

Immanent transcendence in Georg Simmel's sociology of religion

Journal of Classical Sociology

10(1) 5–32

© The Author(s) 2010

Reprints and permission: <http://www.sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermission.nav>

DOI: 10.1177/1468795X09352559

<http://jcs.sagepub.com>

 SAGE

Frédéric Vandenberghe

University Research Institute of Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ), Brazil

Abstract

This article presents a systematic reconstruction of Georg Simmel's sociology of religion. Following the development of his sociology of religion, it successively analyses religion as a form of interaction, as a symbolic form and as a personal form. The main argument is that all of Simmel's writings are metaphysical and that religion is only one form among others that gathers the fragments of existence into a unified totality. Religiosity is the central category of Simmel's writings on religion. It 'detranscendentalizes' religion and locates its conditions of possibility within the aspirations of wholeness of the soul.

Keywords

cosmos, religiosity, Simmel, sociology of religion, soul, symbolic forms

*To see a World in a Grain of Sand,
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower,
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand,
And Eternity in an hour.*

William Blake, 'Auguries of Innocence'

At the turn of the twentieth century, sociology was striving to become an autonomous discipline, differentiated from political economy, philosophy and theology, yet without losing the vital connection with the moral, political and philosophical questions of the age. Classical sociology continued the great tradition of moral and political philosophy. By its own means, through empirical research and not through mere speculation, it wanted to 'grasp [that is, understand and transcend] its time in thought' (Hegel) – grasp and propose an empirically based, theoretically informed 'ontology of the present' (Foucault). This connection to philosophy explains why the classics did not practise the

Corresponding author:

Frédéric Vandenberghe, IUPERJ, Rua da Matriz, 82, Botafogo, 22260-100 Rio de Janeiro RJ, Brasil.

E-mail: frederic@iuperj.br

sociology of religion as a special sociology, but as a general one.¹ If they focused on religion, it was above all because religion offered a particular challenge and allowed them to test the viability of the sociological perspective. If one could scientifically show that God is a social construction and empirically analyse the implications of collective beliefs for social life, the viability of the sociological perspective would thereby be demonstrated. Analysing not religion as such, but its relation to social action in secularizing societies, the sociology of religion was not a religious sociology, however, but a secular one, and as such a product of its time.

The ‘founding fathers’ of sociology were all centrally concerned with the theme of religion, which they generally considered as an important theme within a larger sociology of culture, which was itself, most often, part of a more general sociological reflection on the transition to modernity and the social pathologies of industrial-capitalist societies. Max Weber’s historical investigation of the religious roots of capitalism, and, more specifically, his demonstration of a weak causality (or ‘elective affinity’) between the Protestant habitus and the spirit of capitalism, no longer needs to be introduced to sociologists (or historians for that matter, though the latter are usually more sceptical about his claims). The same holds for Émile Durkheim’s ethnographic reflections on the elementary forms of religious life and his insistence on the lingering importance of mechanical solidarity and totemic rituals for the social integration of complex societies. Karl Marx, another humanist and militant secularist, was less sanguine about religion, which he considered, as is well known, as a form of false consciousness that makes the intolerable tolerable, contributing thereby to the ideological reproduction of the existing order. While specialists in the sociology of religion might want to add Ernst Troeltsch to the sacred canon of their subfield, there are good chances that they will overlook the contributions of Georg Simmel. This may be regrettable, but to the extent that his meditations on God are more philosophical than sociological, yet do not add up to a systematic theology, this oversight is understandable. After all, the same misapprehension explains his omission from the pantheon of the founding fathers of sociology.²

Immanent Transcendence

Nostalgia of the Totally Other

Georg Simmel (1858–1918) is a typical, yet highly original and somewhat idiosyncratic product of the bohemian intelligentsia of *fin-de-siècle* Berlin. Born in a Judaeo-Christian milieu (his father was a Jew who converted to Catholicism, while his mother was evangelical), Georg was baptized as a Protestant and celebrated his marriage in the church, but during the First World War he left the Church to become religiously ‘free-floating’. Objectively, Simmel was Jewish in culture, appearance and mannerisms, but subjectively he was more of a secular *Kulturprotestant* who considered Judaism inferior to Christianity. His contemporaries differed about whether he was ‘religiously musical’. Whereas Siegfried Kracauer (1977) categorically denied it, Margarete Susman (1959) insisted that religion and mysticism were among his deepest impulses. In this debate, which continues up till today, I side with those (like Landmann, 1957, 1968 and Liebersohn, 1988) who privilege a theological reading of his writings over a more

aesthetic one (like Frisby, 1981, 1985 and Waizbord, 2000). My feeling is that, ultimately, Simmel's *Weltanschauung* is a metaphysical one. Beyond the oppositions and divisions that characterize our mortal existence, beyond, above and underneath the fragmentation of reality, our metaphysician is groping for a deeper and higher unity. Religion is the expression of this longing for unity. As a kind of 'weak mysticism', the nostalgia of the totally other can be detected in all of Simmel's writings and gives them their typical touch and tonality.³ Without openly saying so, the German sociologist continuously hints that there is something beyond reality, something that transcends mere life, encompassing all of its moments and giving it its unity. For sure, our metaphysician remains agnostic throughout and never openly confesses that he believes in God or denies that God exists. If he does not speak about God, though, it may be because the Divine is ineffable, which does not mean that one cannot speak about it, but that one can always say more. The Divine can be experienced, the religious experience can be recognized, but as God cannot be described, all descriptions should be avoided as a matter of principle. In Simmel, there's a strong tendency towards 'negative theology'. God is the totally Other – *das Ganz Andere* (*thateron* or *alienum*) – and one can affirm neither his existence nor his non-existence. He is so complete different from us that we, human creatures, cannot even imagine, let alone conceptualize or represent Him.

From Religion to Religiosity

Perhaps this negative and apophatic theological strain in Simmel's thought is related to his atheism. His atheism is strictly methodological, however, and should not be taken at face value.⁴ He does not make existential or ontological judgments about the existence or non-existence of God, but in a typical Kantian move, he switches from ontology to epistemology, from the transcendent to the transcendental, to analyse the psychological conditions of possibility of religion. From a transcendental point of view, religion appears as 'a process of consciousness, and nothing else' (1989: 52). Using more phenomenological language, we could say that the transcendental approach 'reduces' religion to an immanent state of the mind and considers its noematic contents as an intentional product of the constitutive activities of the Ego. The noumenon – or the 'numenous', to speak like Rudolf Otto (1987) – is, in other words, a phenomenon, something that appears to consciousness and is intentionally constituted by consciousness as an object of experience of a certain kind and with certain definite characteristics.⁵ As a result of this Kantian displacement from the transcendent to the transcendental, the transcendent object of consciousness becomes immanent to consciousness. Religion becomes in other words a state of mind or, better, to avoid the cognitivist overtones of transcendental phenomenology, an expression of the soul. As a form of consciousness, religion integrates ambivalent, but complementary feeling states – 'abandonment and confirmation of the self, modesty and passionate desire, fusion with the highest principle and distancing from it' (Simmel, 1989: 53) – into a unity. All the feelings communicate with one another and fuse into a unitary attitude towards God, nature and other human beings.

As religion is no longer grounded in God, but in the constituting activities of the subject who experiences the Divine from within, the emphasis shifts from religion to religiosity, piety and spirituality.⁶ Religiosity is the central category of Simmel's

whole sociology of religion and refers to a fundamental disposition, predisposition or inclination of the religious person that expresses his or her ultimate spiritual stance towards the world and colours all of his or her emotions, volitions, cogitations and perceptions, in brief: actions and passions, in such a way that the totality of beings appear as ultimately grounded in a transcendent being that sustains the world and gives it its unity.

From the point of view of the subject, religiosity appears as a *Stimmung*, a kind of diffuse emotional intentionality that comes from the depths of the soul and traverses all the acts of the subject, giving them a specific tonality; from the point of view of the object, it appears as an atmosphere of peace in which all the objects are plunged and transfigured.⁷ As an expression of the soul, religiosity is a spiritual attitude that seeks God and unifies the world: it connects the empirical appearances to something deeper or higher that transcends them, to something more essential of which they partake, and integrates the empirical manifold in a meaningful totality. With a wink to Simmel's last book, we could say that religiosity implies and presupposes *Anschauung*, the noetic 'capacity [or "capability"] of the subject to perceive the meaningful links that turn the whole into a whole' (Waizbord, 2007: 317).

Establishing a mystical connection between the appearances and the essence, the fragment and the totality, the empirical and the metaphysical, the contingent and the necessary, religiosity transforms the *kaos* of impressions into a well-ordered *kosmos*. The true believer interprets reality in a symbolic way: spontaneously, s/he endows everything with meaning; whatever s/he encounters is connected to the cosmos and read allegorically as an indication of divine presence in this world. Like Blake, s/he sees 'a World in a Grain of Sand/ And a Heaven in a Wild Flower'. Less poetically and more philosophically, we could say that the devotee is a practising Spinozist who ignores him- or herself: s/he sees and experiences every thing *sub specie aeternitatis* (Spinoza) – from the point of view of eternity or internal necessity, that is to say, in its functional dependence from God and thus as independent from contingency.⁸

Empirical Pantheism

If such an epiphanic reading of reality is proper to religiosity, then we can say without hesitation that the whole of Simmel's work is a continuous variation on the theme of 'empirical pantheism' (GSG 6: 732) that exemplifies religiosity.⁹ Whatever it is that he writes about, be it roses, money, bridges or Rembrandt, he always establishes analogical connections between the most heterogeneous things and, moving from analogy to analogy, he suggests that everything is related to everything else in the universe and that the universe is ultimately one. Philosophically speaking, our metaphysician arrives at this insight through a Platonizing interpretation of Kant's regulative principle of interaction (*Wechselwirkung*). The *Critique of Pure Reason* introduced it as the third of the three 'Analogies of Experience'.¹⁰ The principle of interaction states that in spite of the heterogeneity of all substances and our perception of them at different instants, we must assume for the sake of knowledge that they are interrelated parts of a single world. Resuming with the cosmological use of analogy that one finds in Plato (*Timaeus*, 31a), who

employed it to answer to the question of how the diverse elements of the world can be integrated into a well-ordered universe, Simmel interprets everything as a symbol, that is, as an ordinary expression of the extraordinary.

