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/Fragments of Modernity/

Theories of Modernity in the Work
of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin

David Frisby

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Introduction

Left to itself . . . life streams on without interruption; its restless rhythm opposes the fixed duration of any particular form. Each cultural form, once it is created, is gnawed at varying rates by the forces of life. As soon as one is fully developed, the next begins to form; after a struggle that may be long or short, it will inevitably succeed its predecessor.

Georg Simmel

. . . as if the present lasts for an eternity.

Siegfried Kracauer, *Georg*

The destructive character sees nothing permanent. But for this very reason he sees ways everywhere. Where others encounter walls or mountains, there too, he sees a way. But because he sees a way everywhere, he has to clear things from it everywhere. Not always by brute force; sometimes by the most refined. Because he sees ways everywhere, he always positions himself at crossroads. No moment can know what the next will bring. What exists he reduces to rubble, not for the sake of the rubble, but for that of the way leading through it.

Walter Benjamin

This study deals in large measure with three writers' approaches to the study of modernity. It is intended as not merely an account of the substantive analysis of modernity in the writings of Georg Simmel (1858–1918), Siegfried Kracauer (1889–1966) and Walter Benjamin (1892–1940) but also a discussion of the methodological problems that arise out of any study of modernity. Hence their diverse analyses of modernity – provisionally understood as the modes of experiencing that which is 'new' in 'modern' society – are intimately connected with diverse methodological presuppositions. What their analyses of modernity have in common is an orientation – often

unwittingly – towards that which Baudelaire, as the originator of the modern concept of modernité, characterised as ‘le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent’.

The theme of modernity itself has once more moved towards the centre of discussion in social theory and, with the presumed arrival of post-modernity and post-modernist movements, it has become a topic for discussion in the literary and aesthetic realms too. This is evident from the debate surrounding Habermas’s interventions into a theory of modernity as well as critical studies by Berman on modernity and by Lyotard on post-modernity, quite apart from the continuing debate on earlier critiques of modernism by Lukács and others in the aesthetic sphere which themselves presuppose a theory of modernity.

Yet such contemporary discussions and debates in these areas are hardly new. Over a century ago, Baudelaire, Marx and Nietzsche, in their different ways, all sought to investigate and adopt a critical stance towards that which is ‘new’ in ‘modern’ society and its cultural manifestations. Furthermore, the establishment of sociology as an independent social scientific discipline in the closing decades of the nineteenth century – and the debates which this process generated then and continues to stimulate today – is hardly intelligible without our recognition of its attempts to delineate the new modes of experiencing the social world which modern society had generated.

Unfortunately, the recent rediscovery of the theme of modernity in the ‘classical’ texts of sociological theory has so far given undue emphasis to the one sociologist who was in many respects a most determined anti-modernist, namely, Max Weber. Although this did not prevent Weber from providing a social theory of modernity that centred around the process of rationalization and its consequences for the individual – especially, according to Habermas, the attendant loss of meaning and loss of control – his treatment of modernity hardly does justice to the important changes in experience that capitalism inaugurated. The concentration upon the theme of modernity in Weber’s work has meant that its significance in the writings of the other sociologists of his generation such as Ferdinand Tönnies, Emile Durkheim and Georg Simmel has only just commenced.

This study of modernity quite deliberately takes up the work of three writers whose work on modernity commences from a different focal point. It starts out with the social theory of modernity developed by Georg Simmel, perhaps the first sociologist of modernity in the sense which Baudelaire had originally given it. The main outlines of Simmel’s theory of modernity were already elaborated in his *Philosophy*

of Money (1900),¹ several years before Weber commenced his reflections upon modernity.

In the case of Siegfried Kracauer, for whom Simmel originally opened ‘the gateway to reality’, we have an instance of a writer whose early work seems to take up a theme in his analysis of modernity that derives directly from Weber, namely the domination of instrumental reason and the consequences of the process of rationalization. However, a closer examination suggests that Kracauer’s discussion of a restricted form of intellectual reasoning (*ratio*) can just as easily be derived from a close reading of Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money* – and Kracauer wrote extensively upon Simmel – and from the elaboration of some central themes in Lukács’s *History and Class Consciousness* (where, of course, Weber’s mediating influence should not be underestimated). Further, Kracauer’s early quasi-existentialist position bears testimony to the works of Kierkegaard, whose writings were in vogue in Germany in the years immediately after the First World War. Finally, it is clear that, at the substantive level, Kracauer was concerned from the mid-1920s onwards with the capitalist process of rationalization in Germany that was under way after the instigation of the Dawes Plan in 1924 and which was accelerated with the deepening capitalist crisis in the later Weimar years. In the light of Kracauer’s increasingly Marxist orientation, it was not difficult for him to regard this process of rationalization as ultimately an irrational one, though on grounds that were by no means derived from Weber’s standpoint.

Whereas Benjamin’s early work displays an often quite bewildering conjuncture of sources, his attempt to generate a social theory of modernity that is implicitly announced in *One-Way Street* (1928)² and continued in what has come to be known as the ‘Arcades Project’ is certainly one that owes nothing to Weber’s theory of modernity, despite the fact that it developed important sociological dimensions. Indeed, in the notes to this project only one sociologist is frequently cited: Georg Simmel. The Arcades Project took its original impetus from Aragon’s surrealist vision of the *Passage de l’Opéra* in his *Le Paysan de Paris*. Benjamin’s theory of modernity was to later have its source in the prehistory of modernity, one of whose central locations was the Parisian arcades of the earlier part of the nineteenth century. They were to be conceived as the threshold to a primal world of fantasy, illusion and phantasmagorias that expressed the dream world of capitalism.

If it is the case, therefore, that the three attempts at an investigation of the social dimensions of modernity owe little to Weber’s analysis

of modernity, understood as the delineation of what distinguishes modern western societies from earlier forms of society and from other civilizations, then what is this modernity that they were investigating? In their different ways, Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin were all concerned with the new modes of the perception and experience of social and historical existence set in train by the upheaval of capitalism.

Their central concern was the discontinuous experience of time, space and causality as transitory, fleeting and fortuitous or arbitrary – an experience located in the immediacy of social relations, including our relations with the social and physical environment of the metropolis and our relations with the past.

Such disjunctions, dislocations and disorientations were also taken up in a variety of ways in the literary and artistic movements that even by the late nineteenth century were assembled under the umbrellas of 'the modernist tradition', 'the modern movement' and 'modernism'. One feature which the works of Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin have in common, at least with regard to their investigations of the social dimensions of modernity, is the expression of a strong aesthetic interest in literary and artistic modernism that reacts upon and informs their visions of modernity.

1800s
Simmel wrote frequently upon the literary and artistic movements of his time – upon naturalism and somewhat more indirectly upon the *art nouveau* (*Jugendstil*) movement – and some central figures in art, such as Arnold Böcklin and Rodin, and literature, such as Hauptmann and, more extensively, Stefan George, as well as corresponding with writers such as Paul Ernst and Rilke. More importantly, it is not difficult to see aesthetic movements such as impressionism manifesting themselves in Simmel's own style and mode of presentation. In Kracauer's case, his one novel, *Ginster* that was published anonymously during the Weimar period, was itself hailed as an important modern literary work. A whole range of his contributions to the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and other journals testifies to his critical response to the literary, artistic and, significantly, architectural avant-garde of the period. Of particular note are perhaps his receptions of Kafka, Tretjakov, Döblin, Brecht and, elsewhere, his critical response to the *neue Sachlichkeit* (literally, new objectivity) movement. Above all, Kracauer proved himself to be one of the outstanding film critics of the Weimar period. For Benjamin, too, one must speak not merely of an interest in aesthetic movements such as modernism but also his active participation in their reception. Aside from his early literary criticism and his translations of Baudelaire and Proust, together with

his reception of Kafka, Lesskov, Malraux and many others, his reception of surrealism and the extensive discussion of Brecht's dramatic and political programme bear directly and indirectly upon his own construction of a social theory of modernity. Above all, however, the centrality of Baudelaire's work for the Arcades Project testifies to a crucial source of his insights into the world of modernity in the nineteenth century. All this is quite apart from both Kracauer and Benjamin's interest and participation in new mass media such as film and radio.

Not surprisingly, therefore, the search for a social theory of modernity is fused with that of a concern for the aims and sometimes techniques of modernism in all three writers. Indeed, none of them can be reduced to the simple category of social theorists of modernity and least of all can they be readily incorporated into a single profession such as sociology. Nonetheless, it is their contributions to a social theory of modernity that is at issue here. And of the three writers, Simmel's inclusion requires least justification. If Simmel's contribution to a theory of modernity has, until recently, largely been neglected, then that of Kracauer has – along with his other contributions to social theory – been almost totally ignored. It is not merely that Kracauer's contribution to critical theory has been overshadowed by that of other members of the Frankfurt School circle but that some of its members – notably Adorno – seriously undervalued it. This is especially unfortunate since, if the metropolis is one of the key sites for the changing modes of experiencing modernity, then Kracauer must be judged to be one of its most sensitive excavators, both in relation to the deciphering of the significance of social space and in relation to the varied configurations of its inhabitants. In particular, and as a kind of critical cultural materialist, Kracauer analysed the culture of modernity in its extremes in the vanguard city of Berlin in Weimar Germany. His ability to decipher the signifiers of social space was matched only by that of Benjamin whose social analysis of modernity focused upon the ambitious attempt to reconstruct the prehistory of modernity in the capital of the nineteenth century: Paris. Despite the fact that Benjamin's projected investigation of modernity is incomplete, it remains one of the most original interventions into this area. For this reason, his project must, like that of Simmel and Kracauer, be reconstructed.

What is distinctive about the three authors' investigations of modernity, and the specific nature of modern life experience, is that they do not commence from an analysis of society as a whole or from

a structural or institutional analysis. In this respect, their analyses have little in common with theories of modernization that have become commonplace in sociology in the twentieth century. Nor, as in the case of social theories of modernism in the literary and artistic sphere, do they have much in common with those theorists such as Lukács who start out from the primacy of the totality of modern society. Rather, all three authors start out from the apparent fragments of social reality. Indeed, this they share with the modernist movement itself.

In turn, this implies that they confront interesting methodological problems that derive, in part, from the object of study itself. If one starts out from Baudelaire's notion of modernity as the fleeting, the transitory and the arbitrary, then there can be no fixed, secure object of study in the accepted sense. The object of study is thus determined not merely by a particular mode of viewing modern life but by the new mode of experiencing a new social reality itself.

