel," in *The Mass Ornament – Weimar Essays*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1995, pp.225-258.
- <sup>4</sup> "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben" op.cit., p.120.
- <sup>5</sup> See Anon. "Die Schönste Stadt der Welt," *Die Zukunft*, 26, 1899, pp.36-48, esp., p.37.
- <sup>6</sup> See G. Simmel, "Über Kunstausstellungen," *Unsere Zeit*, 26 February 1899, pp.474-80.
- <sup>7</sup> Ibid., p.476.
- <sup>8</sup> Ibid., p.477.
- <sup>9</sup> Ibid., my emphasis.
- <sup>10</sup> Ibid., p.476.
- <sup>11</sup> G. Simmel, *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, Vol.2, 1983, pp.359-60.
- <sup>12</sup> G. Simmel, "Anfang einer unvollendeten Selbstdarstellung," in H. Böhringer and K. Gründer (Eds.), *Ästhetik Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende: Georg Simmel*. Frankfurt: Klostermann, 1976, p.260.
- <sup>13</sup> G. Simmel, "Die Kunst Rodins," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen, 1909-1918*. GSG 12, pp.34-5.
- <sup>14</sup> G. Simmel, "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben," GSG 7, op.cit., p.120.
- <sup>15</sup> Simmel's pieces for *Jugend* are available in *Miszellen, Glossen*, GSG 17, K.C. Köhnke (Ed.), 2004, pp.347-440.
- <sup>16</sup> Wittgenstein had a different object of study with his focus on everyday language.
- <sup>17</sup> See *Cityscapes of Modernity*, op.cit., pp.130-139.
- <sup>18</sup> On Meidner and German Expressionism see ibid., ch.6.
- <sup>19</sup> "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben," op.cit., pp.119-120.
- <sup>20</sup> See, for example, H. Maertens, *Der Optische – Maassstab oder die Theorie und Praxis des ästhetischen Sehens in den bildenden Kunst*, Bonn: Max Cohen, 1877. On Sitte see G.R. and C.C. Collins, *Camillo Sitte: The Birth of Modern City Planning*, New York: Rizzoli, 1987.
- <sup>21</sup> G. Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, GSG 6, D.P. Frisby and K.C. Köhnke (Eds.), 1989, p.345.
- <sup>22</sup> For a stimulating study of nervous life that also makes reference to Simmel, see P. Carter, *Repressed Spaces – The Poetics of Agoraphobia*, London: Reaktion Books, 2002.
- <sup>23</sup> "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben," GSG 7, op.cit., p.117.
- <sup>24</sup> *Philosophie des Geldes*, GSG 6, op.cit., p.345.
- <sup>25</sup> A. Killen, *Berlin Electropolis*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006, p.47.
- <sup>26</sup> *Philosophie des Geldes*, op.cit., p.675.
- <sup>27</sup> "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben," op.cit., p.121.
- <sup>28</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>29</sup> On department stores, see R. Williams, *Dream Worlds*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982. On world exhibitions see T. Richards, *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, London: Verso, 1993.