As everything is, one way or another, related to the absolute, nothing is trivial; even the most banal is in its own way sublime and divine. Adrift like an adventurer who confidently throws himself into the concreteness of reality to find its essence (and himself!), Simmel treats trivia with utmost consideration, analysing them from all their angles and turning from facet to facet, till eventually their full meaning emerges and is revealed in its kaleidoscopic splendour. Our talented essayist practises this hermeneutics of the banal as a ‘scholastic of the fingertips’ (Bloch, 1969: 60). It characterizes not only his writings on religion, but also those on philosophy, sociology, psychology, aesthetics, ethics and economics. What he says about his *Philosophy of Money* holds, in fact, for all of his works:

The unity of these investigations does not lie, therefore, in an assertion about a particular content of knowledge and its gradually accumulating proofs but rather in the possibility ... of finding in each of life’s details the totality of its meaning.

(GSG 6: 12)

Elsewhere, in a passage that is often quoted, he links his worldview to aesthetic pantheism:

We only need to involve ourselves deeply and lovingly enough in the most indifferent phenomenon, which is banal or repulsive in isolation, in order to be able to conceive of it as a ray of light or symbol of the ultimate unity of all things. ... If we push the aesthetic approach to its limits, the distinctions between the aesthetic values of things disappear. The vision of the world turns into aesthetic pantheism. Every point conceals the possibility of being released into absolute aesthetic significance. To the adequately trained eye, the total beauty, the total meaning of the world as a whole radiates from every single point.

(GSG 5: 198–9)

The religious moment in the thought of our sociologist has often been misread as an aesthetic one and associated with impressionism – as if Simmel were the philosophical pendant of Monet or, in case one prefers a musical analogy, of Debussy. If, however, we read his work not so much from the point of view of the object, but rather from the point of view of a subject who is looking for a sense of unity behind the apparent diversity of the world, it can be properly described as expressionist, or, even better – if we want to interpret it as an expression of his yearning for wholeness – as ‘expressivist’, to invoke a category that has been used by Charles Taylor (1979: 1–15) in his interpretation of Hegel.

The Elementary Forms of Religious Life

As a continuous meditation on the theme of unity and difference, of a deeper unity that connects and integrates all of existence into a totality, Simmel’s worldview is clearly influenced by mysticism and tends towards pantheism. To the extent that this pantheism

is the expression of a longing soul, it has, however, also strong personalist overtones.¹¹ Foregrounding the concept of the soul, which unifies the empirical manifold of the world and gives it a mystical imprint, the unity of all things that shines through in each and every thing reflects and evokes a higher unity from which it seems to emanate, but which is, in fact, nothing but the expression of a soul that searches for unity, yet needs to project itself into the Other to express its innermost self. The movement is thus a circular one: the soul seeks to express itself, but needs the detour of an external object – God, who is also a subject – to come to itself and find its unity in the reflection of an object that is its own product. As the poet Hugo von Hoffmannstahl stated: ‘The shortest way to yourself is around the world.’

The longing for unity, for overcoming the fragmentation of reality that characterizes religiosity, is what remains of religion in a post-Christian secular age that has lost the belief in God, but not the yearning. In his comparative analysis of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer, Simmel suggests that ‘this longing is the legacy of Christianity, which has bequeathed to us the need for a *definitivum* in the movements of life – a need that persists as an empty urge toward a goal that has become inaccessible’ (GSG 10: 178). Although religiosity is not devoid of nostalgia, it is not necessarily turned towards the past, however. As an expression of hope, it projects an underlying tendency towards unity from the present into the future.

The insistence on longing for unity forces us to revise the received view of Simmel as a dualist thinker (Liebersohn, 1988: 151–6).¹² Although his thought is undoubtedly marked by strong dualist tendencies and he always emphasizes tensions, strains, oppositions and contradictions that cannot be dialectically ‘sublated’ (*aufgehoben*) in a higher synthesis, the religious moment in his thought suggests that the opposition of contrary elements should, in fact, be interpreted as complementary aspects of a single reality. This reality should not be conceived of as a substance, however, but as a process of unification. As the unification of contents in a coherent worldview is the work of the synthetic activities of the subject who projects his or her own desire for unity outside of him- or herself into the universe, the harmony of the macro-cosmos is a reflection and expression of the inner peace of the meditating subject. Like in a hologram, the cosmos is refracted through, and reflected in, the soul of the religious subject; but it should be stressed at this point that the unity without (macro-cosmos) is a reflection of the unity within (micro-cosmos), and not the other way round, as is the case in Max Scheler (1980). Somewhat provocatively, I’d like to suggest that Simmel’s mysticism is atheistic or, conversely, that his atheism is mystical.¹³ The sensing of harmony is the expression of an ecstatic soul that projects its own unity beyond itself and, collapsing the distinction between the personal and the transpersonal, the natural and the supranatural, discovers mystery in every being. This feeling of ecstatic unity is not the prerogative of the faithful. From this point of view, religious mysticism is only a subcategory of a more generalized and more diffuse mysticism that can be experienced in blissful contact with art, the frenzy of creation, communion with nature, the union of love or other internal upheavals that connect the subject to something deeper or higher that transcends it.

The drift towards unity in Simmel forces us also to revise the tragic strain in his thought. His ultimate intuition seems to be that the conflict between life and forms, between the individual and society can be pacified and, perhaps, ultimately, overcome in

a more encompassing form that unifies the opposites. This is, for sure, a romantic view, but to the extent that is formulated in a religious key and has mystical and messianic and chiliastic overtones, it does not project the present into the past, but the past into the future and the future into the present. The Kingdom of God is already here. It is imminent; it is immanent: the Divine is omnipresent. To believe it is to see it, but to see it, one must transfigure the whole of reality and interpret the specious present *sub specie aeternitatis*. Only then, to quote the poet once again, do you hold ‘infinity in the palm of your hand/ And Eternity in an hour’. This is the mystic moment of the *nunc stans*, the abiding now, the instant that knows no temporal articulation, where distinctions between past, present and future have fallen away.

Although this aspiration towards unity is present in all of Simmel’s writings and constitutes as it were his signature, it only fully pierces through in his later, more metaphysical writings on life and death. As is often the case with the German sociologist and philosopher, however, the later writings throw a new light on his earlier writings. His work has to be read in reverse, so that the earlier sociology is interpreted from the point of view of his writings on the philosophy of culture, which in turn is interpreted from the point of view of his philosophy of life. Interestingly, this is not the case for his writings on religion. The earlier statements prefigure the later theory, even to the point that I would venture that his philosophy of life is a transfiguration of his earlier conception of religion and religiosity. In other words, it took our thinker a whole lifetime to work out his mystical intuitions into a coherent metaphysical view of the relations between life, the soul, the universe and God.

In the following pages, I will present an introduction and reconstruction of Simmel’s scattered meditations on religion.¹⁴ At the most general level, we can say that our speculative philosopher considers religion as a form. But the notion of form is itself rather formless and, depending on the context, it can take on different meanings. To deploy the different meanings, it is best simply to follow its development in Simmel’s *Gesammelte Schriften zur Religionssoziologie*. Following the deployment of the elementary forms of religious life, I will first discuss his sociology of religion (religion as a form of association); then, I will move to his philosophy of culture (religion as a cultural form); and, finally, rounding off this article, I will present his philosophy of religiosity and his metaphysics of the soul (religion as a personal form).

Religion as a Form of Association

Sociology of the Inter-human

Simmel developed a micro-sociology of the ‘inter-human’ (Buber, 1962: 271–6) that focuses on conscious interactions between individuals. When two individuals watch each other and are conscious not only of watching, but also of being watched, they are consciously interacting with each other. They may like it or not, they may even be flirting. In any case, their actions are joined actions and together they form a ‘we’. When three individuals play cards, they are in continuous interaction with each other. They observe each other’s movements, talk to each other, and occasionally bluff. When one puts down a card on the table, this has immediate repercussions on the two others, which

can be observed by the first player and affect his or her immediate reactions and subsequent behaviour. When four individuals wine and dine together, they are not just eating, but they are also enjoying each other's company and enacting a ritual of sorts. Together, they form a micro-society that will inevitably dissolve after the meal, when they leave each other and go their own way.