In Simmel's case, for instance, the starting point of his analysis of modernity is not the social totality. Rather, it commences with 'the fortuitous fragments of reality'. In other words, the key to the contemporary analysis of modernity does not lie in the direction of an investigation of the social system or even its institutions, but in 'the invisible threads' of social reality, in diverse 'momentary images' or 'snapshots' (*Momentbilder*) of modern social life that are to be viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. Yet such a mode of procedure does not necessarily exclude access to the social totality. In the preface to his important work, *The Philosophy of Money* (1900) – which is one of the major sources for his theory of modernity – Simmel states quite explicitly that 'the unity of these investigations lies . . . in the possibility . . . of finding in each of life's details the totality of its meaning'.³

In Kracauer's essay 'The Mass Ornament' a similar starting point for his analysis can be discerned. There he states that 'the place which an epoch occupies in the historical process is determined more forcefully in the analysis of its insignificant superficial manifestations than from the judgment of the epoch upon itself'.⁴ Yet these 'insignificant superficial manifestations' are not to be understood as typical forms of expression of social reality. They play a very different role than is the case in an orthodox empirical analysis of social reality. In the preface to his fascinating study, *White Collar Workers* (*Die Angestellten* – 1930), Kracauer insists that 'quotations, conversations and observations on the spot form the rudiment of the study. They are not to be taken to be instances of this or that theory but as

exemplary instances of reality'.⁵ Kracauer's analysis of modernity is to be found not merely in this study but also in his early unpublished study, *The Detective Novel* (1922–5) and his later 'societal biography' of Jacques Offenbach (which he was working upon at the same time as Benjamin was engaged upon his Arcades Project) which Kracauer published in 1937.⁶ Above all, his analysis of modernity is to be found in a richly diverse collection of shorter texts (of which 'The Mass Ornament' is one) that he published largely in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* during the Weimar period.

Although Walter Benjamin is the only one of these three authors who quite explicitly goes in search of a theory of modernity, his whole project remains to be reconstructed. Work on this theme commenced in the late 1920s and is evident in his *One-Way Street* (1928), the 'first of Benjamin's writings in the context of his planned prehistory of modernity' (Adorno).⁷ This whole cycle of work, usually referred to as the 'Arcades Project', remained incomplete and almost totally unpublished at his death in 1940. A small part of that work on Baudelaire has been assembled in English in *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*.⁸ Benjamin's 'prehistory of modernity' – itself no orthodox 'historical' project – was to be captured in 'dialectical images' of modernity. It too was to take fragments as its starting point from 'Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century'. Indeed, the Arcades Project as a whole has been viewed as merely a collection of fragments, as a complex montage, to such an extent that Adorno could declare that 'the whole . . . is hardly capable of being reconstructed'.⁹

Whilst one may challenge Adorno's judgement on the Arcades Project, it does remain true that the social theories of modernity need to be reconstructed not merely in Benjamin's work but also in that of Simmel and Kracauer. Nonetheless, their work is replete with social analyses of modernity. Benjamin's focus of attention in the Arcades Project lay in mid-nineteenth century Paris, Simmel's in what one may term a sociology of modes of experiencing modernity around the turn of the century in Berlin, and Kracauer's with Weimar Germany, and especially with 'the newest Germany' (*Die Angestellten*) in the Berlin of the 1920s and early 1930s (by then for many people in Europe *the city of modernity* just as, for Benjamin, Paris was '*the city of modernity*' a century earlier). Sometimes, their analysis extended beyond these spatial and temporal locations. Benjamin, for instance, hoped to extend his analysis of modernity down to the turn of the century in an attempt to show both 'how far *Jugendstil* [art nouveau] appears

already formed in Baudelaire's concept of the new' and to what extent 'Nietzsche's Will to Power (the eternal return)' is prefigured in Baudelaire's 'idée fixe of the new and the ever-same'. The relevance of Kracauer's 'societal biography' of Jacques Offenbach, 'a phantasmagoria of the Second Empire', lay not merely in the fact that this society was 'the immediate predecessor' of modern society but also that the 'motifs in the most diverse spheres' of that earlier society 'still continue to assert themselves today'.

Thematically, Kracauer's Offenbach study – though not his most successful social analysis – is intimately connected with Benjamin's investigation of the Second Empire. In Simmel's case, the connections are indirect. Simmel shared many of the aims of the *Jugendstil* movement at the turn of the century and was deeply indebted to Nietzsche. Indeed, it is at least plausible to inquire how far his sociology of modernity seeks to show how 'the new' is, in fact, 'the ever-same', especially since at least one of his students discerned that 'Simmel dealt with problems *sub specie aeternitatis* while feigning to deal with them *sub specie momenti*' (Arthur Salz).¹⁰

At the biographical level, the relationship between the three writers suggests that our choice is not an arbitrary one. Simmel attracted as students many who were later to become some of the most original critical social theorists, such as Georg Lukács and Ernst Bloch. He also attracted the young Kracauer who, at one point, considered writing his doctoral dissertation under Simmel. Although this did not take place, Kracauer has left us with one of the most sensitive but critical appreciations of Simmel's social theory by any of his students.¹¹ Kracauer's own analysis of modernity owes not a little to Simmel. In Weimar Germany, Kracauer himself had an extensive network of connections with the younger generation of critical social theorists. Aside from his close friendship with the young Adorno and his sometimes uneasy but productive relationship with Bloch, Kracauer was on relatively close terms with Benjamin. As an increasingly prominent reviewer in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* in the late 1920s, Kracauer was responsible for placing a number of Benjamin's short pieces in the newspaper as well as producing one of the most illuminating reviews of Benjamin's *One-Way Street*. For his part, Benjamin was impressed by Kracauer's critical pieces in the *Frankfurter Zeitung* and especially by *Die Angestellten*, which he reviewed twice. Sometimes, as when Benjamin was working on the *exposé* for his Arcades Project during his Paris exile, relations became somewhat strained. However, what they did share in this period of exile was an uneasy and

unsatisfactory relationship to the *Institut für Sozialforschung* (Institute for Social Research) or, as Kracauer termed it (according to Bloch), the *Institut für Sozialfälschung* (Institute for Social Falsification).

Benjamin's contact with the work of Simmel is also worthy of note. Although Scholem confirms that Benjamin was already acquainted with Simmel's work prior to the First World War and that in 1920 he hoped to apply for admission to 'Troeltsch's seminar on Simmel's philosophy of history' (though only as a means of using the library!),¹² evidence of Simmel's influence on Benjamin's early work is difficult to find. One important location is *The Origins of German Tragedy*, where Benjamin secured the vital concept of 'origin' from Simmel's study, *Goethe*.¹³ A much later reference occurs in the first draft of his essay on Baudelaire 'The Paris of the Second Empire in Baudelaire'. Adorno, in his highly critical remarks on this first draft, criticized the use of Simmel's writings.¹⁴ It is apparent from Benjamin's reply that he disagreed with Adorno's 'askance view of Simmel' and that he had found his reading of *The Philosophy of Money* highly stimulating.¹⁵ Indeed, as we can now see from the recently published notes on the Arcades Project,¹⁶ there is one sociologist whose work is cited, often critically, on many occasions – that of Georg Simmel. Interestingly, in the light of the construction of a social theory of modernity, there is not a single reference to the work of Max Weber.

Aside from these methodological, thematic, biographical and textual connections between Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin, there is something which unites all three authors. In their various ways, they were all outsiders, strangers in their own society. Simmel's role as a 'stranger in the academy'¹⁷ (Coser) and his preoccupation with various forms of distance, including social distance, has often been remarked upon. Kracauer's early personal reserve – perhaps the result of a very bad stutter – and his sense of a deep estrangement is captured in his highly autobiographical novel, *Ginster*. Both Kracauer and Benjamin, despite their personal contact with Adorno, remained very much on the margins of the Frankfurt Institute in its exile years and, in Kracauer's case, even in the US exile and the post-war phases too. Benjamin's marginality is manifested with regard to his relations to the academy – witness his rejected Habilitation thesis and the hostility of those such as Horkheimer to its possible resubmission in Frankfurt – and in his extensive publications outside the 'academic' sphere. This characteristic he shares with Simmel. But more than Simmel or Kracauer (who also experienced real

hardship in the Paris exile years), Benjamin's later life appears as a constant struggle for the existence minimum. All three, as outsiders, could experience modernity in a critical manner, they could all view their society as strangers.

Modernité

I am not astounded that Megalopolis which the Arkadians founded in all eagerness, and for which Greece had the highest hopes, should have lost its beauty and ancient prosperity, or that most of it should be ruins nowadays, because I know that the daemonic powers love to turn things continually upside down, and I know that fortune alters everything, strong and weak, things at their beginning and things at their ending, and drives everything with a strong necessity and according to her whim. Mycenae which led the Greeks in the Trojan War, and Nineveh, seat of the Assyrian Kingdom are deserted and demolished . . . The sanctuary of Bel survives at Babylon, but of that Babylon which was the greatest city the sun saw in its time, nothing was left except a fortress wall, like the one at Tiryns in the Argolid. The daemonic power annihilated all these, and Alexander's city in Egypt and Selenkos's city on the Orontes were built yesterday and the day before, and have risen to such greatness and such prosperity because Fortune is favouring them . . . This is how temporary and completely insecure human things are . . .

Pausanias *Guide to Greece*
(Second Century AD)

l'évolution social prend la form d'une *désagrégation spontanée*.
Ferdinand Tönnies

One thing distinguishes modernity from all that is past and gives it its particular character: knowledge of the eternal becoming and disappearance of all things in ceaseless flight and insight into the connectedness of all things, into the dependency of each thing upon every other in the unending chain of what exists.

Hermann Bahr

I

The social theorist who goes in search of a theory of modernity is soon confronted with a paradoxical situation. Social and political theory abounds with attempts to grasp that which is 'new' in 'modern' society. There is no lack of theories of modernization and the process of modernization, many of which take as their starting point the very 'modern' society within which they themselves are located. In particular, sociology now abounds with theories of modernization that refer in large part to the transformation of political, economic and social systems or sub-systems. Sometimes, as Habermas has pointed out with respect to recent neo-conservative social theories of Daniel Bell and others, they are combined with a denunciation of the culture of modernity in order to assert the existence of post-modernity, post-industrialism, post-capitalism.¹ Such theorists betray a desire 'to get rid of the uncompleted project of modernism, that of the Enlightenment'. Lyotard suggests that, for its part, Habermas's critique of modernity rests upon the view that

if modernity has failed, it is in allowing the totality of life to be splintered into independent specialities which are left to the narrow competence of experts, while the concrete individual experiences 'desublimated meaning' and 'destructured form', not as a liberation but in the mode of that immense *ennui* which Baudelaire described over a century ago.²

This is argued by Lyotard in the context of answering what exactly is '*le postmoderne*'. The literary and artistic context within which the question is posed in turn suggests that Lyotard has already fused modernity with modernism in the aesthetic sphere. His answer is that post-modernism 'is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant',³ whilst '*post modern*' would have to be understood according to the paradox of the future (*post*) anterior (*modo*)'.⁴ The implication of Lyotard's argument is that modernism has *not* been superseded. But perhaps a virtue of Lyotard's discussion is that, unlike much aesthetic discourse on modernism, it is not confined to the attention of those who deal solely with art and culture.

The problem faced by a social theory of modernity in this context is that modernity itself becomes subsumed either under modernization or modernism or it disappears altogether as an object of investigation.

The splintered and thereby precarious concept of modernity must itself be reconstructed out of its earlier conceptualizations. It would be possible to commence with that academic discipline which, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, during its struggle to assert itself as an independent discipline often took as its object of study that of which it was a product - modernity. Certainly, the sociology of this period does confront the problem of distilling what is new, what is modern in modern society. Most often, it performed this task by juxtaposing what is new with its opposite. Such a reading of sociology in this period would provide us with Tönnies's contrast between *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft*, Durkheim's opposition of societies based upon mechanical and organic solidarity, Simmel's less pronounced contrast between a society with a non-money economy and a developed (capitalist) money economy and Weber's contrast between all previous 'traditional' societies and those based upon modern western rationalism (modern western capitalism).