- <sup>30</sup> See G. Simmel, "Berliner Gewerbe Ausstellung," in *Miszellen, Glossen*, GSG 17, pp.33-38.
- <sup>31</sup> A. Killen, *Berlin Electropolis*, op.cit.
- <sup>32</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>33</sup> G. Simmel, *Philosophie des Geldes*, op.cit., p.612.
- <sup>34</sup> Ibid., p.613.
- <sup>35</sup> Ibid., p.685.
- <sup>36</sup> G. Mattenklott, "Der Mystische Leib: Physiognomisches Denken bei Nietzsche, Simmel und Kässner," in K.H. Böhler (Ed), *Mythos und Moderne*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1983, p.147.
- <sup>37</sup> H. Böhringer, "Die "Philosophie des Geldes" als Ästhetische Theorie," in H.J. Dahme and O. Rammstedt (Eds), *Georg Simmel und die Moderne*, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1984.
- <sup>38</sup> More fully on fashion see G. Simmel, *Philosophie der Mode*, M. Behr, V. Krech and G. Schmidt (Eds.), GSG 10, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1995, pp.7-38.
- <sup>39</sup> "Die Grosstädte und das Geistesleben," op.cit., p.128.
- <sup>40</sup> Ibid., pp.123-124.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibid., p.130.
- <sup>42</sup> Ibid., p.126.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>44</sup> Ibid., p.127.
- <sup>45</sup> The prostitute is discussed in several places, including Chapter 5 of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*.
- <sup>46</sup> This arose out of the critical responses to Weber's study of the Protestant Ethic. See my *Cityscapes of Modernity*, op.cit., pp.7-10.
- <sup>47</sup> Ibid., p.8.
- <sup>48</sup> See my *Sociological Impressionism. A Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory*, London: Heinemann, 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged edition, 1991, London: Routledge, esp. ch.3.
- <sup>49</sup> G. Simmel, "Soziologische Aesthetik," in H.J. Dahme and D.P. Frisby (Eds.), *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1894-1900*. GSG 5, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1992, pp.197-214, esp. p.198.
- <sup>50</sup> G. Simmel, "Das Abenteuer," in R. Kramme and O. Rammstedt (Eds.), *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie. Philosophische Kultur*, GSG 14, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1996, pp.168-85.
- <sup>51</sup> Cited in my *Simmel and Since*, London: Routledge, 1992, p.132.
- <sup>52</sup> G. Simmel, "Das Abenteuer," op.cit., p.181.
- <sup>53</sup> Ibid., p.171.
- <sup>54</sup> G. Simmel, "Zur Soziologie der Religion," in *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1894-1900*, op.cit., p.269.
- <sup>55</sup> See my *Cityscapes of Modernity*, op.cit., ch.4, esp. p.164.
- <sup>56</sup> G. Simmel, "Exkurs über den Fremden," in O. Rammstedt (Ed.), *Soziologie*, GSG 11, Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, pp.746-771.
- <sup>57</sup> G. Simmel, "Exkurs über die soziale Begrenzung," pp. 698-702 and "Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne," pp.722-742 in *ibid*.
- <sup>58</sup> G. Simmel, "Exkurs über den Fremden," op.cit.
- <sup>59</sup> See D. Parsons, "Paris is not Rome or Madrid: Locating the City of Modernity," *Critical Quarterly*, 2002, 44(2): 7-29.
- <sup>60</sup> See G. Prakash and K.M. Kruse (Eds.), *The Spaces of the Modern City*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008.

## WORKS CITED

Anon.

- 1899. "Die Schönste Stadt der Welt," Die Zukunft, 26: 36-48.

Böhringer, H.

- 1984. "Die 'Philosophie des Geldes' als Ästhetische Theorie," in H.J. Dahme and O. Rammstedt (Eds), *Georg Simmel und die Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp.

Carter, P.

- 2002. *Repressed Spaces, The Poetics of Agoraphobia*, London, Reaktion Books.

Collins, G.R. and C.C.

- 1987. *Camillo Sitte: The Birth of Modern City Planning*, New York, Rizzoli.

Frisby, D.

- 2001. *Cityscapes of Modernity*, Cambridge, Polity.
- 1992. *Simmel and Since*, London: Routledge
- 1991. *Sociological Impressionism. A Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory*, London, Heinemann, 2<sup>nd</sup> enlarged edition.

Killen, A.

- 2006. *Berlin Electropolis*, Berkeley, University of California Press.

Kracauer, S.

- 1995. *The Mass Ornament – Weimar Essays*. Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press.

Maertens, H.

- 1877. *Der Optische – Maassstab oder die Theorie und Praxis des ästhetischen Sehens in den bildenden Kunst*, Bonn, Max Cohen.

Mattenklott, G.

- 1983. "Der Mystische Leib: Physiognomisches Denken bei Nietzsche, Simmel und Kässner," in Böhrer, K.H. (Ed), *Mythos und Moderne*, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp.

Parsons, D.

- 2002. "Paris is not Rome or Madrid: Locating the City of Modernity," Critical Quarterly, 44(2): 7-29.

Prakash, G. and Kruse K.M. (Eds.).

- 2008. *The Spaces of the Modern City*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Richards, T.

- 1993. *The Commodity Culture of Victorian England*, London, Verso.

Simmel, G.

- *Georg Simmel – Gesamtausgabe*, 24 Volumes, Frankfurt, Suhrkamp.
- 1899. "Über Kunstausstellungen," Unsere Zeit, 26 February, pp.474-80.
- 1976. "Anfang einer unvollendeten Selbstdarstellung," in Böhringer, H. and Gründer, K. (Eds.), *Ästhetik Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende: Georg Simmel*. Frankfurt, Klostermann.

Williams, R.

- 1982. *Dream Worlds*, Berkeley, University of California Press.