Society as we know it is, according to Simmel, nothing else but the continuous flow of interactions between individuals. However trivial these interactions may be, they are the threads societies are made of. When these threads are interwoven, micro-societies emerge, and then they disappear again. To underscore the processual nature of societies, Simmel calls those micro-societies 'sociations' (*Vergesellschaftungen*). If, following Durkheim, we translate the term literally, we can call them 'associations'. They correspond to what Max Weber called 'social relations'.¹⁵ Their defining criterion is mutual orientation of the individuals who act with, for or against each other. They are everywhere. Individuals who flirt, play cards, wine and dine, stand in queues or work together form associations. These come and go, but society remains. Society is the complex, continuously changing network of evanescent associations of individuals who interact with each other.¹⁶

With a sense for detail and a fascination for the mundane, Simmel analyses associations as the fulcrum of society. To differentiate his approach from competing sociologies, he gave it a name and called it 'formal sociology'. If only he had called it interactionist sociology – or even *Lebenssoziologie*, as Scott Lash (2005) has recently suggested – lots of misunderstandings would have been avoided! Sociology is defined thematically, however, not only by the interactions and associations that make up society, that are society in the making, but also by the specific method of abstraction that it utilizes to separate the form of associations from its contents. Unlike general sociology, which is concerned with everything that is social – from language to nation-states and the world system – formal sociology limits itself to the analysis of the forms of association (*Formen der Vergesellschaftung*) that structure social life, which it analytically separates from the contents, and describes how the forms structure the interactions.

Simmel compares sociology to geometry and affirms that the former is defined by extraction of the social forms from the contents of social life. As examples of contents, which are themselves not social, our sociologist mentions desires, drives, needs, interests and impulses of all sorts; as examples of forms, he mentions, among others, conflict, subordination, competition and imitation. Although it is not clear if the forms are extracted through induction, abstraction or intuition, it is understood that social forms structure the interactions from within. The abstracted forms are themselves not abstractions. They are not analytical, but synthetic, which is just another way of saying that they are not imposed from without by the analyst (as is the case with ideal-types), but extracted or abstracted by the analyst from the actors themselves through interpretation and reconstruction of the social categories of understanding that make common action possible. Actors are driven by certain needs, but it is only when these needs are canalized and directed, moulded and shaped by a social form, that interactions are structured in such a way that the actors become mutually aware of what they are doing together and that they become conscious of the fact that they constitute a community.

The Invisible Church

To illustrate what Simmel means by a form of association, let's take the example of the sociology of the meal.¹⁷ As basic needs, hunger and thirst are contents that drive not only lions but also humans into action. When individuals have a meal together, the needs are sublimated, structured and channelled in such a way that the individuals act together and eat together, following certain unwritten rules (aesthetic and stylistic rules, rules of etiquette, and so on). To have a meal, it is not sufficient to sit at the same table and eat together side by side, as happens in fast food restaurants where anonymous customers share a table. No, it is necessary that diners have consciousness of sitting and eating together and that they intentionally accomplish the joint act of eating together as a common act of commensality.

If the meal is a social form of togetherness, so is the Holy Communion. The communicants who gather around the priest eat the consecrated bread, and this communion in Christ is at the same time a communication of hearts and minds. Thanks to the pneumatic presence of Christ, each communicant communicates directly with God and indirectly with the others, and this communication of hearts and minds is what constitutes society – and also God, because God is a being that becomes in and as He gathers the faithful in a circle around Him (Simmel, 1989: 144).

The example of the Church is a paradigmatic example of what Simmel means by society. Being essentially an 'interspiritual' phenomenon, society is a participative reality created by all the people who partake of and in the group and who are conscious of doing so.¹⁸ As such, society refers to some kind of consciousness of the second degree, a consciousness of consciousness of individuals who are in interaction, while association refers to the reflexive process whereby the members become conscious not only that they are united, but also of what unites them – the form that structures their interactions and makes common action possible. The process of association is a dialectical one of mutual constitution of individuals and society, whereby the latter emerges as a result of the interaction of individuals, while the former are socialized through their participation in social life.

Although Simmel's sociology of the forms of association focuses mainly on the interactions of daily life that take place in situations of co-presence, it can easily be extended to the macro-level. The existence of the 'invisible church', formed by all these individuals who pray in solitude, but are nevertheless united in God, shows that a particular religion virtually includes all the adepts of a given creed. 'In the house of God, there's a place for everybody' – for each and every one. The believers don't have to be physically present. It is enough that they partake of the life in the Spirit, as the Gospel has it, to be included in the larger community of minds that are unified in and by the mediation of the Spirit.

Pushing this example into a more humanist direction, Simmel speculatively concludes his treaty on the sociology of the forms of association with a reference to humanity as a collective subjectivity. In the very last pages of his *Soziologie*, he suggests that cosmopolitanism is the secular religion of individuals who are conscious that they belong to a single species and share a common humanity that transcends and integrates all individuals

into a single society (GSG 11: 860–3). Since globalization has interconnected individuals, communities and societies worldwide into a world system, the idea of a single community of fate has at last become a reality. As a modest contribution to the current debate about recognition and redistribution (Honneth and Frazer, 2003), I'd like explicitly to introduce the Simmelian idea of consciousness as a third dimension of a political and moral philosophy of history for the present. While 'redistribution' refers to the necessity of massive redistribution of the wealth of nations from the overdeveloped North to the global South, 'recognition' focuses on processes of intercultural and interspiritual dialogue between the East and the West. As an overarching category, consciousness, both at an individual and a planetary level, factors in the noetic presuppositions of 'the good life with and for others in just institutions and sustainable environment' that have to be satisfied to bring the human adventure to the next stage of evolution.

Unlike Comte's, Simmel's sociology of religion is not a religious sociology. It transcends itself into a humanist outlook with spiritual overtones. As is always the case with humanism, this anti-religion that transforms sympathy into a religion of humanity, one does not have to delve too deeply to discover religious residues. Simmel's sociology of religion thus confirms Régis Debray's conjecture about the theologico-political dimensions of social life:

Underneath collective identity, any identity, one always finds in filigree the armature in the form of a cross. The vertical connects the humus to the stars. ... The transversal joins the members of the same group together one to another. Let's call the ordinate the *meta-axis* and the abscissa the *inter-axis*.

(Debray, 2003: 237)

Religion as a Cultural Form

A Sphere of 'Its' Own

The distinction between form (categories) and content (*Ding an sich*) is of Kantian origin. It is axiomatic that any content can enter into a multiplicity of forms and, conversely, that any form can contain an infinity of contents. In 'The Sociology of Religion' (1898), which is the first text of his hand that is explicitly devoted to religion, Simmel uses this axiom to analyse the relation between social and religious forms. In the same way as religious contents can enter a social form, religious forms can structure social interactions and give them a religious coloration, as happens, for instance, when the consciousness of togetherness is exacerbated to the point that the individuals feel part of a transcendent totality. What defines religion, according to Simmel, is a relation of participation between a whole and the part, transcendence and immanence, God and the soul. Religion is a merological wonder that realizes what society cannot accomplish: it integrates the part within the whole, while allowing that the part itself becomes a whole, and not just a fragment. It unites the parts with the whole without having to pass through the social processes of competition, differentiation and division of labour. The unity of society is therefore a 'unity of order' (*unitas ordinis*), as Saint Thomas would have it.¹⁹ The harmonization of a heterogeneous whole which consists itself of wholes is made

possible by the common orientation of all participants of the interaction towards the common good.

In a way that foreshadows Durkheim's socio-genesis of religion (Durkheim, 1968), but without its sociologism, Simmel suggests that religion finds its origin in social life. Out of the social interactions between individuals, a sense of unity emerges which is then idealized, projected in the sky and symbolized by God, who represents and performs the unity of the group. Everything happens as if at a certain moment the social unity which results from the interactions is somehow heightened and transubstantiated into an extra-social substance that symbolizes in pure form the unity to which the group aspires, but can never attain in reality. The individuals in interaction become conscious of themselves in religion, and when religion becomes as it were conscious of itself, this consciousness of the third order emerges as a special form from the undifferentiated magma of cultural significations.

In his monograph on religion (1912), Simmel examines at length the analogies between the social and the religious. He builds up a sequence that goes from quasi-religious feelings of unity via social solidarity to religion as such, suggesting that religion is nothing but a crystallization of psychic energies in an autonomous cultural form. What appears from one side as an objectivation of social interactions that becomes conscious of itself can be analysed from the other side as a complex of objective contents that follows its own laws and has its own logic, which can be analysed, systematized and further developed by specialists of the religious domain (from magicians and prophets to priests and theologians). As an autonomous cultural form, religion is differentiated from other cultural forms, like philosophy, ethics, aesthetics, law, science and technology, for instance, and follows its own laws and rules (Weber's *Eigengesetzlichkeiten*).

At this point where the religious form emerges out of social life as a functionally differentiated and culturally specialized sphere of symbolic contents, Simmel's micro-sociology of the forms of association goes over into an evolutionist macro-sociology of cultural and social differentiation, which will in turn be relayed by a more philosophical approach of religion as a symbolic form that emanates from the soul. While sociology explains the genesis of religion as a cultural form, philosophy can concern itself with its metaphysical content, but to the extent that these contents enter into social relations and influence social life, sociology and philosophy converge, offering alternative interpretations of the same reality.

Initially, society, culture and the individual are undifferentiated. They form as it were a 'cosmic soup' in which all the elements of the universe are plunged. Through interaction between the elements, a structure slowly emerges. This process of structuration is a process of formation of consciousness and as such a process of cultivation of individuals (*Bildung*). Human beings live their life, but unlike animals, they live consciously, use symbols and have culture. Culture is the objective result of conscious action, but when we analyse it not as a product, but as a process, it also appears as its condition. Between culture and consciousness, there's a double mediation. Following the humanist tradition, Simmel conceives of culture as a dialectical process of objectivation and subjectivation.²⁰ Subjects objectivate their thoughts and their actions into a cultural form (objective culture); and by using these forms to express themselves, their identity is shaped and moulded in the process (subjective culture). As civilization progresses and culture

becomes more complex, the cultural form, which unifies and structures the contents of consciousness, starts to fragment. Forms start to proliferate and a progressive process of cultural differentiation sets in.