With pessimistic hindsight, it has been fashionable in much modern sociological discourse to read all these polarities as if they were grounded in a philosophy of history thesis as to the inevitable transition from one to the other in such a way that the source of their dynamic - be it functional differentiation, rationalization, etc. - not merely produced only negative consequences but obscured the complexities of the 'present' societies and any countervailing tendencies operating within them. Yet, to take but one example, and perhaps the least understood, Tönnies emphasized time and time again not merely that features of *Gemeinschaft* and *Gesellschaft* exist side by side in contemporary society but - and this is a crucial thesis of modernity theories - that *Gesellschaft* 'is only a transitional and superficial phenomenon' which one goes into 'as into a *strange country*'.⁵ Any reading of such social theories which took the modern society they delineate as being a fixed end state (development or 'progress' only existing up to the present) would fail to see the emphasis upon the transitory nature of the 'new', sometimes even the recognition that the 'new' was already doomed.

Thus, it is important to remember that this transitory nature of the new in notions of modernity was associated with crucial changes in time consciousness - and especially a challenge to the notion of unilinear progress - in such a way that the study of modernity could become 'a reconnaissance into an unknown realm, that carries with it the risk of sudden, shocking confrontations' (Habermas).⁶ One possible implication was to see society and social relations in a state of flux, in motion, in ceaseless movement.

Although this view of society took many varied forms in the course of the second half of the nineteenth century and became a central feature of 'modernist' artistic and literary movements in the twentieth century, it is clearly not possible to outline all these developments here. Instead, the treatment of some of the key dimensions of modernity will be extracted from the works of three writers, all of whom play an important role in the subsequent delineations of modernity in the writings of Benjamin and to a lesser extent those of Simmel and, more marginally, Kracauer.

In Benjamin's projected 'prehistory of modernity' that was to focus upon 'Paris - Capital of the Nineteenth Century', one figure came to dominate his study, that of Charles Baudelaire. His work provided Benjamin with a 'fresco of modernity'. Yet Baudelaire is significant in the much more specific sense that he gave the concept of *modernité* its modern meaning in his essay 'The Painter of Modern Life' (written 1859-60 and first published in 1863). Its focus lay in the newness of the present, indeed even to the extent of identifying modernity as that which is new. A second contemporary figure who may be described as a hidden analyst of modernity is, of course, Marx, for whom modernity is a historical phenomenon. Marx's analysis of the dialectics of a society based upon commodity production not merely sought to grasp what was new about capitalist society but, in searching for the dynamics of that social formation, came to recognize it as historically transitory. In the later decades of the nineteenth century, another writer engaged in what can only be described as a radical critique of modernity in which modern society was viewed as decadent. Modernity, for Nietzsche, came to be 'the eternal recurrence of the ever-same'. Even this cursory glance at these three writers provides us with conceptions of modernity as the new, the historical (and transitory) and the ever-same. It is to their contributions to the delineation of the elusive concept of modernity that we now turn.

II

La modernité, c'est le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent, la moitié, de l'art, dont l'autre moitié est l'éternel et l'immuable.

Charles Baudelaire

The true painter, will be the man who extracts from present day life its epic aspects and teaches us in lines and colours to understand how great and poetic we are in our patent-leather shoes and our neckties.

May the real pioneers next year give us the exquisite pleasure of being allowed to celebrate the advent of the truly *new*.

Charles Baudelaire

'No matter what party one may belong to', wrote Baudelaire in 1851, 'it is impossible not to be gripped by the spectacle of this sickly population which swallows the dust of the factories, breathes in particles of cotton, and lets its tissues be permeated by white lead, mercury and all the poisons needed for the production of masterpieces . . . ; of this languishing and pining population to whom *the earth owes its wonders*; who feel a purple and impetuous blood coursing through their veins, and who cast a long, sorrow laden look at the sunlight and shadows of the great parks.' This population is the background against which the outline of the hero stands out. Baudelaire captioned the picture thus presented in his own way. He wrote the words *la modernité* under it.

Walter Benjamin

When Baudelaire introduced the concept of *modernité* in his 'The Painter of Modern Life',⁷ he confessed to the reader: 'I know of no better word to express the idea I have in mind.' He viewed modernity as both a 'quality' of modern life as well as a new object of artistic endeavour. For the painter of modern life, this quality is associated with the notion of newness, with *nouveauté*. Its significance 'as a conscious aim of artistic production' is emphasized by Benjamin:

In Baudelaire's work, the concern is not with the attempt, common to all the arts, to call into life new forms or to gain access to a new side of things but with *the fundamentally new object whose force lies solely in the fact that it is new*, regardless of how repulsive and wretched it may be. [My emphasis.]⁸

This proposed aim of modern painting - which Baudelaire detected in the work of Constantin Guys and elsewhere in Goya and Daumier - coincides with Baudelaire's own artistic intention. However, this should not lead us to assume that even in 'The Painter of Modern Life' or elsewhere in Baudelaire's writings there exists a theoretical 'analysis' of modernity. As Oehler remarks with reference to Baudelaire's earlier writings:

In the search for his conception of modernity, specific guiding images remain before him, but he is not in a position . . . to anticipate theoretically his own advance beyond these preconceptions. This

further step is only indicated by scenes and sketches that Baudelaire continually adds to his argument either without comment or even in a misleading manner.⁹

Some of these guiding images are to be found, of course, in Baudelaire's poetry too and are the subject of Benjamin's analysis almost a century later.

At the heart of Baudelaire's 'phenomenology of modernity' there lies the newness of the present. Baudelaire says: 'the pleasure which we derive from the representation of the present is due not only to the beauty with which it can be invested, but also to its essential quality of being present.'¹⁰ But this presentness is of a transitory nature and this feature gives to modernity its distinctive character since 'by modernity I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable'.¹¹ Indeed, beauty itself is not merely 'made up of an eternal, invariable element' but also 'a relative, circumstantial element, which will be . . . the age, its fashions, its morals, its emotions'.¹² Nonetheless, as Jauss has argued, this aesthetics of the absolutely new was not merely a later variant of the ancient antithesis of the temporal and the eternal:

Just as the transitory, momentary and contingent can only be one half of art that requires of its other half the constant, timeless and universal, so also the historical consciousness of modernité presupposes the eternal as its antithesis . . . timeless beauty is nothing other than the idea of beauty in the status of past experience, an idea created by human beings themselves and continuously abandoned.¹³

Baudelaire's conception of modernity and the tasks set for the modern artist 'liberate the poetic precisely in the fashionable and historical dimensions which classical taste left out of its account of the beautiful'.¹⁴

Yet this very task which Baudelaire set the painter of modern life, namely to capture 'the ephemeral, contingent newness of the present' poses a particular problem of method since 'in trivial life, in the daily metamorphosis of external things, there is a rapid movement which calls for an equal speed of execution from the artist'. It requires a special skill, even a new kind of artistic function: 'Observer, philosopher, flâneur - call him what you will; but . . . you will certainly be led to bestow upon him some adjective which you could not apply

to the painter of eternal, or at least more lasting things' since 'he is the painter of the passing moment and of all the suggestions of eternity that it contains [my emphasis].'¹⁵

This prompts us to ask what distinctive experiences the painter of modern life can call upon, what is his social milieu? As 'a passionate lover of crowds and incognitos' and as a 'man of the world', he resembles Poe's 'Man of the Crowd' who, convalescing from a recent illness, seeks to remember everything in the midst of the urban throng and for whom 'curiosity has become a fatal, irresistible passion'.¹⁶ The capacity for capturing *la nouveauté* resembles this post-illness ability to see everything anew. In like manner, it has affinities with the experience of childhood since 'convalescence' is like a return towards childhood. The convalescent, like the child, is possessed in the highest degree of the faculty of keenly interesting himself in things, be they apparently of the most trivial . . . The child sees everything in a state of newness; he is always drunk.' In this respect, then, 'genius is nothing more nor less than childhood recovered at will - a childhood now equipped for self-expression with manhood's capacities and a power of analysis which enables it to order the mass of raw material which it has involuntarily accumulated.'¹⁷

Armed with the naive gaze of childhood and the obsession with form of adulthood, the artist of modern life goes in search of its fleeting beauty. Where does he look to? Baudelaire's answer is unequivocal:

The crowd is his element . . . His passion and his profession are to become one flesh with the crowd. For the perfect flâneur, for the passionate spectator, it is an immense joy to set up house in the heart of the multitude, amid the ebb and flow of movement, in the midst of the fugitive and the infinite. To be away from home and yet to feel oneself everywhere at home; to see the world, to be at the centre of the world, and yet to remain hidden from the world . . . The spectator is a prince who everywhere rejoices in his incognito.¹⁸

Entry into the crowd is as though entering 'a magical society of dreams' or 'as though it were an immense reservoir of electrical energy'. The artist himself is like 'a mirror as vast as the crowd itself' or 'a kaleidoscope gifted with consciousness' that reproduces 'the multiplicity of life and the flickering grace of all the elements of life . . . at every instant rendering and explaining it in pictures more living than life itself, which is always unstable and fugitive'.¹⁹

But despite the transitoriness of the crowd, the artist of modern life seeks out its eternal beauty while not neglecting its slightest and

newest modification. On the one hand, 'if a fashion or the cut of a garment has been slightly modified . . . his eagle eye will have already spotted it from however great a distance'. Yet on the other hand, the artist of modern life 'marvels at the eternal beauty and the amazing harmony of life in the capital cities, a harmony so providentially maintained amid the turmoil of human freedom. He gazes upon the landscapes of the great city – landscapes of stone, caressed by the mist or buffeted by the sun.' The resulting 'phantasmagoria' of modern life that has been distilled from nature results from 'a perceptiveness acute and magical by reason of its innocence'.²⁰

Yet this very perceptiveness suggests that the painter of modern life is not merely a *flâneur* since he 'has an aim loftier than that of a mere *flâneur*', namely the systematic search for modernity. His task is that of 'seeking out and expounding the beauty of *modernity*'. The artist must grasp 'this transitory, fugitive element, whose metamorphoses are so rapid'. Only the artist of modern life can release this beauty from its most trivial externalities since, 'for most of us . . . for whom nature has no existence save by reference to utility, the fantastic reality of life has become singularly diluted'.²¹ The artist, on the other hand, concerned with 'the outward show of life, such as it is to be seen in the capitals of the civilised world', is able 'to express at once the attitude and the gesture of human beings . . . and their luminous explosion in space'.²²

Where, then, is this elusive modernity located, if not merely in 'the landscapes of the great city', with their threatening crowds and 'pomps and circumstances'? Baudelaire chose to emphasize its location in the fleeting beauty of *fashion*, 'a symptom of the taste for the ideal which floats on the surface of all the crude, terrestrial and loathsome bric-a-brac that the natural life accumulates in the human brain', 'an ideal for which the restless human mind feels a constant, titillating hunger'.²³ In fact, fashions retain 'the moral and aesthetic feeling of their time'. Again, the artist's task is 'to extract from fashion whatever element it may contain of poetry within history, *to distil the eternal from the transitory* [my emphasis]'.²⁴ And here we may concur with Oehler that fashion is not merely a feature of modernity for Baudelaire; rather, 'for him fashion is the salt of modernity'.²⁵ It is also the starting point for his aesthetics since

it contains a dual attraction. It embodies the poetic in the historical, the eternal in the transitional; in it there arises beauty not as a permanent trustworthy ideal but as the notion that the human being

himself makes of beauty, in which he betrays the morality and aesthetics of his epoch and which, like the latter, permits him to be what he wishes.²⁶

The centrality of fashion which we ourselves create and within which 'the eternal part of beauty will be veiled' challenges the timeless notion of beauty and renders it historical. Now the eternal lies in the transitory, in the temporal, 'for almost all our originality comes from the seal which Time imprints on our sensations'.²⁷

In turn, the total devotion to fashion is to be found in a fast disappearing social type, the dandy who, 'even if blasé, has no other occupation than the perpetual pursuit of happiness'. In possession of time and money in quantity, 'these beings have no other calling but to cultivate the idea of beauty in their persons'. As 'a kind of cult of the self' dandyism is also 'a kind of religion'. It flowers, says Baudelaire, in periods of transition from aristocracy to democracy. It is 'the last spark of heroism amid decadence', 'a sunset; like the declining daystar, it is glorious, without heat and full of melancholy'.²⁸ Dandies are, as Lefebvre remarks, 'spontaneous (as opposed to professional) artists'.²⁹ Baudelaire saw dandyism as the last heroic stand against bourgeois *ennui*. He did not live to see its resurgence in the aestheticism and decadence of the fin de siècle. The artistic production of this second phase constituted, for Benjamin, the second moment of modernity, the analysis of which he was unable to complete.

Baudelaire's essay on the painter of modern life gives little indication of the dark side of modernity that is already indicated in the title of his most famous series of poems *Les Fleurs du Mal*. It is there, in *Spleen* and other writings, that the images 'pregnant with dreams and evocations' of 'the savagery that lurks in the midst of civilisation' are to be found. There, too, is to be found a historical dimension of Baudelaire's work, one that – as Oehler and Sahlberg have shown – is more political than even Benjamin's interpretation would suggest.³⁰ Baudelaire's poetic filtering of the 'harsh refuse of modernity' (Oehler) and his capacity for 'extracting beauty from evil' possess an important aesthetic function: 'The negative beautiful dimensions of modern reality are the *materia prima* of the utopian art propagated by Baudelaire, a necessary transitional stage on the way to the absolutely new.' But as Oehler goes on to indicate, this aesthetic aim is also a critical one, especially in his work up to and around the Revolution of 1848: 'The essence of modern aesthetics, that Baudelaire sketched

out on the eve of the 1848 Revolution, consists however no longer merely in a romantic adherence to negativity; it is a dialectical transcendence and supercession by means of two "fundamental literary qualities: surrealism and irony", of that bourgeois newness which was soon to bore everyone.³¹

Having liberated modern aesthetics from its mesmerism with a timeless past, Baudelaire did not intend that the presentation of modernity would replace it with the aesthetics of a timeless present. Indeed, he intended the aesthetic representation of the 'modern' world, often as its opposite, one that would reveal the 'harsh refuse of modernity', 'the savagery that lurks in the midst of civilisation' and its 'living monstrosities'.³² Such a view of modernity was to commend itself subsequently to Benjamin, for whom there was no object of civilization that was not, at the same time, the product of barbarism.³³

Baudelaire's introduction of the concept of *modernité* and his presentation of its temporal, spatial and causal (reduced to the fortuitous) dimensions, however unsystematic, proved to be central to both the future debate on modernism (and the modern hero) and, especially in Benjamin's work, the attempt to generate a social theory of modernity. The location of *modernité* in various modes of experiencing modern metropolitan life and the problem of its artistic representation unwittingly created problems for those social theorists who wished to examine the fleeting, transitory and the fortuitous in modern social life. The dialectic of the transitory and the eternal, already present in Baudelaire's aesthetics, was transposed by the social theorist of modernity into dimensions of social life itself.

III

The reform of consciousness consists entirely in making the world aware of its own consciousness, in arousing it from its dream of itself, in explaining its own actions to it.

Karl Marx, *Early Writings*

Constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones. All fixed, fast-frozen relationships, with their train of venerable ideas and opinions, are swept away, all new-formed ones become obsolete before they can ossify. All that is solid melts into air, all that is holy is profaned and men

at last are forced to face with sober senses the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow men.

Karl Marx, *Communist Manifesto*

Value . . . does not have its description branded on its forehead. Rather, it transforms every product of labour into a social hieroglyphic. Later on, human beings try to decipher the hieroglyphic, to get behind the secret of their own social product, for the determination of useful objects as values is as much their social product as is their language.

Karl Marx, *Capital*

Baudelaire was not alone in sensing the transformation of modern experience into the temporally fleeting and the spatially transitory and the concomitant appearance of events as arbitrary and fortuitous. Berman has argued that we should give due recognition to Marx as 'the first and greatest of modernists'³⁴ and not merely see him as a major contributor to theories of modernization. Berman maintains that crucial aspects of modernity and critical reflection upon them are contained in Marx's work. How far is this the case?

Certainly there is evidence of an analysis of the internal dynamic of modernity in Marx's account of the 'unleashing' of productive forces, production relations and social relations in general. In the *Communist Manifesto* (1848)³⁵ - 'the archetype of a century of modernist manifestos and movements to come' (Berman)³⁶ - Marx radically characterizes the 'new' historical configuration of capitalism as one in which 'constant revolutionising of production, uninterrupted disturbance of all social relations, everlasting uncertainty and agitation distinguish the bourgeois epoch from all earlier ones'. Marx concludes that this permanent sweeping away of all earlier fixed relationships and the rapid disappearance of all newly formed ones leads to a situation in which human beings for the very first time can confront 'the real conditions of their lives and their relations with their fellow beings'. Berman poses an opposite possibility, namely that "'uninterrupted disturbance, everlasting uncertainty and agitation'", instead of subverting this society, actually serves to strengthen it'.³⁷

Certainly this vision of a '*révolution en permanence*' (Proudhon) is an impossible one for those who seek to dominate such a society. Any society which requires for its dynamic the revolutionizing of production as a permanent (or even periodic) process requires at the same time the stabilization of some social relations that are necessary for this mode of production. Alongside a need for the permanent adaptability of individual personalities (secured not merely by virtue of work

discipline), there is a corresponding necessity to maintain crucial relationships between capital and labour. In other words, not everything is allowed to be swept away and, as we shall see, not all illusions are permanently dissolved.

Confronted with this revolutionizing of ‘the instruments of production, and thereby the relations of production, and with them the whole relations of society’,³⁸ what is the role of those sciences devoted to the study of society? One possibility is to go in search of the ‘laws of motion’ of this society that is in permanent flux. Marx’s option, to uncover the dynamic of capitalist society and apply that knowledge to that society within ‘the vanguard of movement’ with the aim of its transformation, was not the only one available. To take but one contemporary example, Lorenz von Stein could assert, in the light of the complex of movements in modern society, that ‘the life of European society is such an infinitely multifarious, restless to and fro’, whose movements themselves were caught ‘in the threads that lead through the labyrinth of movement’ in such a way that ‘most see nothing of the motions of things and the law of this life’. One of the ways out of this ‘labyrinth of movement’ lay for Stein in a ‘System of Statistics’, ‘whose foundation is the fact of moving energy’.³⁹ The subsequent history of the social sciences suggests that another option lay in seeking out the sources of stabilization and integration in modern society.

Even Marx’s search for the ‘laws of motion’ of capitalist society proved more difficult than his early work suggested. Whereas in 1848 Marx could assert that the fundamental relations in bourgeois society had been rid of their ‘religious and political illusions’, or that ‘the bourgeoisie has stripped of its halo every occupation hitherto honoured and looked upon with reverent awe’ and has ‘torn away’ the ‘sentimental veil’ from the family, he was much less certain two decades later that social relations had been stripped of their illusions. Rather than people being ‘forced to face with sober senses’ their real conditions and social relations, the latter appeared only in their fetishized form. The task of a critical social science – in contrast to a ‘vulgar economy’ that merely reproduced the ways in which relations ‘appear’ to its participants – lay in a confrontation with the ‘secret’ of ‘the fetishism of the commodity’ and its ‘mysterious character’ in order to ‘decipher the hieroglyphic’ of the commodity form. As Benjamin was later to recognize in his ‘prehistory of modernity’, the commodity form not merely symbolizes social relations of modernity, it is a central source of their origin. The ‘phantasmagoria’ of the world

of commodities is precisely a world in motion, in flux, in which all values are transitory and all relations are fleeting and indifferent. In part this was also recognized by Simmel in his analysis of the consequences of the mature money (implicitly capitalist) economy. But though this world of commodities appears to be permanently transitory, it goes together with ‘the continuous reproduction of the same relations – the relations which postulate capitalist production’.⁴⁰ It thus provides Benjamin with one of his images of modernity as the dialectic of the new and the ever-same.

But before raising some aspects of the theory of commodity fetishism, it should be emphasized that Marx’s analysis of the commodity bears directly upon a methodological approach to modernity that takes as its starting point the fragment of social reality. Marx commences his most fully developed analysis of the capitalist system as a whole in *Capital* with an examination of its seemingly most insignificant element – the commodity. As Marx himself acknowledged, ‘the understanding of the first chapter . . . will . . . present the greatest difficulties’.⁴¹ Economic investigations, Marx argues, have been more successful at the ‘analysis of forms which are much richer in content and more complex’ than the value form, in part because ‘the complete body is easier to study than its cells’. Yet,

for bourgeois society, the commodity-form of the product of labour, or the value-form of the commodity is the economic cell-form. To the superficial observer, the analysis of these forms seems to turn upon minutiae. It does in fact deal with minutiae, but so similarly does microscopic anatomy.⁴²

By commencing with the ‘elementary form’ in which ‘the wealth of societies in which the capitalist mode of production prevails appears’, Marx sought to unravel the ‘secret’ of the value form. This seemingly insignificant fragment of capitalist production appears to us as something that we might indeed easily overlook: ‘A commodity appears at first sight an extremely obvious, trivial thing. But its analysis brings out that it is a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties.’⁴³

One of the prices to be paid for the phenomenal development of the productive forces under capitalism is that what is actually occurring in capitalist transactions is not merely veiled but appears to us in an inverted form. Whereas in earlier forms of society, the social relations of production are ‘much more simple and transparent’, under

capitalism the products of labour, for instance, are surrounded by 'mystery', by 'magic and necromancy'. Indeed, the 'finished form of the world of commodities - the money form - . . . conceals the social character of private labour and the social relations between the individual workers, by making those relations appear as relations between material objects, instead of revealing them plainly'.⁴⁴ Mesmerized, as it were, by the fleeting and arbitrary relations between what is exchanged, it becomes all the more difficult to recognize that 'in the midst of the accidental and ever-fluctuating exchange relations between the products, the labour-time socially necessary to produce them asserts itself as a regulative law of nature'.⁴⁵ In other words, that which appears as arbitrary and fleeting hides the ever-same.