A Polyphony of Forms

We have already seen that the religious form emerges as a transubstantiation of society (differentiation of society and culture) through which society becomes conscious of itself. But religion is only one symbolic form among others.²¹ Initially, all cultural forms are fused into the religious form. As the form of forms, religion is the cultural matrix out of which the other cultural forms will emerge. Like in a fractal, the 'Urform' reappears in all of the other forms, and this common origin explains why they all offer variations on a pantheistic theme: they all establish connections between the parts and the whole, between the actual elements and a virtual structure of relations in which they are inserted, but they do so differently, which explains why the same element can take on a different meanings in different forms.²² The same line in the sand can indicate a sacred place in the desert (religious form), an arabesque in a painting of Klimt (aesthetic form) or a geometric figure that can be mathematically expressed by a sinus function (scientific form). Like any other symbolic form, religion organizes the totality of the contents of the world into a unity by establishing relations between them, but differently from other symbolic forms, it does so by organizing the elements of the world into a harmonious and peaceful whole. As in a kind of divine 'conspiracy', all the elements breathe and hang together in an atmosphere of serenity and tranquillity. When the elements are integrated into a religious form, they are transposed into another dimension and brought in relation with the transcendent. Each element, be it a stone on the road or a bird on the roof, appears a symbol, as a sign of the beyond, in which the believer sees the finger of God. Consequently, everything is as it should be. This is a perfect world: it is God's world. He is truly present in the nooks and crannies of the universe.

Unlike Max Weber, Simmel does not dramatize the opposition between cultural forms into an eternal conflict between value spheres. When a form incorporates all the contents of the universe into a meaningful totality that establishes relations between them, a 'world' emerges.²³ According to Simmel, the empirical world of everyday life is only one world among others. It is normal that we grant it a practical privilege, but we should not grant it agnoseological priority. The universe is a multiverse. Each of the forms creates its own world, but we should not assume that worlds are bound to clash. In this respect, cultural forms are more like languages. They are functionally equivalent and can peacefully coexist with each other.

Like in a polyphony, they complement and enrich one another. Aspects of one world can be 'reframed' within another form (Goffman, 1974), as happens for instance when a religious theme is treated aesthetically (the representation of the Madonna) or an aesthetic theme is treated scientifically (dating or chromatic analysis of a painting). Moreover, within cultural forms, subforms (and subforms within subforms) can emerge. Looking at the world from within a certain perspective, they all represent a possible vision of the world. Within art, there are different styles, like impressionism and expressionism; in

philosophy, there are different traditions, like the continental and the analytic one; not to mention sociology, where there are more schools than classes in the building with the same name. Likewise, the great world religions offer different visions, hence different versions of the world, but *pace* Samuel Huntington, one should not assume that they necessarily clash and go to war.

Simmel definitely tends towards oecumenism, or its more secular equivalent, cosmopolitanism. All forms are compossible and complementary. One only needs to develop them fully, let them gather all of the fragments of the world within their womb, to discover their limits, and understand that the limits of one form are the conditions of possibility of another. The truth is to be found not in a form, but in the relations between the forms. By interrelating the forms, relativism tends towards absolutism. Taken together, all the possible forms find their unity in God, the ‘geometral of all the forms’, as Leibniz said, that overcomes the limits and reconciles all the forms in an encompassing form.

Religion as a Personal Form

The Problem of the Religious Situation

If Simmel emphasizes the complementarities of cultural forms and grants all of them an equal value in principle, he does not, however, ignore the fact that religions have lost a good deal their credibility since the Enlightenment and can no longer be defended on rational grounds. The process of secularization does not spell the end of religion. It means, however, that, like everything else, religion is caught in the process of individualization and becomes an option – a question of belief rather than certainty.²⁴ For us moderns who have eaten from the tree of knowledge, values are no longer given; they have to be picked and chosen.

Like Max Weber, Simmel is strongly influenced by Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values and is convinced that modernity leads to the disenchantment of the world. Although there’s a nihilist undercurrent in his thought and his philosophy of modernity exemplifies a tragic vision of history, Simmel does, however, succeed in avoiding the pathos of despair that marks Weber’s bleak diagnosis of the present.²⁵ With the collapse of the Christian *ordo*, the ‘sacred canopy’ has been ripped apart (Berger, 1967). The decomposition of the religious sphere into autonomous, differentiated and specialized cultural subspheres, like science, ethics and aesthetics, has led to a generalized loss of meaning. The death of God leaves a void. Values have become arbitrary and everything floats in an air of contingency. Confronted with a meaningless world where nothing is necessary and everything is possible, the denizens of modernity are facing existential anguish. They long for certainty, but as it is no longer to be had, they run after fads, fashions and gurus. They long for unity and a sense of community, but as it is no longer given objectively, it lingers on as a subjective aspiration towards wholeness.

In ‘The Problem of the Religious Situation’ (1911), Simmel presents the predicament of the post-secular age like ours with lucidity: transcendence as such may have evaporated,

but it remains present in its absence as a void (Lacan's 'lack') that cannot be filled. What remains from religion is the yearning for plenitude that expresses itself in

... the need to fulfil fragmentary existence, to reconcile the contradictions within and between people, to find a fixed point in all that is vacillating around us, to find justice in and behind the atrocities of life, to experience unity in and beyond the bewildering multiplicity.

(1989: 114)

Instead of being part of an encompassing symbolic whole that structures all domains of life and keeps society together, the individual has to recompose the totality, projecting as it were his or her aspiration outwards so that it appears as pre-given and pre-ordained (and not merely as the result of the constitutive activities of the Ego).

This capacity of 'divination' (Schleiermacher) that spontaneously reconnects the elements into a symbolic whole has lost its cultural salience. The whole may still be experienced, but it is now psychologically transcoded and understood as the intimate expression of a person who believes that there is 'something' that transcends us. The totality is the objective manifestation of a subjective disposition or inclination of a soul that recognizes the sacred in the phenomenal world and endows it with meaning. Unlike Weber, who granted this spiritual disposition only to the religious virtuosi, Simmel democratizes the faculty of divination and esteems that, in principle, everybody is capable of this kind of synthetic spiritual knowledge a priori and can get access to a transcendent force that is immanent in the world. To the extent that this capacity is now subjective and that society is no longer unified by religion, it has, however, lost its structuring power for the world.

At least in the West, what remains of religion in modernity is now largely individualized. Religion has not disappeared as such, it survives, but with the 'exit' of religion from the public sphere, society is no longer religiously organized.²⁶ After 3,000 years, the theologico-political age has now finally come to its end. The religious person can still communicate with the Divine, but this communion is personal and takes place in the innermost heart of the believer. The absolute has become a personal affair. Religion no longer belongs to the objective spirit, not to mention Hegel's absolute spirit, but the yearning soul who aspires to totality can still experience what Freud referred to as the 'oceanic feeling'. In personal life, and perhaps also in small pneumatic communities, one can overcome the historical disjunction between objective and subjective culture, experiencing unity within as if it were coming from without.

The current infatuation with all kind of New Age philosophies, which is reflected in the contemporary concern with 'spirituality' and 'pluralism' (of which one finds ample echoes in today's sociologies of religion), confirms the topicality of Simmel's 'observations on the spiritual situation of our age' (Jaspers). Since the grand narratives of yore have lost their credibility and religious dogmas their appeal, our epoch seems to be characterized by a growing split between the body and the soul, materialism and spirituality, the search for pleasure and salvation. The frenetic search for 'peace, love and harmony' in the bazaars of religion of the West and the ashrams of the East seeks to overcome this dualism in a spirituality within or without God. Overflowing with healing injunctions, today's self-help manuals that tell and sell mystical experiences for all recycle the

wisdom of the ancient sages of the great religions. They may avoid direct references to God, yet they intimate that everyone can fill the internal void and experience a sense of bliss and connectedness. One does not have to be a religious virtuoso to experience within one's innermost heart a sense of deep connection with all being. Egosyntonic bonding or the connection a person feels when s/he is in tune with him- or herself, others, the world and the cosmos – that is perhaps what Simmel's atheistic mysticism tries to capture and what today's souls are yearning and paying for. The resonances between two historical periods – his 'belle époque' and our 'dark times' – may in part explain why Simmel remains popular not only in academic circles, but also well beyond (though I doubt that readers will encounter his books in the esoteric section of their local bookshop).

Religion without God

Simmel's diagnosis of spirituality in modern times is clear: the modern world is characterized by a generalized loss of meaning. Unlike Weber, Simmel does not sink into despair, but, moving from the transcendent to the transcendental, he introduces religiosity as one of the great categorical forms of consciousness that endows, and continues to endow, the world with meaning. In the age of disenchantment, religion becomes purely subjective – something that takes place in the inner sanctum of the person and no longer structures society as a whole. As a subjective disposition, religiosity is an expression of the soul that yearns for unity and re-enchants the world. Religiosity is a personal property. It changes the outlook of the world, by changing the person, through conversion, for example. Like eroticism, which endows the world with a sensual-affective glow, religiosity does not necessarily presuppose an object – at the limit, it is even compatible with utter solipsism.²⁷ In the same way as the erotic person can be in love with the world without being in love with a person, the mystic can be religious without, however, necessarily believing in the existence of God or adhering to any established religion. With the category of religiosity, Simmel's 'atheology' thus saves religion without having to rescue God. This kind of atheistic mysticism is quite apt for a New Age like ours where individuals are crudely materialist in conduct and vaguely spiritualist in thought.