Stated differently, 'the mysterious character of the commodity-form' arises from the fact that

the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men's own labour themselves, as the socio-natural properties of these things . . . As against this, the commodity-form, and the value-relation of the products of labour within which it appears, have absolutely no connection with the physical nature of the commodity and the material [*dinglich*] relations arising out of this. It is nothing but the definite social relation between men themselves which assumes here, for them, the fantastic form of a relation between things.⁴⁶

One implication of the existence of this new 'veil' which envelops social relations within the capitalist mode of production is that their analysis cannot remain confined to 'their form of existence as it appears on the surface, divorced from the hidden connections and the intermediate connecting links'.⁴⁷ It cannot remain with the 'banal and complacent notions held by the bourgeois agents of production about their own world'.⁴⁸ A critical analysis must investigate 'the real internal framework [*Zusammenhang*] of these relations'.⁴⁹

The starting point of that analysis is the seemingly insignificant cell of the commodity and the commodity form, but not conceived as an entity that is merely to be described in its phenomenal form, as if it were a natural product. The commodity form possesses a historical specificity that is often overlooked, even within classical political economy. Marx maintains that

The value-form of the product of labour is the most abstract, but also the most universal form of the bourgeois mode of production; by that fact it stamps the bourgeois mode of production as a particular kind of social

production of a historical and transitory character. If we then make the mistake of treating it as the eternal natural form of social production, we necessarily overlook the specificity of the value-form, and consequently of the commodity form together with its further developments, the money form, the capital form, etc. [My emphasis.]⁵⁰

Thus, whereas we have already seen that Marx's analysis of the commodity locates one dimension of modernity in the continuous appearance of new commodities which hides the reproduction of the same relations of production, Marx here points to the fact that this particular mode of production hides its 'historical and transitory character' in the illusion of 'the eternal natural form of social production'.

Further, the commodity form extends its 'necromancy' throughout bourgeois society, creating 'the riddle of the money fetish' of 'the magic of money', 'the perfect fetish' of 'the consummate automatic fetish' of interest-bearing capital and 'the most fetishistic expression of the relations of capitalist production' in 'the form of revenue and the sources of revenue'. The riddles of the hieroglyphics of $c - m - c$, $M - M'$ and the 'Trinity Formula' of Rent (Land) - Interest (Capital) - Wages (Labour) only 'become visible and dazzling to our eyes' when we reject the standpoint of 'the participants in capitalist production' who 'live in a bewitched world'.⁵¹

The 'mystery' of the universal equivalent is resolved once money is seen as 'the direct incarnation of all human labour'. By means of money,

Men are henceforth related to each other in their social process of production in a purely atomistic way. Their own relations of production therefore assume a material shape which is independent of their control and their conscious individual action. This situation is manifested first by the fact that the products of men's labour universally take on the form of commodities. The riddle of the money fetish is therefore the riddle of the commodity fetish.⁵²

Yet it is not merely the commodity and money which appear in a fetishized form in capitalist society. Capital itself appears in a fetishized form but neither when it is located in the production where 'the relation of the capitalist to the worker is always presupposed and assumed' nor when it appears in the circulation process as merchant capital, where at least profit 'is explained as a result of exchange, that is,

as arising from a social relation and not from a thing'. Rather, when capital appears as interest-bearing capital or money capital, it appears as 'capital in its finished form . . . and therefore yields a definite profit in a definite period of time'. Money capital here 'becomes very much obscured, something dark and mysterious'. In other words, when money capital as $M - M'$ hides $M - C - M'$, it becomes 'the consummate *automatic fetish*, the self-expanding value, the money-making money, and in this form it no longer bears any trace of its origin. The social relation is consummated as a relation of things (money, commodities) to themselves,⁵³ and 'instead of the real conversion of money into capital, there appears only the empty form of this process'.⁵⁴ Marx takes the riddle of 'the perfect fetish' a stage further to the point at which 'capital which yields "compound interest"' becomes 'the complete *objectification, inversion and derangement* of capital as interest-bearing capital', 'the incomprehensible form of capital'. Here, 'it appears as a Moloch, demanding the whole world as a sacrifice belonging to it of right, whose legitimate demands, arising from its very nature, are however never met and are always frustrated by a mysterious fate'.⁵⁵

'This bewitched and distorted world' of the capitalist mode of production which creates one 'mystical being' after another, is completed in what Marx terms the 'Trinity Formula': 'Capital-profit (profits of enterprise plus interest), land-ground rent, labour-wages, this trinity form holds in itself all the mysteries of the social production process'.⁵⁶ Indeed, it is 'this economic trinity as the connection between the components of value and wealth in general and its sources' which

completes the mystification of the capitalist mode of production, the reification of social relations, and the immediate coalescence of the material relations of production with their historical and social specificity: the bewitched, distorted and upside-down world haunted by Monsieur le Capital and Madame la Terre, who are at the same time social characters and mere things.⁵⁷

For those 'who feel completely at home precisely with the *alienated form* in which the different parts of value confront one another', including those who inhabit 'the *graveyard* of this science' of political economy, 'the different forms of surplus-value and configurations of capitalist production do not confront one another as alienated forms, but as heterogeneous and independent forms, merely different from

one another but not *antagonistic*'.⁵⁸ Hence, these 'factors of production' and the different revenues,

do not stand in any hostile connection to one another because they have no inner connection whatsoever. If they nevertheless work together in production, then it is a harmonious action, an expression of harmony . . . Insofar as there is any contradiction between them, it arises merely from competition as to which of the agents shall get more of the value they have jointly created.⁵⁹

Only the most critical analysis, which accepts that 'all science would be superfluous if the form of appearance of things directly coincided with their essence', is capable of illuminating the 'metamorphoses' of the elements of the capitalist mode of production in order to reveal their 'hidden' 'inner connections'.

When all this is conceded, it becomes clear that Marx himself was not a modernist in the sense of identifying with the experience of modernity that he outlined. When Habermas maintains, for instance, in relation to the project of modernity that 'in the over-evaluation of the transitory, the fleeting and the ephemeral . . . there is expressed just as much the desire for an untarnished, still intact present',⁶⁰ then this in no way applies to Marx's account of modernity, which neither expresses this secret desire for present-day society nor hides an 'abstract opposition to the past'. The capitalist society which Marx analysed was, for him, doomed to be transitory. And in so far as European Marxist orientated socialist movements retained this perspective in the late nineteenth century and beyond, they became the 'spectre' that 'haunted' sociology's own analyses of modernity.

Indeed, to the extent that Marx identifies the 'origins' of the experience of modernity in capitalism, his analysis suggests that these 'origins' were themselves almost totally obscured to its participants. If the mystified world of commodity exchange did create the impression of a fleeting, transitory, arbitrary and indifferent constellation of social relationships, the mere experiencing of these relations did not open up the possibility for the realization of the transitory nature of capitalist society as a whole. Rather, as a seemingly eternally self-reproducing natural process, it cast a veil over precisely this transitory dimension at another level. The dialectic of modernity remained hidden by vulgar political economy and remained hidden to the participants in the 'bewitched world' of capitalist relations. The eternal and the natural and the harmonious masked the transitory, the historical and the contradictory.

IV

The madly thoughtless shattering and dismantling of all foundations, their dissolution into a continual evolving that flows ceaselessly away, the tireless unspinning and historicising of all there has ever been by modern man, the great cross-spider at the node of the cosmic web – all this may concern and dismay moralists, artists, the pious, even statesmen; we shall for once let it cheer us . . .

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*

ON MODERNITY

What does us credit

If there is anything that does us credit, then it is this: we have located what is *serious* somewhere else: we take seriously the *meanest* things that are ignored in all ages and left aside – conversely we provide the ‘beautiful feelings’ cheaply.

. . . We have discovered the ‘smallest world’ as the universally decisive one . . .

. . . we have taken seriously all the *necessities* of existence and *ignore* all ‘soulful beauty’ as a kind of ‘light-heartedness and frivolity’.

That which has hitherto been most ignored is placed above all else.

Friedrich Nietzsche, *Nachgelassene Fragmente*

The significance of the notion of the eternal return lies in the fact that the bourgeoisie no longer dares to look the impending development of the mode of production which it set in motion in the eye. Zarathustra’s notion of the eternal return and the motto of the cushion cover, ‘Just a short nap’, complement one another.

Walter Benjamin, *Zentralpark*

Marx was not alone in viewing contemporary society as riddled with mystification and illusion. From a very different perspective, this was also the conclusion reached by Friedrich Nietzsche. But Nietzsche’s critique of contemporary society and of modernity – about which he often quite explicitly spoke – commences from quite other premises, even though at a formal level there are some remarkable parallels with Marx’s critique. Indeed, to reverse the comparison, there are some aspects of Marx’s analysis of the contemporary situation which, in the context of the crisis of 1848 and its aftermath, read like Nietzsche’s vision of the crisis which he detected several decades later. Hugo Fischer,⁶¹ for example, cited a passage from Marx’s *Eighteenth*

Brumaire where he sums up ‘the peculiar physiognomy of this period’ of revolution in France in 1848 as one in which ‘if any section of history has been painted grey on grey it is this. Men and events appear . . . as shadows which have become detached from their bodies.’⁶² It was a period possessing ‘the most variegated mixture of crying contradictions’:

a republic with imperialist trappings, which is nothing but the combined infamy of two monarchies . . . ; alliances whose first condition is separation and struggles whose first law is their indecisiveness; wild and empty agitation in the name of tranquillity, the most solemn preaching of tranquillity in the name of revolution; passions without truths, truths without passion; heroes without deeds of heroism, history without events; a course of development apparently only driven forward by the calendar, and made wearisome by the constant repetition of the same tensions and relaxations; antagonisms which seem periodically to press forward to a climax, but become deadened and fall away without having attained their resolution; exertions pretentiously put on show and bourgeois terror at the danger that the world may end, and at the same time the pettiest intrigues and courtly comedies played by the world’s saviours.⁶³

But whereas for Marx this constituted a rhetorical description of the development of a crisis in a revolutionary situation and whereas for him the ‘superficial appearance’ of this crisis ‘veils the class struggle’, for Nietzsche it could describe the permanent present of decadence, the total decadence of modernity with its lack of genuine passions, its false truths, its empty historicism, its eternal recurrence of the ever-same that, at the same time, did not veil or mask anything lying beneath it. Rather, modernity *is* this present, this inversion of all values, this world of masks and illusions.

Modernity as decadence ‘announces the permeability of present day life’. Decadence is, Fischer argues, ‘the deepest and most apposite characterisation of the provisional character of all arrangements, all world views, all political and social forms of our present time.’⁶⁴ It is intimately bound up with ‘present’ reality. Its analysis was Nietzsche’s task, the analysis of the ‘forms of human decadence’ that arise out of the decay of ‘organising force, of “willpower”’. What is left is an empty shell of convention and appearance: ‘The phenomenon of modern man has become wholly appearance; he is not visible in what he represents but rather concealed by it.’⁶⁵ His analysis of modernity was not merely a description of the forms of decadence

in the present but a critique of them. This was sometimes explicitly stated as in *Beyond Good and Evil* where Nietzsche announces that 'this book is . . . in all essentials a critique of modernity' – an aim that could well describe most of his published works as well as his unpublished fragments.

If the starting point of Nietzsche's analysis of modernity lies in his critique of the present, then it does not lie with the science of modern society: sociology. Sociology is itself evidence for 'the unconscious effect of decadence upon the ideals of science'; sociology 'only knows the *decayed-form* of society from experience', and is itself a symptom of the 'herd instinct'.⁶⁶ It merely looks upon the destructuretion of its own object – society. In fact, '*modern society* is not "society", not a "body", but a sick conglomerate of components'.⁶⁷ As an illusory science, sociology investigates 'the illusory world', along with other sciences. If we are to study the modernity of the present then we must seek another approach and another object. Nietzsche replaces sociology with a study of structures of domination and society with the cultural complex, with modern culture as a whole.⁶⁸

This modern culture, with its 'modern ideology', its false spokesmen for 'modern ideas', is characterized through and through by its decadence, by the disintegration of all genuine values. In their place stand illusions: 'viewed from any position, the *illusory nature* of the world in which we believe to live is the most certain and secure thing which our eyes can still catch hold of'.⁶⁹ In large part, therefore, Nietzsche's critique of modern ideology is 'in all basic respects a critique of modernity' and a difficult search for an alternative. This does not lie unambiguously in a juxtaposition of a false present with a true past. Any alternative does presuppose an unpleasant recognition of the real nature of the modernity of the present, in order to conceive of 'a culture which corresponds to real needs' and instead of belonging to a 'retinue of slaves whose task it is to satisfy its *imaginary needs*' in a 'soulless or soul-hardened society', in 'an entire merely decorative culture'.⁷⁰

Looked at more closely, this modern culture seems to be afflicted with a terrible sickness. When the genuine philosopher for the future thinks of

the haste and hurry now universal, of the increasing velocity of life, of the cessation of all contemplativeness and simplicity, he almost thinks that what he is seeing are the symptoms of a total extermination and uprooting of culture. The waters of religion are ebbing away and

leaving behind swamps or stagnant pools; the nations are again drawing away from one another in the most hostile fashion and long to tear one another to pieces. The sciences, pursued without any restraint and in a spirit of the blindest *laissez-faire*, are shattering and dissolving all firmly held belief; the educated classes and states are being swept along by a hugely contemptible money economy. The world has never been more worldly, never poorer in love and goodness . . . Everything, contemporary art and science included, serves the coming barbarism. The cultured man has degenerated to the greatest enemy of culture, for he wants lyingly to deny the existence of the universal sickness and thus obstruct the physicians.⁷¹

Confronted by 'the weakness of the outlines and the dullness of the colours in the picture of modern life', by 'the whole noisy sham-culture of our age', individuals exhibit a 'restlessness', 'they think with a precipitancy and with an exclusive preoccupation with themselves' which suggests that they are dimly aware of 'absolutely fundamental convulsions', of the 'absolutely unavoidable . . . atomistic revolution', 'in the age of atoms, of atomistic chaos'. This fragmented universe is indeed a frail construct since 'everything in our modern world is so dependent on everything else that to remove a single nail is to make the whole building tremble and collapse'. Hence, we cannot be unaware of 'the uncanny social insecurity which characterises our own times'.⁷²

What modern culture symbolizes is, then, the fleeting, the transitory and the fortuitous nature of modernity. All modern culture

requires extreme mannerliness and the newest fashions, inward hasty grasp and exploitation of ephemera, indeed of the momentary: and absolutely nothing else! As a result, it is embodied in the heinous nature of journalists, the slaves of the three M's: of the moment (*Moment*), of opinions (*Meinungen*) and of fashions (*Moden*); and the more an individual has affinities with this culture the more will they look like journalists.⁷³

Nietzsche contrasts this symbolic social type of modernity with the genuine philosopher whose aim is to secure people for 'all blows and sudden eventualities of fate and to arm them against any surprise'. In so far as philosophy should prevent people from 'taking the fleeting moment too seriously', 'it is the greatest enemy of that haste, that breathless grasp of the moment, that excessive hurry which breaks all things too early from their branches, that running and hunting

which now digs furrows in people's faces and, as it were, tattoos everything that they do'.⁷⁴ Modern art, too, mirrors this 'modern way of living . . . as a reflection of its hurried and over-excited worldliness, as an ever broader means of distraction and diffusion, untiring in the constant change in excitements and titillations, as it were, the spice shop of the whole West and East, equipped for any taste . . . regardless of whether someone exhibits good or bad "taste" within it'.⁷⁵ Modern art is thus a 'flight from boredom'. Modern life itself is an indication of how little human beings have gone beyond '*education through the fortuitous*'.

But just as a genuine philosophy may counter the decadence of modernity, so too, at least in *The Will to Power* and elsewhere, art can also serve as a counter-movement to the 'forms of human decadence', in so far as it contains positive force.⁷⁶ As early as his *Untimely Meditations*, Nietzsche speaks of 'the redemption of art, the only gleam of light to be hoped for in the modern age'.⁷⁷ It can also be countered precisely in the fleeting moment itself in so far as we possess 'the capacity to feel *unhistorically* during its duration. He who cannot sink down on the threshold of the moment and forget all the past . . . will never know what happiness is'.⁷⁸ For those who possess a suprahistorical capacity, 'the world is complete and reaches its finality at each and every moment'.⁷⁹ This capacity is not in the possession of the levelled, chaotic masses of modern society, only those who possess outstanding gifts of excellence (*Vornehmheit*). They alone can grasp this eternal moment. Nietzsche confesses that he would 'gladly exchange a couple of Goethe's "outlived" years for whole cartloads of fresh modern lifetimes . . . and thus be preserved from all and any up-to-date instruction from the legionaries of the moment'.⁸⁰

The context for such reflections is Nietzsche's critique of the relationship between modernity and history. If modernity is characterized by an emphasis upon a transitory fleeting present, then it also takes on another seemingly contrary feature, namely, 'the oversaturation . . . with history', '*the malady of history*' which 'has attacked life's plastic powers, [since] it no longer knows how to employ the past as a nourishing food'.⁸¹ The antidote to the historicist 'sickness', brought upon by a surfeit of scientific history which 'sees everywhere things that have been, things historical, and nowhere things that are, things eternal' and which has robbed 'man of the foundation of all his rest and security', his belief in the enduring and the eternal, lies in the unhistorical and the suprahistorical. They constitute the counterpoint to modernity. As Nietzsche declares, 'by

the unhistorical I designate the art and power of forgetting and of enclosing oneself within a bounded *horizon*; I call "suprahistorical" the powers which lead the eye away from becoming towards that which bestows upon existence the character of the eternal and stable, towards *art* and *religion*'.⁸² The echoes of Baudelaire's aesthetic reflections are unmistakable here.

Is there then any genuine historical knowledge of the past? If it exists then it can only do so '*out of the fullest exertion of the vigour of the present*' and not the empty present of the 'essentially subjective' modern culture. Indeed, 'when the past speaks it always speaks as an oracle: only if you are an architect of the future and know the present will you understand it'.⁸³ But this does not imply that the 'architect of the future' can opt for a 'reversion' to the past. The way forward is only through the present: 'There is nothing for it: one *has* to go forward, which is to say *step by step further into decadence* (- this is my definition of modern "progress" . . .)'.⁸⁴ That modern belief in progress is precisely what gives a false significance to the past. It sets it out in grand propositions and in an irresistible grand course of things. Nietzsche, however, affirms his 'hope that the significance of history will not be thought to lie in its general propositions, as if these were the flower and fruit of the whole endeavour, but that its value will be seen to consist in its taking a familiar, perhaps commonplace theme, an everyday melody, and composing inspired variations on it, enhancing it, elevating it to a comprehensive symbol, and thus disclosing in the original theme a whole world of profundity, power and beauty'.⁸⁵ Hence, Nietzsche will seriously take up 'the *meanest* things that are ignored in all ages', 'the "smallest world"'.⁸⁶ In other words, he will take up the insignificant fragment.

What this implies is, of course, that the genuine totality no longer exists. This Nietzsche emphasizes in relation to whole realms of modern existence - social, political, moral, individual, and so on. He gives it a dramatic emphasis in his characterization of '*literary decadence*' which consists in the fact that

life no longer lives in totalities. The word becomes sovereign and springs out of the sentence, the sentence takes over and obscures the meaning of the page, the page gains life at the cost of the whole - the totality is no longer totality. But that is the image for any decadent style: everytime the anarchy of atoms, the disintegration of the will, to express it morally, 'freedom of the individual' - enlarged into a political theory, '*equal rights for all*'. Life, *equal* liveliness, the vibrance

and exuberance of life driven back into the smallest form, the remainder *impoverished* of life. Everywhere paralysis, drudgery, torpidity or enmity and chaos . . . The whole no longer lives any more; it is compounded, calculated, artificial, an artefact.⁸⁷

Nietzsche's critique of literary decadence thus also holds for the whole contemporary social fabric. As a 'criticism of modernity', he emphasizes the fact that 'our institutions are no longer fit for anything . . . But the fault lies not in them but in *us*'.⁸⁷ This is because 'one lives for today, one lives very fast – one lives very irresponsibly: it is precisely this which one calls "freedom". That which *makes* institutions institutions is despised, hated, rejected.' Indeed, 'the entire West has lost those instincts out of which institutions grow, out of which the *future* grows'.⁸⁹

What then, of the future? In his later writings, especially, Nietzsche developed his much disputed doctrine of 'the eternal recurrence of the ever-same'. It presupposes a conception of time as discontinuous, the denial of duration, the irreversibility of time. The doctrine of eternal return contains two possibilities. The first, negative possibility, is that of permanent duration:

Duration with an 'in vain', without goal or purpose, is a most *paralyzing* thought . . . Let us think this thought in its most terrible form: existence, as it is, without meaning or aim, but inevitably recurring, without a finale, into nothingness: 'the eternal recurrence.' This is the most extreme form of nihilism: nothingness (meaninglessness) eternally!⁹⁰

This is the nihilistic moment of modernity which, in a different context, Max Weber sought to confront. The affirmation of recurrence is countered by modernity's affirmation of each moment of existence. In the context of the process of movement within the existent, Nietzsche poses this second possibility:

Can we remove the idea of purpose from the process and *still* affirm the process? – That would be the case if something within that process were *attained* in every moment – and always the same . . . Every fundamental characteristic which underlies every event, which expresses itself in every event, would have to drive the individual to affirm triumphantly every moment of existence in general, if the individual experienced it as *his* fundamental characteristic.⁹¹

In every moment is contained eternity. Indeed, 'the *infinitely small moment* is the higher reality and truth is a lightning flash out of the eternal flux'.⁹² This *leitmotif* that came to dominate aesthetic discussion at the turn of the century, is expressed more dramatically by *Zarathustra* in which he conceives of the gateway to eternity in the moment itself. Zarathustra and the dwarf behold a gateway which

has two faces. Two roads came together here: no one has yet ever followed either to its end. This long lane backward continues for an eternity. And that long lane forward – that is another eternity. They contradict each other, these roads. They directly abut one another. The name of this gateway is inscribed above: 'Moment' . . . And are not all things knotted together so firmly that this moment draws after it *all* that is to come? *Therefore* – itself too? For whatever *can* run its course of all things – also into this long lane *outward* too – it must run it once more! And this slow spider which crawls in the moonlight, and this moonlight itself, and I and you in the gateway, whispering together, whispering of eternal things – must not all of us have been there before? And return and run in that other lane before us, in that long, dreadful lane – must we not eternally return?⁹³

The same can thus be attained at any moment in the 'abyss of midday', not in the masked everyday world of modernity but in 'the magic of the extreme', not in the world of mediocrity but in the moment beyond herd existence.