In his 'Contribution to an Epistemology of Religion' (1902), which can be considered as prolegomena to his theory of the soul, Simmel asks how religion is possible. Unlike Stendhal, he does not want to know how one becomes a priest, but wonders how the transcendent can be understood immanently as a function of the constituting activities of consciousness. What he wants to understand is the *Weltanschauung*, literally, the vision of the world as it is seen, experienced and constituted by the religious person. Just like the artist and the philosopher, who also seek to express their personal stand towards the world within their works, yet differently from them, the religious person reacts to the whole world and considers it from a well-determined perspective that unifies his or her experiences by throwing a new light on the universe. Using a musical analogy, we could say that religiosity expresses being in its own key by arranging all the sounds into a harmonious melody that echoes the divine music of the infinite spheres. The person who is religiously musical has 'spiritual hearing'. Whatever she listens to, she always hears the voice of God whispering to her (lest she hears *Cantatas* – Karl Barth said that when the

angels go about their task praising God, they play only Bach). Although the music of the spheres is played for all, only those who are properly attuned to it will hear the inner music. As Saint Augustine said: 'The things that are created speak to all, but only those who compare this language with the voice of truth that speaks in them, will understand them' (*Confessiones*, Liber 10, Caput 6).

Meditations on the Self

The move from religion to religiosity accompanies the turn toward subjectivity that marks the advent of modernity. It opens up the question of identity: 'What would we become without the help of what does not exist?' (quoted by Debray, 2003: 29) – this puzzling question by Paul Valéry is also Simmel's, though the latter usually refrains from crisp statements about the existence or non-existence of God. One way or another, all of his reflections on religion and religiosity turn around the question of the constitution of a coherent self with a singular identity.²⁸ If religion finds its condition of possibility in a certain mode of attunement of the self, the self, in turn, finds its condition of possibility in religion. Religion, religiosity and the self are caught in a reflexive loop whereby the religious self constitutes the world as a world that is constituted by God, who constitutes the self, who constitutes God. This loop is not a vicious circle; it is more like the hermeneutic one between the whole and the parts. The point is not to get out, but to correctly enter into something that is more encompassing and of which one is always already a part.

Although any religion will do, Simmel sees an elective affinity between religiosity and theist conceptions of a personal God. In the 'Personality of God' (1911), one of his most profound and beautiful essays, and its earlier companion piece 'On Pantheism' (1902), he continues his meditations on the religious unification of the world, but this time he analyses it from the point of view of the self.²⁹ The notion of a coherent self finds its origin in the representation of a personal God. Pantheism or theopantism does offer a unified vision of the universe, intimating that all is one (*Deus sive natura*), but as its movement is centrifugal rather than centripetal, it lacks the moment of closure and centredness that characterizes theist conceptions of God. Although one might think that the idea of a personal God smacks of anthropomorphism, our essayist proposes, in fact, the reverse: the human person is a theomorphism. 'God is not a magnified human being, but the human being is God in miniature' (Simmel, 1989: 98).

By bringing in the notion of personality, and pushing it to its limits, Simmel does not mean to re-enthroned God. He remains within the Kantian fold and introduces the person of God as a regulative idea: God is the perfect person, the 'person of persons', as Scheler would say. The concept of a personal God points to an ideal towards which human beings tend, but which they can never attain.³⁰ All things converge in God; in God all things come harmoniously together (*coincidentia harmonica oppositorum*, to vary a formula of Cusanus).

In accordance with the relativist metaphysics that he develops towards the end of his life, Simmel works out an alternative conception of the self as a 'relational work in progress' (McCole, 2005: 22). The self is not a substance, but a function of unification. Unlike the scholastics, who thought of the self as a *vinculum substantiale*, Simmel conceives of

it as a *vinculum functionale*. It is an ensemble of processes and relations, and nothing else. If the personality is to have any unity, it can only be as a dynamic unity that inter-relates and unifies all contents of the mind into a form. As a kind of metaphysical collector and connector, the self is religious in its very core. As a matter of fact, all concepts of the self are secularized concepts. Although the etymology of the term ‘religion’ is contested, Simmel clearly seems to interpret religion as a personal form that collects and connects (from *ligare*³¹) the elements of the universe in singular fashion, that is, in such a way that the personality of the subject ‘resonates’ (from *per-sonare*³²) in the world s/he encounters and experiences as a mystical garden. It allows the individual not only to interconnect the elements of the world into a cosmos, but also to ‘gather’ him- or herself internally into a well-formed totality that is absolutely unique.

To gather the whole world in the self and bring it internally to unity, the subject needs an external reference that is ‘inside the self, while being infinitely above it’ (*Interior intimo meo et superior summo meo*, Augustinus, *Confessiones*, III, vi. II). The external reference functions as a ‘mirror’ (Lacan): it holds up and reflects an ideal and idealized image of the self.³³ There’s nothing paradoxical in the fact that the individual has to make a detour via God to come to him- or herself. The *eidos* (essence) needs an *eikos* (image). Created in the image of God (*imago Dei*, cf. 1 Co., 11.7), the image of God represents an *Ideal Ich* (Freud). In contemporary parlance, we would say that there’s no identity without representation of unity and no unity without alterity. Unity presupposes externality and projects an alterity that lives within the person. The Other is ‘ecstimate’ (Lacan), an intimate exteriority. Being external, yet internal to the person, this de-doubling of the person who gives him- or herself over to God, but only to find him/herself in the other and the other in him/her, is exactly what characterizes living religion. God symbolizes the permanence of the self, while foreshadowing its transcendence. If God is represented, experienced and felt by the devotee as a personality with and within whom one can enter into contact and communion, it is because He represents an ideal to perfection and holds it up to the subject, summoning him or her to ‘become who they are’ (*‘Werde, der du bist!’*, cf. Nietzsche, 1988, II: 219; III, 519, 563).

The Calling

Thanks to, through and in the Other, the subject can thus realize its unique identity and attain authenticity. As is written in the Gospel: ‘He who is willing to lose his own self today for the sake of the Lord shall be given what is really his own in the future’ (Mark 8.35). In the ‘Salvation of the Soul’ (1903), an early but quite revealing essay, Simmel presents a religious formulation of the aesthetic vision of the self as a unified and coherent, authentic and singular human being that he will develop towards the very end of his life under the slightly oxymoronic heading of the ‘individual law’ (GSG 16: 346–426). Understood as a personal command that comes from higher up and that summons the individual to obey God’s will and follow the path that the One has foreseen for that person, and that person alone, the individual law functions as a *principium individuationis* that expresses the ultimate fulfilment of the person *qua* person.

By sketching out an ideal-Ego that represents what that very person could become if his or her potential was fully realized, the individual law is not an external constraint, but

an inner appeal to become what one authentically is. Like in Saint Augustine, the road inwards leads upwards. By going inwards, the self is drawn upwards and led to the Truth. Appealing to the innermost essence of the person that dwells in the 'inner fortress' (Eckhart), the sublime imperative does not impose this ideal self from without, but whispers to the soul that 'it only needs to throw off its outer veil to become what it already is' (Simmel, 1989: 62). Freeing oneself from one's former self, shedding all the social conditionings, detaching oneself from exteriority and giving oneself over to interiority, so that centre of the person determines the outer reaches of his or her behaviour – this is self-determination and it is through this inner freedom that 'the new man, the noble man' (Meister Eckhart's *Homo nobilis*) comes into being when he follows his calling:

In God, with God and through God, one has to learn to act in such a way that the interiority manifests itself in the external operation, that one reintroduces the external operation within the interiority and gets used to act in this way without constraint. Because one has to turn one's gaze towards this internal operation and act from there, whether one is reading, praying or accomplishing external works.

(Eckhart, 1971: 97)³⁴

When Simmel will return to the issue of authenticity and singularity towards the end of his life, Meister Eckhart's insistence on spiritual nobility will be tuned down and substituted by an appeal to Nietzschean distinction and strength.³⁵ The religious discourse about the ultimate fulfilment of the soul will be translated in the secular language of the aesthetics of the self. Against the generalizing eighteenth-century conception of Man as a 'species being' (*Gattungswesen*), he introduces the romantic topos of *Lebenskunst*, or the art of life (Vandenbergh, 2000).

In the context of a vitalist critique of Kant's depersonalizing universalism – the moral law holds for all and thus for nobody – Simmel advances the idea of 'the individual law' as an alternative to the categorical imperative. With the idea of the individual law, he proposes an aesthetic ethics that conceives of the well-formed individual as a living work of art. In the same way as the succession of notes forms a melody or an ensemble of lines and colours a painting, all the acts of the person, when they are intimately connected to the inner core of the person, form a harmonious, organic whole that can reckon with unanimous approval and has universal validity, even if it is realized only in a single case.

In his discussions of singularity, Simmel makes largely an abstraction of society. This is no accident. Following Nietzsche and the anti-Enlightenment, he privileges difference over equality and focuses on the uniqueness of the individual, forgetting that modern societies are individualist, universalist and egalitarian. As a result, all selves are deemed equally unique, but to the extent that they are, they are, paradoxically, virtually non-social. In modern societies, with a high degree of division of labour, specialization and participation in varied circles of sociability, socialization is compatible with individualization, but to become a singular, unique individual, the non-social element of the soul has to be factored in.³⁶ Through interaction with others and insertion into differentiated social networks, the individual becomes what s/he is, a social being with a distinct social identity, who is a member of a class, plays a role, has a family, and so on. As an interactive

practice that integrates persons with all their natural differences through processes of allocation (of roles) and classification (of individuals), society forms a differentiated unity that does not necessarily level; to the contrary, it offers to all the possibility of individualization. But to become a singular individual, unique in its own class (of which s/he is the only member) and, thus, unclassifiable, the individual has to withdraw from society into the interiority and connect with the deepest layers of the soul. It is only there that through 'internal conversations' the subject comes to realize its full potential as an incomparable individual (*individuum ineffabile*) with an unfathomable depth that stretches beyond the furthest point of clear expression.³⁷

In his monograph on religion, Simmel speculates at length about the relation between society and the individual. How is it possible, he asks, that a part can be integrated in a whole, if that part is itself a whole? His tentative answer is that the conflict between part and whole cannot be overcome in society, but that religion offers a unique template in which the full development of the individual is not incompatible with the full development of the community: 'The accomplished society would be one which is composed of accomplished individuals' (1989: 149). The reason for this merological miracle is that the Church, just like the Umma, is itself a living community that embraces all souls (including the dead) and finds its accomplishment as each and every one of its members realizes his or her full potential, that is, its *eidos*, and fulfils his or her calling. In the house of God, there's a place for all. The faithful are not in competition with each other, but in communion. Unlike society, the religious community does not have to pass through the travails of functional differentiation to integrate its members in its bosom. It therefore represents, prefigures and realizes the ideal society (as the secularized Kingdom of God).

Sub Specie Animae

Influenced by the mysticism of Meister Eckhart, the romanticism of the '*Sturm und Drang*' movement (Novalis, Goethe and Schlegel), and, last but not least, the philosophy of life of Bergson, Simmel is groping for a deeper unity that overcomes and overflows the divisions and fragmentations of existence. Towards the end of his life (but the intuition was there from the very beginning of his career), he finds the unity in the concept of Life. Metaphysically speaking, the essence of life is that it flows. As a force of life, life is an anonymous flux that flows, vitalizes and animates nature. Like animals, we humans can experience and feel the life that flows through and in us as energetic pulses (Reich's *orgon*); but unlike animals, as human beings we are conscious of life and its finitude. Hence, we do not simply live, but we consciously lead our life towards death till we die.³⁸

In life, Simmel finds the unifying force that overcomes all dualisms – between forms and contents, the absolute and the relative, the universal and the particular. Life, but we might as well say the soul, or even God, because for Simmel all these concepts refer to the same processes of unification, but considered from a different angle. Topologically speaking, Simmel's universe is a three-level one: life flows from below, the soul is within and God is above like the stars in the sky. As he writes in one of the notes of his diary: 'I place myself in the concept of life as the centre; from there one way goes to the soul and the I, the other to the Idea, the Kosmos, the Absolute' (Simmel, 1923: 6).

If we understand religion as a form, or, better, as a function, we can say that it interconnects and unifies life, the self and God into a single living trinity (the *trimurti* of Shiva, Vishnu and Brahma, for those who prefer Vedic references). We have already seen that the soul and God are deeply interconnected. Now, to conclude our presentation of Simmel's metaphysical speculations on religion, we have to bring in Life. Life and God are the same, but whereas the former thematizes the original anonymous force as a process from which everything flows (*terminus a quo*), the latter refers to the product towards which everything converges (*terminus ad quem*). Between life and God, there's the soul as a transitional space that interconnects the extremes.

For Simmel religion is, ultimately, a question of the soul (*die Seele*).³⁹ Traditionally, the soul is conceived of as the divine spark within the person. It is the inner space where the Spirit penetrates the person and, by means of this interpenetration into the intimacy of the self, gets individualized, personalized and singularized.⁴⁰ As a realm of mediation (and meditation) between the flux of Life and the eternity of the Forms, the soul connects the human to the divine, the profane to the sacred, the temporal to the eternal. In Simmel's metaphysical reflections on religion, the soul is vitalized while the world for its part gets thoroughly spiritualized. Indeed, the soul is not a substance; it is a form, or, better, it is a living force and function of unification that collects and connects the world into itself. As such, it is a fold. The whole world is folded into the soul, and when it is thus folded, the world appears as a personal and personalized universe that bears the signature of the folder. The part is in the whole, the whole is in the part, and the two are so intimately connected that they form a union and a unity.

The soul is the metaphysical space where reality enters the sphere of experience and gets transfigured into a spiritual universe that is produced by the soul and bears its marks. The soul is, to quote a beautiful phrase of Novalis, the 'inner outer world' (*innere Außenwelt*). As the human being penetrates the world, the world penetrates the soul and is experienced as an epiphany. When the contents of consciousness are received by the soul, they are transposed into another dimension and enter into contact with the absolute. The function of the soul is to concentrate, condense and unify the universe by reconnecting it to life. The world is folded in the soul, while the soul is folded in God and grounded in life. The soul emanates from the depths of life and gathers all its contents by projecting them beyond. The unity of life and the unity of the universe intersect in the unifying function of the soul, which reflects the unity of God. When life and God are thus interconnected in the soul, the extremes touch each other, and by touching each other, they reach the absolute and touch the sublime: the micro-cosmos of the soul is an image of God and, communicating in the Spirit, the soul 'reflects' the macro-cosmos of the universe. Everything happens as if the subject had to project his or her inner unity into infinity to experience in, through and with God, who symbolically represents the unity of the universe, the unity of his or her own soul.

Establishing a mystical correlation between the relative and the absolute, the fugitive and the eternal, the profane and the sacred, the soul is not a substance, but a telic function that interrelates and integrates all the contents into a form. The soul gathers the contents and transforms them from within so that they appear *sub specie aeternitatis*. Although commentators of Simmel have often insisted that he interprets common reality from the point of view of eternity, they have usually overseen that the perspective of eternity is, in

fact, equivalent to the perspective of the soul. When the world is folded in the soul, it is transfigured and appears *sub specie animae* – without divisions, healed, in peace with itself and with the world.

Conclusion: The Monograph on Religion

In the same way as the world converges in the soul, all writings of Simmel on the psychology, sociology, epistemology, aesthetics and metaphysics of religion converge in his booklet on religion (1906, second enlarged edition in 1912). Published in the famous monographic series *Die Gesellschaft*, edited by Martin Buber and whose contributors included, among others, Werner Sombart, Eduard Bernstein and Gustav Landauer, the book gathers all his reflections on religion and religiosity in a single text (Krech, 1998: 227–50).

To conclude, let us try to systematize some of Simmel's main ideas on the relations between the sub-, the inter- and the superhuman with the following catchwords: relativism, religiosity, symbolism and modernity.

First of all, I would like to stress that Simmel's writings on religion bear the mark of their author. Whether he is writing on religion, art, the individual or society, he always relates the elements at the surface to something deeper that interconnects them. Moving from theme to theme via a sequence of analogies, he intimates that everything is in relation with everything and that the world is one. As he conceives of the world as an ensemble of relations, his vision of the world can be characterized as fundamentally relativist (in the Einsteinian sense).

Secondly, the central category of Simmel's writings on religion is not God, but religiosity. Transcendence is immanent. Before anything else, religion is a form of experience of the world that is transcendently grounded in the constitutive activities of the Ego. The religious person experiences the world in a certain way, in a certain mood, so that everything appears interconnected by something that transcends it and encompasses it (typically, though not necessarily, God). As an expression of the soul that yearns for unity, this universal interconnection of things and persons is a subjective accomplishment.

Thirdly, the soul, society, the universe and God are interconnected through analogical relations. As regulative ideas, they all refer to an ideal unity that comes from the depths of life, passes through the soul and is projected into infinity. God is a symbol that represents the unity of the universe, reflects the unity of consciousness in society and evokes the unity of the soul. From this point of view, religion is nothing else but the relation between the relations that binds God, the universe, society and the soul into a unity that has become conscious of itself.

Lastly, with modernity, the old certainties of the past are eroded and religion comes to its end. The 'end of religion' does not mean that religion disappears as such. It simply means that religion no longer structures the whole of society and society as a whole. The end of religion is compatible with the resurgence of religiosity. When religion retreats into the interior of the person, it becomes a question of personal belief. What remains of religion in the modern age is a yearning for wholeness. 'Things fall apart, the centre cannot hold. ... Surely some revelation is at hand. Surely the second coming is at hand' (Yeats).

Notes

This article is dedicated to Harry Kunneman, fellow humanist. The article will also feature as an introduction to the Portuguese translation of Simmel's *Collected Essays on Religion*. I'd like to thank Leopoldo Waizbort, José Luís Garcia, Jorge Claudio Ribeiro, Fernando Suárez Müller, Gabriel Peters, Nathalie Heinich and Harry Kunneman for their generous comments. I hope they will forgive me for projecting my own 'Godless mysticism' onto Simmel's.

1. For a good overview of the sociology of religion at the turn of the twentieth century, see Krech and Tyrell (1995).
2. This omission is now, in part, compensated by a late rediscovery of his work. The publication of his collected writings in twenty-four volumes under the editorship of Otthein Rammstedt is a sign that at last his time has come. For a panoramic overview of current 'Simmelology', I refer the reader to *Simmel Studies* (formerly *Simmel Newsletter*), a journal that is uniquely dedicated to the scholarly study of The Man's work.
3. Whereas the notion of 'weak mysticism' comes from Walter Benjamin, one of Simmel's most original students, the concept of the 'nostalgia of the totally other' (*Sehnsucht nach das Ganz Andere*) comes from the late Horkheimer. These references to the members of the Frankfurt School should suffice to suggest a hidden connection between Simmel's sociology of religion and the messianic materialism of Critical Theory.
4. Peter Berger coined the phrase 'methodological atheism' and defended it in the following terms:

Within the frame of reference [of scientific theorizing] the religious projections can be dealt with only as such, as products of human activity and human consciousness, and rigorous brackets have to be placed around the question as to whether these projections may not also be something else than that. In other words, every inquiry into religious matters that limits itself to the empirically available must necessarily be based on a 'methodological atheism'.