This possibility, however, was continually threatened by the forces of modernity themselves. Nonetheless, those deeply influenced by Nietzsche such as Simmel saw the significance of his doctrine in the relevance for the individual in modern society as lying in a moral imperative. We should live as if we wished to realize 'the ideal lines of development' that extend 'beyond this momentary reality' of our existence, 'as if we lived for eternity, i.e. as if our eternal return did exist'.⁹⁴ Leaving aside the extent to which this is a reformulation of Nietzsche's doctrine, there is certainly a whole complex of strands of thought linking Nietzsche with Simmel – the significance of the 'pathos of distance', the emphasis upon excellence and differentiation and sometimes a form of aristocratism, the significance of the fragment and a constellation of judgements upon modernity.⁹⁵

In contrast, Kracauer's analysis of modernity seems to have little affinity with Nietzsche's judgements upon it, until we introduce the mediating role of Simmel and especially Max Weber. Weber's delineation of the consequences of modern social development itself

owes not a little to Nietzsche's work. If the loss of meaning and the loss of individual control are two of the major consequences of the process of rationalization in modern society, then the first of these is certainly of central concern to Kracauer. This search for a lost meaning was often expressed by Weber, sometimes drawing on echoes of a vision of empty duration that Nietzsche had earlier brought to life:

As intellectualism suppresses belief in magic, the world's processes become disenchanted, lose their magical significance, and henceforth simply 'are' and 'happen' but no longer signify anything. As a consequence, there is a growing demand that the world and the total pattern of life be subject to an order that is significant and meaningful.⁹⁶

In a variety of ways, Kracauer too went in search of lost meaning within modernity.

If we turn to Benjamin's analysis of modernity, then it is difficult to underestimate the significance of one aspect of Nietzsche's work – however reinterpreted – for his prehistory of modernity.⁹⁷ Benjamin himself acknowledged the decisive importance of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return of the ever-same for his understanding of the historical content of Baudelaire's aesthetic experience. Together with Benjamin's discovery of Blanqui's *L'éternité par les astres*,⁹⁸ Nietzsche's doctrine proved decisive for his own theory of modernity located as it was in the experience of a society based upon commodity production in which the ever new commodity whose newness was clothed in the latest fashion announced, in fact, the significance of the ever-same production of exchange value necessary to keep such a mode of production in existence. Elsewhere, in his analysis of the experience of history in the nineteenth century, Benjamin also drew upon Nietzsche's critique of historicism.⁹⁹

Above all, however, it is Benjamin's adaptation of Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal recurrence that is most striking. When it is recognized that one cannot decree for the world 'the capacity for *eternal newness*', then, equally, it must be conceded that 'the world . . . lives from itself: its excrements are its nourishment'.¹⁰⁰ The response to the fact that 'the world . . . lacks the capacity for eternal newness' is a varied one. For Marx, the capitalist mode of production up to the point of its disintegration produces nothing new other than 'new' commodities. Benjamin adopts Nietzsche's doctrine for a way into the historical configuration which Marx's insights into commodity

exchange and fetishism provide. Benjamin hoped to investigate the historical connection between those who took up the doctrine of the ever-same. In 'Zentralpark' he declared that

It must be elucidated and emphasized how the idea of the eternal return crops up roughly simultaneously in the world of Baudelaire, Blanqui and Nietzsche. In Baudelaire, the emphasis lies upon that which is new that is gained with heroic striving from the 'ever-same', in Nietzsche, upon the 'ever-same' which the human being awaits with heroic composure. Blanqui stands much closer to Nietzsche than to Baudelaire but resignation predominates in his case. For Nietzsche, this experience is projected cosmologically in the thesis: nothing new will ever appear.¹⁰¹

In the end, it was only Baudelaire's presentation of the doctrine which Benjamin worked upon in any detail. It is, for him, Baudelaire 'who conjures up the phantasmagoria of modernity out of the calamity of humdrum existence'.¹⁰²

2

Georg Simmel

Modernity as an Eternal Present

The essence of modernity as such is psychologism, the experiencing and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life and indeed as an inner world, the dissolution of fixed contents in the fluid element of the soul, from which all that is substantive is filtered and whose forms are merely forms of motion.

Georg Simmel

Simmel is a child and favourite of modernity with all its dreadful sicknesses and weaknesses.

Ernst Troeltsch

The gateway to the world of reality was first opened for us by Simmel.

Siegfried Kracauer

Your askance view of Simmel. Is it not time that we recognised the inklings of cultural bolshevism in him?

Walter Benjamin to Adorno

I

It has been suggested recently that Simmel 'intimates, but never really develops, what is probably the closest thing to a twentieth-century dialectical theory of Modernity'.¹ However, what Berman has in mind here is largely the outcome of Simmel's theory of the inevitable clash between subjective and objective culture as he developed it in his later and especially in his wartime writings.² Although this theme is present from his early writings onwards and is thus not confined to his essay on the tragedy of culture, Simmel's preoccupation with modernity surely deserves a much wider focus. In the context of

Modernity as an Eternal Present

Simmel's social theory as a whole, it is plausible to argue, in the sense in which Baudelaire understood modernity, that Simmel is the first sociologist of modernity. More than any of his contemporary sociologists, he came closest to expressing and analysing the modes of experiencing the 'new' and 'modern' life-world. This may in part be due to his strong aesthetic interest in modernity – which would bring him closer to Baudelaire – as well as his own mode of presentation of modern experience which suggests that he himself was a modernist.

The location of his analysis at the level of modes of experiencing reality has its origins in the distinctive nature of his sociology. The earlier interest in social interaction and, even in the early 1890s, the definition of sociology as the study of forms of social interaction (and later of sociation) was combined with Simmel's original interest in emotional and psychological states derived from the study of the *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal.³ This acute analysis of the experiences of modern, and largely urban, life was often commented upon by Simmel's contemporaries. It was an analysis that not only related very directly to his own position within Berlin at the turn of the century but was also capable of capturing the nuances of its bourgeois culture.

Indeed, if we look to the judgements of his contemporaries, there is ample support for the thesis that Simmel possessed the capacity for capturing the basic experiences of modernity in a way that few of his contemporaries could equal. His students 'scented the instinct for the times' and his 'interpretation of the times from the modernist perspective [Zeitdeutung von Modernen aus]'.⁴ Other contemporaries maintained that he was 'the only genuine philosopher of his time, the true expression of its fragmented spirit'.⁵ Another saw his *Philosophy of Money* as 'a philosophy of the times'.⁶ Yet this capacity for capturing the essential nature of modernity was reflected not merely in his substantive analysis of modernity but also in the mode of presentation itself. A reviewer of his *Soziologie* discerned that

Modernity has found here a dynamic expression: the totality of fragmentary, centrifugal directions of existence and the arbitrariness of individual elements are brought to light. In contrast, the concentric principle, the monumental element is not attained.⁷

More negative is Troeltsch's judgement that, as a creature of modernity, Simmel embodied 'its dreadful sicknesses and weaknesses',⁸ which for Troeltsch meant, amongst other things, 'the

transformation of history into a somewhat free game of fantasy . . . This was the most basic essence of modernity.⁹

What Simmel's contemporaries did discern, in their various ways, was the extent to which at least one aim of his social theory was the analysis of the present. His response to modern modes of experiencing social reality is emphasized by Becher:

Simmel's alert, critical mind not only allowed the contemporary cultural currents to pass through it but also, simultaneously, as a sociologist and philosopher of culture, to question their content. In so doing, he 'elevated the social reality of the *present* into scientific consciousness'.¹⁰

Yet the manner in which Simmel engaged in a critique of contemporary trends is a very distinctive one, possibly one that is in many respects far removed from 'scientific consciousness'. The critique takes place within the context of an aestheticization of reality that led Simmel to distance himself from the practical consequences of his critique. Simmel might shock the bourgeoisie – an aim imputed to his work by Troeltsch – but, at the same time, leave them undisturbed. In Benjamin's terms, the shock of the new is countered by experiencing it as the ever-same. What seems to be viewed *sub specie momenti* is actually interpreted *sub specie aeternitatis*. Nonetheless, Simmel did bring the experience of modernity, very much as Baudelaire had understood it, into the realm of sociological investigation. In so far as he was the first to do this, we may justly claim Simmel as the first sociologist of modernity.

II

However, it is here that the problems begin. If Simmel can be credited with the development of sociology as a form of analysis of the present (*Gegenwartsanalyse*), even with seeking for a sociology that is a science of the present times (*Gegenwärtswissenschaft*) – though, however, much this is implicit in his analysis of the present, it was never expressed as an explicit aim – then we need to examine the distinctive nature of this analysis of the present. Secondly, if it can be shown that Simmel provides us with the first sociology of modernity in Baudelaire's sense of *modernité*, then how is it possible for sociology to analyse 'le transitoire', 'le fugitif' and 'le contingent' and to capture 'the fleeting

beauty of modern life'?¹¹ The methodological problems posed by an analysis of the fleeting and transitory suggest that Simmel had embarked on no orthodox sociological project. Indeed, like Baudelaire's painter of modern life, such a project may well be predicated upon a particular form of experiencing social reality on the part of the 'painter' or sociologist of modernity. And if this is the case, then the recognition of Simmel's sensitivity towards modern contemporary life, towards 'the specifically modern aesthetics of the style of life'¹² and the 'seismographic accuracy'¹³ of its presentation carries with it a necessary confrontation with the reflexivity of his analysis since the mode of accounting for *modernité* also belongs to the modernist tradition itself. Only when these problems have been confronted can we turn to Simmel's substantive social theory of modernity.

If we start out from the assumption that around the turn of the century an implicit aim of Simmel's social theory was an analysis of the present, then we must examine the nature of this analysis. It does not take the form of a 'prehistory of modernity' as in Benjamin's study of modernity. Simmel's account of modernity is not grounded in a historical investigation of the important changes in German society around the turn of the century. In this respect, his analysis has little in common with that of his contemporaries such as Werner Sombart or Max Weber. There exists no systematic historical analysis of any of the phenomena that he describes. Even at the individual level, it is not only the case that Simmel viewed the historical location of particular figures as uninteresting (as in the case of individual figures such as Rembrandt whose life and work he analysed in detail)¹⁴ but also his own writings exhibit a complete absence of references to earlier contributors to the field of study. At the substantive level, Kracauer pointed out that of Simmel's social fragments and vignettes 'none of them live in historical time'; rather, each is transposed into 'eternity, that is, into the sole form of existence in which it can exist as pure essentiality and can be contemporary with us at any time'.¹⁵ Even in his major text, *The Philosophy of Money*, one of the most important sources for his theory of modernity, the analysis of contemporary society is located in a historical constellation that is given no more definite features than that of a mature money economy. Even his remarkable analysis of the alienating consequences of the modern division of labour in the same work is located within the context of a permanent and accelerating opposition between subjective and objective culture.