(1967: 100)

Berger himself is not an atheist, however, but a religious Lutheran.

5. With its call for a 'return to the things themselves', phenomenology transforms Kant's noumenon (the unfathomable *Ding an sich*) into a phenomenon, that is, an object of consciousness, the constitution of which can be reflexively and descriptively analysed by the meditating philosopher. With his insistence on forms (categories), Simmel remains within the Kantian fold, but he detranscendentalizes, historicizes and personalizes the forms to such an extent that they become as it were 'empirical a priori' (which is unthinkable for Kantians in good standing). The world cannot be experienced without the schematizing activities of the form, but as the forms themselves are already the product of experience, Simmel seems to be caught in a circle. The point is not to get out of this circle, but how properly to enter it.
6. With his focus on religiosity, Simmel continues the hermeneutic tradition in theology, inaugurated by Schleiermacher, that grounds religion in felt experiences of dependence of God. Simmel's conception of religiosity is akin to Schleiermacher's piety: "Piety is neither a form of knowledge nor a form of action, but a determinate inclination of feeling" (quoted in Krech, 1998: 182).

7. On moods and atmospheres, see the respective articles by Lohmann (1993) and Schmitt (1993).
8. 'De natura rationis est, res sub quadam aeternitatis specie percipere [It is in the nature of reason to consider things as eternal from a certain perspective]' (Spinoza, 1914: 57).
9. Simmel used the suggestive phrase of 'empirical pantheism' in the Preface of the first edition of the *Philosophy of Money*, but withdrew it from the second edition. The adjective is important and suggests that there are different sorts of pantheism – empirical, aesthetic, religious, and so on – all with different shades of meaning.
10. 'All substances, to the extent that they are perceived in space as being simultaneous, are in continuous interaction' (Kant, 1956: B256/A211).
11. The early essay of 1902 on pantheism (GSG 7: 84–91) and the later one on the personality of God (1989: 87–99) are complementary pieces – while pantheism spiritualizes nature, theism humanizes it. Although Simmel continuously drifts off in the direction of free-floating mysticism, he always pulls back at the end and brings in a more personalist conception of God that contracts the universe into a point that 'reflects' the human being and 'pro-jects' its fulfilment into infinity.
12. In my monograph on Simmel, I emphasized the dualist nature of his thought (Vandenberghe, 2001b). Although this characterization is not wrong, his writings on religion allow for a somewhat different reading that foregrounds unity, not as a given, though, but as an aspiration towards wholeness.
13. The old, almost oxymoronic category of 'atheistic mysticism' (which one finds in Fromm, Bataille, Valéry and Delpierre among others) has recently been reintroduced in the French debate by Jean-Claude Bologne (1995). In accord with Simmel's panformism, the French novelist affirms that religious mysticism is only one form of mysticism among others and, introducing various forms of mysticism (cosmic, artistic, erotic), he even says that the connections with religion are the result of a 'historical misunderstanding' (Bologne, 1995: 49). As a practising humanist, I'd like to further explore the idea of a spirituality without God, but this obviously cannot be done here.
14. For a more systematic introduction to Simmel's sociology of religion, to which this article is indebted, see the outstanding work of Volkhard Krech (1998). Krech's book has raised the level and set a new standard for discussions on the theme at hand.
15. 'The term social relationship will be used to denote the behaviour of a plurality of actors insofar as, in its meaningful content, the action of each takes account of that of the other and is oriented in these terms' (Weber, 1968: 13). Following Tönnies, Weber distinguished two types of relationships: traditional communal ones (*Vergemeinschaftungen*) that are based on subjective feelings that they belong together, and modern rational ones (*Vergesellschaftungen*) that rest on interests or rational agreement by mutual consent (Weber, 1968: 21). From a Simmelian perspective, all social relations, including rationalized ones, can and should be analysed as associations.
16. As Luhmann says in an interesting take on the evanescent character of associations:

Ephemeral, trivial, brief distinctions between system and environment develop without any obligations with regards to form and without necessity to legitimate the difference in relation to society. The big forms of societal subsystems are swimming in a sea of continuously newly emerging and new decaying little systems.

(1997: 812)

For a more advanced analysis of these little systems of interactions, see Kieserling (1999).

17. On the sociology of the meal, see GSG 12: 140–7. To work out the example, I have been inspired by Margaret Gilbert's (1989) analysis of 'plural subjects'.
18. For a more theosophic interpretation of participatory collective thought that constitutes society as a society, see Bohm's (1996) interesting reflections on how to experience and observe the processes of association as a participant witness.
19. 'It must be known that the whole which the political group or family constitutes has only a unity of order, for it is not something absolutely one. A part of this whole, therefore, can have an operation that is not the operation of the whole, as a soldier in an army has activity that does not belong to the whole army. However, this whole does have an operation that is not proper to its parts but to the whole' (Aquinas, Eth. I.5, quoted by Prof. Hittinger [2008] in his superb paper on the common good in Catholic social doctrine).
20. For a classic account of the 'guiding concepts' of *Bildungshumanismus*, see the opening pages of *Wahrheit und Methode* (Gadamer, 1975).
21. Cassirer, one of Simmel's former students, has worked out a systematic philosophy of symbolic forms (compare Cassirer, 1964 and Vandenberghe, 2001a).
22. From this point of view, Simmel's pantheism can be understood as a particular instance of panformism. There are as many variants of pantheism as there are forms. Once again, we see that aesthetic pantheism is only a special case of a more general phenomenon.
23. Simmel's philosophy of culture is most clearly presented in the second chapter of *Lebensanschauung*, his philosophical testament (GSG 16: 236–9). For a masterful analysis of 'worldmaking', see Weingartner (1960).
24. On individualization in classic sociology, see Kippele (1998); on individualization in late modernity, see Beck and Beck-Gernsheim (1994) and Heelas et al. (1996); on individualization in religion, see Beck, 2008.
25. In the *Philosophy of Money* (GSG 6) and other philosophical texts, like the 'The Concept and the Tragedy of Culture' (GSG 14: 385–416), Simmel has presented a critical analysis of modern capitalism that prolongs Marx's theory of alienation and anticipates Weber's theory of rationalization. As I have analysed the theories of reification at length elsewhere and do not want to repeat the analysis here, I refer the interested reader to my book on German social theory (Vandenberghe, 1997–8).
26. For an interesting discussion of the role of religion in a post-secular world, see the debate that was sparked by Gauchet's thesis of the 'exit' of religion (Gauchet, 2004).
27. Like religion, which Simmel often compares to love, love is a categorical form. For a collection of his essays on love and gender, see Simmel (1985).
28. As I've been working on Max Scheler's onto-theological phenomenology of love (Vandenberghe, 2006, 2008), I cannot exclude an interpretative overflow from Scheler to Simmel (reversing thereby the real arrow of influence). In spite of the incompatibilities that exist between a Kantian approach to religion (within the bounds of reason) and a Catholic one (within the bounds of Divine love), there are very strong convergences and resonances between the conceptions of subjectivity that one finds in both authors. The difference is in their respective ways of 'approaching' God. While Scheler deduces everything from God (top-down approach), Simmel induces everything from the soul (bottom-up approach).
29. In the following pages I use notions of self, the subject, the individual, the person and the soul interchangeably.
30. Simmel is obviously thinking of Catholicism, but downplays the complication of Trinitarianism. God is one – one substance and three persons (*una substantia et tres personas*), to mention

the canonic formula of the compromise that was reached at the First Council of Nicaea in 325 and that has since become a dogma. (See Claverie, 2003: 313–45 for a discussion of the more arcane aspects of the Christology.) If he would have taken the Trinitarian view of God more seriously, he could have arrived at an alternative conception of identity: multiple identities with plural polyphonic selves.

31. The precise origins of *religio* are murky (Derrida, 2000: 54). While Cicero derives the term from *re-legere* (meaning not only to ‘read’ [scriptures, for instance], but also to ‘choose’, ‘go over again’ or ‘consider carefully’), Lactantius contests this etymology and attaches the term to the verb *re-ligare* (literally, to re-connect, gather). By conceiving of the self as a collector, Simmel follows the tradition of Lactantius and Saint Augustine.
32. In his genealogical history of the concept of the person, Mauss (1950: 350) mentions that the term ‘persona’ derives from the verb ‘*per-sonare*’ and refers to the ‘being that resonates through the mask’. For a fascinating history of the concept of the person, see Ladrière (2001).
33. On the role of mirrors and images (*imago*) in the formation of the self, see Lacan (1966: 90–7). Psychoanalysts will forgive me for taking the freedom to generalize and extend Lacan’s ‘mirror stage’ beyond early childhood.
34. The idea of spiritual nobility is not just of Nietzschean origin. It is well known that Simmel admired the mysticism of Meister Eckhardt, but what is less well known is that he also had a theory of the ‘noble man’ (‘*Quidam homo nobilis*’, in Eckhardt, 1971: 155–75). For a good analysis of the influence of Meister Eckhart’s mysticism on Simmel’s conception of the soul, see Krech (1998: 210–26).
35. On the reception of Nietzsche’s aristocratic ideal of nobility and distinction (*Vornehmheit*) by Simmel, see Lichtblau (1984).
36. The distinction between individualization and singularization has recently been elaborated by Luc Boltanski (2004: 47–9, 57–8) in his ‘terrible’ book on abortion.
37. On the ‘internal conversations’ that we have with ourselves and the role they play in society, see the fascinating book by Archer (2003).
38. The Heideggerian overtones are intentional. There may be a faint echo of the trenches of Verdun in *Sein und Zeit*, but it is directly influenced by Simmel’s metaphysics of death (GSG 16: 297–345), which he wrote while he knew that he was dying.
39. The soul is a master concept not only of his philosophy of religion, but of his whole philosophy of the spirit (Vandenberghe, 2002). The soul is at the heart of all ‘great cultural forms’ (religion, philosophy, art, ethics).
40. For a more sociological account of the personalization of the spirit in the soul and its symbolic representation in personal totems, see the classic chapter on the soul in *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* (Durkheim, 1968: Ch. 8).

References

- Archer M (2003) *Structure, Agency and the Internal Conversation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Beck U and E Beck-Gernsheim E. (eds) (1994) *Riskante Freiheiten*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Beck U (2008) *Der eigene Gott - Von der Friedensfähigkeit und dem Gewaltpotential der Religionen*. Frankfurt am Main: Verlag der Weltreligionen

- Berger P (1967) *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday.
- Bloch E (1969) 'Weisen des "Vielleichts" bei Simmel', pp. 57–60 in *Philosophische Aufsätze zur objektiven Phantasie*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Bohm D (1996) *On Dialogue*. London: Routledge.
- Bologne J-C (1995) *Le mysticisme athée*. Monaco: Rocher.
- Boltanski L (2004) *La condition foetale: Une sociologie de l'engendrement et de l'avortement*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Buber M (1962) *Das Dialogische Prinzip*. Gerlingen: Lambert Schneider.
- Cassirer E (1964) *Philosophie der symbolischen Formen*. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Claverie E (2003) *Les guerres de la vierge. Une anthropologie des apparitions*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Debray R (2003) *Le feu sacré: Fonctions du religieux*. Paris: Gallimard.
- Derrida J (2000) *Foi et savoir*. Paris: Seuil.
- Durkheim É (1968) *Les formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Eckhart Meister (1971) 'De l'homme noble', pp. 154–70 in *Les traités*. Paris: Seuil.
- Frisby D (1981) *Sociological Impressionism. A Reassessment of Georg Simmel's Social Theory*, London: Heinemann.
- Frisby D (1985) *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin*, Cambridge: Polity.
- Gadamer H-G (1975) *Wahrheit und Methode*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Gauchet M (2004) *Un monde désenchanté?* Paris: Éditions de l'atelier.
- Gilbert M (1989) *On Social Facts*. London: Routledge.
- Goffman E (1974) *Frame Analysis*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
- Heelas P, S Lash and P Morris (eds) (1996) *Detraditionalization: Critical Reflections on Authority and Identity*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Hittinger R (2008) 'The Coherence of the Four Basic Principles of Catholic Social Doctrine', pp. 75–123 in M. Archer and P. Donati (eds) *Pursuing the Common Good: How Solidarity and Subsidiarity Can Work Together. Proceedings of the XIVth. Plenary Session of the Pontifical Academy of Social Sciences*. Vatican City.
- Honneth A and N Frazer (2003) *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*. London: Verso.
- Kant I (1956) *Kritik der reinen Vernunft*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band 3. Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft.
- Kieserling A (1999) *Kommunikation unter Anwesenden. Studien über Interaktionssysteme*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Kipple F (1998) *Was heißt Individualisierung? Die Antworten soziologischer Klassiker*. Opladen: Westdeutscher Verlag.
- Kracauer S (1977) *Das Ornament der Masse. Essays*, Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Krech V and H. Tyrell (eds) (1995) *Religionssoziologie um 1900*. Würzburg: Ergon.
- Krech V (1998) *Georg Simmels Religionstheorie*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Lacan J (1966) *Écrits I*. Paris: Seuil.
- Ladrière P (2001) 'La notion de personne héritière d'une longue tradition', pp. 319–68 in *Pour une sociologie de l'éthique*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.

- Landmann M (1957) 'Einleitung', pp. v–xxiii in G. Simmel, *Brücke und Tür*. Stuttgart: Koehler Verlag.
- Landmann M(1968) 'Einleitung des Herausgebers', pp. 7–29 in G. Simmel, *Das individuelle Gesetz: Philosophische Exkurse*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Lash S (2005) 'Lebenssoziologie: Georg Simmel in the Information Age', *Theory, Culture & Society* 22(3): 1–24.
- Lichtblau K (1984) 'Das Pathos der Distanz: Präliminarien zur Nietzsche-Rezeption bei Georg Simmel', pp. 231–81 in H. Dahme and O. Rammstedt (eds) *Georg Simmel und die Moderne: Neue Interpretationen und Materialien*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Lohmann G (1993) 'Zur Rolle von Stimmungen in Zeitdiagnosen', pp. 266–92 in H. Fink-Eitel (ed.) *Zur Philosophie der Gefühle*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Liebersohn H (1988) *Fate and Utopia in German Sociology, 1870–1923*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Luhmann N (1997) *Die Gesellschaft der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- McCole J (2005) 'Georg Simmel and the Philosophy of Religion', *New German Critique* 94: 8–35.
- Mauss M (1950) 'Une catégorie de l'esprit humain: la notion de personne', pp. 331–62 in *Sociologie et anthropologie*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- Nietzsche F (1988) *Sämtliche Werke*. Berlin: DTV-De Gruyter.
- Otto R (1987) *Das Heilige: Über das Irrationale in der Idee des Göttlichen und sein Verhältnis zum Rationalen*. Munich: Beck.
- Scheler M(1980) *Der Formalismus in die Ethik und die Materiale Wertethik: Neuer Versuch zur Grundlegung eines ethischen Personalismus*, in *Gesammelte Werke*, Band II. Bern: Francke Verlag.
- Schmitz H (1993) 'Gefühle als Atmosphären und das affective Betroffensein von ihnen', pp. 33–56 in H. Fink-Eitel (ed.) *Zur Philosophie der Gefühle*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Simmel G (1923) *Fragmente und Aufsätze aus dem Nachlaß*. Munich: Drei Masken Verlag.
- Simmel G (1985) *Schriften zur Philosophie und Soziologie der Geschlechter*. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- Simmel G (1989) *Gesammelte Aufsätze zur Religionssoziologie*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot.
- Simmel G (1989–2006) *Georg Simmel Gesamtausgabe (GSG)*, in 24 Bänden, ed. Otthein Rammstedt. Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp.
- GSG 5: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1894–1900*.
- GSG 6: *Philosophie des Geldes*.
- GSG 7: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1901–1908*, Band 1.
- GSG 10: *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche*.
- GSG 11: *Soziologie. Untersuchungen über die Formen der Vergesellschaftung*.
- GSG 12: *Aufsätze und Abhandlungen 1909 – 1918*, Band 1.
- GSG 14: *Hauptprobleme der Philosophie. Philosophische Kultur*.
- GSG 16: *Lebensanschauung*.
- Spinoza B (1914) *Ethica ordine demonstrata*. The Hague: Nijhoff.
- Susman M (1959) *Die geistige Gestalt Georg Simmels*. Tübingen: Mohr + Bdd
- Taylor C (1979) *Hegel and Modern Society*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Vandenberghe F (1997–8) *Une histoire critique de la sociologie allemande. Aliénation et réification*, 2 vols. Paris: La Découverte.
- Vandenberghe F (2000) 'La loi individuelle. Une éthique nietzschéo-bergsonienne', *Simmel Studies* 10(2): 169–78.

- Vandenberghé F (2001a) 'From Structuralism to Culturalism: Ernst Cassirer's Philosophy of Symbolic Forms', *European Journal of Social Theory* 4(4): 479–97.
- Vandenberghé F (2001b) *La sociologie de Georg Simmel*. Paris: Éditions la Découverte.
- Vandenberghé F (2002) 'Relativisme, relationnisme, structuralisme', *Simmel Studies* 12(1): 41–84.
- Vandenberghé F (2006) 'L'archéologie du valoir. Amour, don et valeurs dans la philosophie de Max Scheler', *Revue du MAUSS* 27: 138–75.
- Vandenberghé F (2008) 'Sociology of the Heart: Max Scheler's Epistemology of Love', *Theory, Culture & Society* 25(3): 17–52.
- Waizbord L (2000) *As aventuras de Simmel*. São Paulo: Editora 34.
- Waizbord L (2007) *A passagem do três ao um. Crítica literária, sociologia, filologia*. São Paulo: Cosanaify.
- Weber M (1968) *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft: Grundriss der verstehenden Soziologie*. Tübingen: Mohr.
- Weingartner R (1960) *Experience and Culture: The Philosophy of Georg Simmel*. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press.

Author biography

Frédéric Vandenberghé is Professor in Sociology at the University Research Institute of Rio de Janeiro (IUPERJ) in Brazil and senior researcher at the University for Humanist Studies in the Netherlands. He is the author of a book on theories of alienation and reification (*A Philosophical History of German Sociology*, Routledge, 2009), a book on biotechnologies (*Complexités du posthumanisme: Trois essais dialectiques sur la sociologie de Bruno Latour*, L'Harmattan, 2006) and a booklet on Georg Simmel (*La sociologie de Georg Simmel*, La Découverte, 2001).