However, there does exist a neglected and isolated exception to this lack of a historical analysis of modernity. In an article entitled 'Tendencies in German Life and Thought since 1870' (1902)¹⁶ published shortly after his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel provides us on one of the very few occasions, with his 'diagnosis of the times'. There Simmel seeks to locate important tendencies in 'the spirit of the times' in such a manner that suggests a biographical identification with them. In other words, it unconsciously traces significant stages in the development of Simmel's own response to the modernity of German society after 1871, to a society which, in a very explicit sense, was 'new'. It is thus useful to examine this article briefly since it serves to locate Simmel's own substantive theory of modernity in the light of his own development.

One fundamental process 'during the last seventy years' – which had preoccupied Simmel since its first announcement in *Über sociale Differenzierung* (1890) – was 'the increased externalisation of life that has come about, with regard to the preponderance that the technical side of life has obtained over its inner side, over its personal values'.¹⁷ In other words, the central tendency has been the domination of objective over subjective culture. But rather than see this process in a unilinear manner, Simmel maintains that the various periods of development in Germany 'stand in very complex relations to this tendency' which will include 'the degree in which they embody it or compel reactions against it'. After German unification and the Franco-Prussian War, political and economic forces encouraged the development of 'a practical materialism' and 'the *material* enjoyment of life' whose consequence 'from the psychological point of view . . . was an externalisation of interests' – including not merely improved immediate surroundings but also 'the adornment of buildings', 'the greater amount of travel', etc. The economic growth of the years immediately succeeding German unification (*Gründerjahre*) stimulated the subordination of all things to material interests, resulting in the domination of technique as 'the sole concern of most producers and consumers' whilst 'forgetting that *technique* is a mere means to an end'. Technical perfection was extolled 'as though the electric light raised man a stage nearer perfection, despite the fact that the objects more clearly seen by it are just as trivial, ugly, or unimportant as when looked at by the aid of petroleum'.¹⁸ In the arts, however, Simmel points to new techniques, as in painting (impressionism) which have been beneficial.

However, this 'rapid development of external civilisation', facilitated by large-scale industrial development, 'has assisted the outbreak of the greatest popular movement of the century, namely, the rise of the Social Democrats'. Their 'idealised picture of the future . . . is an essentially rational one in the highest degree: extreme centralisation, nicely calculated adjustment to each other of demand and supply, exclusion of competition, equality of rights and duties'. Alongside the genuine 'ethical impulses of justice and sympathy' on the part of 'the more highly educated', Simmel discerns more confused motives for an interest in socialist ideas:

Many persons are actuated by a diseased longing to experience new sensations, and they feel the power of attraction that everything paradoxical and revolutionary is always capable of exerting upon numerous members of a nervously excitable and degenerate society. With this is often connected a fantastic and effeminate mental state, a vague desire for unity and universal brotherhood; in other words . . . – we might call it parlor socialism – a coquetting with socialistic ideals whose realization would be mostly unendurable to these very dilettanti.¹⁹

But Simmel sees the interest in socialism having declined among non-working class groups once the Social Democrats became 'a reform party on the basis of the existing social order'.

Simmel sees the interest in social issues as emanating from another source, in part in the philosophy of Schopenhauer embodying the notion that there is no final end in life, only the human will. Hence, 'the lack that men felt of a final object, and consequently of an ideal that should dominate the whole of life, was supplied in the eighties by the almost spontaneous rise of the idea of social justice'. This also had its origin in 'the decline of Christianity which had supplied a *final object* to life – 'above everything relative, above the fragmentary character of human existence, above the limitless structure of means and means to means'. This 'yearning after a final object' in a context which 'no longer renders possible its attainment' produces

specifically modern feelings, that life has no meaning, that we are driven hither and thither in a mechanism built up out of mere preliminary stages and means, that the final and absolute wherein consists the reward of living, ever escapes our grasp.²⁰

In the 1880s, Simmel maintains that this absence was filled with the ideal of social justice and a sense of serving society as a whole, a sense 'that the individual was but the crossing-point of social threads and that he, by a devotion to the interests of all, merely discharged an obligation of the most fundamental character'.

Yet Simmel also detected 'the rise of an opposite ideal, that of individualism, which about the year 1890 began to compete with the socialist ideal'. Possibly speaking for himself – at least in the early 1890s – Simmel refers to those 'who are in every way individualists by conviction . . . and who at the same time belong to the social-democratic party, because they regard socialism as a necessary transition stage to a just and enlightened individualism'. This conviction is sometimes stimulated by serious doubts as to 'the physical and spiritual excellence of the higher classes' who 'seem in many cases to be so decadent, so exhausted and neurasthenic as to be unable to bear the future upon their shoulders'. In this context Simmel even speaks of an 'internal migration' of 'the proletarian elements' into such positions in order that society may preserve itself.

A primary source of this new 'enlightened individualism' was the philosophy of Nietzsche which gained popularity in the 1890s, often amongst those who saw in his ideas 'the justification of an unrestrained egoism, and who considered that they gave an absolute right to develop in the highest degree the personality of the individual in defiance of all social and altruistic claims'. It was particularly attractive to the new youth movement and those who sought a false individuality. At the end of the first part of this article, Simmel draws attention to the inevitable conflict between the maintenance of the highest values of mankind and 'the cry for a levelling' as 'a reaction against the dismemberment of society, against the established division of labour'. Somewhat cryptically, Simmel notes that the reconciliation of the two goals 'may require diametrically opposed measures'.

Thus, alongside differentiating tendencies in modern society, there have simultaneously arisen 'levelling tendencies' manifested, for instance, in the women's movement, to which Simmel elsewhere devotes considerable attention.²¹ A further tendency is the growing centralization of church and state and a consequent search by individuals for some secure area 'beyond all the oscillations and the fragmentariness of empirical existence' in order to escape from 'life's complexity and constant unrest'. Here, at the heart of the modernist experience, Simmel argues that for many people

this longing assumes an aesthetic character. They seem to find in the artistic conception of things a release from the fragmentary and painful in real life . . . Unless I am deceived, however, this sudden increase in fondness for art will not long endure. The transcendental impulse, disillusioned by a fragmentary science that is silent as to everything final, and by a social-altruistic activity that neglects the inner, self-centred completion of spiritual development, has sought an outlet for itself in the aesthetic; but it will learn that this field also is too limited.²²

In other words, Simmel reiterates what was implicit in *The Philosophy of Money* namely that an aesthetic retreat from reality cannot be a final one.

Nonetheless, Simmel still maintains as an aim of social analysis the capacity

to experience in the individual phenomenon, with all of its details, the fullness of its reality. To this end, . . . a certain retreat from the phenomenon is necessary, a transforming of it which renounces the mere reflection of what is given in nature, in order to regain, from a higher point of view, more fully and more deeply its reality.²³

This implies a rejection of naturalism in art and also in the historical sciences which, Simmel argues, have passed beyond 'the history of princes and of particular leading persons' as immediate historical facts. Instead, interest has shifted to 'the history of the masses', to 'the totality of social forms and . . . their evolutions'.

Interestingly enough, this 'diagnosis of the times' appeared only in English and not in German. For his German contemporaries it therefore provided a kind of hidden historical location for his analysis of the 'new' in modern society. The economic and social location of modernity – as one of Simmel's central preoccupations around the turn of the century – is to be found in his *Philosophy of Money* and the works which surround it. There Simmel seeks out the fleeting, transitory and contingent elements of modernity as Baudelaire identified them.

But, as Baudelaire maintained, only 'the painter of the passing moment' was able to capture modernity. If modernity as a distinctive mode of experiencing (social) reality involves seeing society and the social relations within it as (temporally) transitory and (spatially) fleeting then this implies, conversely, that traditional, permanent structures are now absent from human experiences. The emphasis which Baudelaire also places upon 'le contingent' is present in

Simmel's explicit concern with that which is fortuitous and arbitrary in modern social life. The transitory, fleeting and fortuitous elements of social interaction must be a central concern for the painter of modern life who is true to the 'passing moment'. In other words, to borrow a phrase from Tönnies, 'l'évolution sociale prend la forme d'une *désagrégation spontanée*'.²⁴ What this implies is that the social theorist is presented with the distinctive problem of locating and capturing the fleeting and the transitory. This is a methodological problem faced not merely by Simmel but also by Kracauer and Benjamin.

III

If the direction of Simmel's account of modernity is hardly ever found in a historical analysis of modern society, where is it located? In the opening passage of 'The Metropolis and Mental Life' (1903), Simmel declares his aim as one in which 'the products of specifically modern life are questioned as to their *inner nature*, as it were, the body of culture as to its soul [my emphasis]'.²⁵ This can be seen to be the task of his sociology of modernity. But this aim is given a more concrete expression in one of the few – if not the only – definitions of modernity provided by Simmel:

The essence of modernity as such is psychologism, the experiencing [*das Erleben*] and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life and indeed as an inner world, the dissolution of fixed contents in the fluid element of the soul, from which all that is substantive is filtered and whose forms are merely forms of motion.²⁶

Modernity is thus a particular mode of lived experience within modern society, one that is reduced not merely to our inner responses to it but also to its incorporation in our inner life. The external world becomes part of our inner world. In turn, the substantive element of the external world is reduced to a ceaseless flux and its fleeting, fragmentary and contradictory moments are all incorporated into our inner life. Viewed in this manner, modernity presents a distinctive problem for its analysts: how is it possible to capture the fleeting, fragmentary social reality that has been reduced to individual inner experience? Only once this modernity has been grasped can we pursue the search for its causes.

One answer is provided in Simmel's essay on Rodin, from which this definition is taken. We should look to those forms of human expression which can capture the fleeting nature of inner experiences. It is modern art that captures 'human beings in the stream of their life' and which emphasises 'the increased dynamic nature [*Bewegtheit*] of real life' since 'art not merely mirrors a world in motion, its very mirror has itself become more labile'.²⁷ Unlike naturalism, modern art does not overlook the fact that 'a style, in which the meaning of our life directly lives, is much more fundamentally true and true to reality, than all copies; it not only *possesses* truth, it *is* truth'.²⁸ Simmel's admiration for Rodin's art stems, in fact, both from its embodiment of modernity and its resolution of modernity's contradictions. Rodin captures modernity in 'the impression . . . the impression of the supra-temporal, the timeless impression'.²⁹ The search for the timeless impression in Simmel's theory of modernity is encapsulated in the title of a number of pieces he wrote for *Jugend*: 'Snapshots sub specie aeternitatis'.³⁰ But the real achievement of Rodin's art lay, as we shall see, in its resolution of the contradictions of modernity.

But however much the aesthetic dimension is important for Simmel's delineation of modernity, it is clear that the work of art is not the starting point for Simmel's analysis of modernity, however much it may have been the source for many of its insights into modernity and however much Simmel's accounts of the work of art provide us with insights into his 'method'. Nonetheless, it is worth pointing out in this context the contrast between Simmel's approach and that of his contemporary Max Weber. In 'Science as a Vocation', Weber explicitly contrasts science and art on the grounds that 'scientific research is harnessed to the launching of progress. In the sphere of art, in contrast, there exists – in this sense – no progress'.³¹ This is because 'a work of art, that is a true accomplishment, will never be surpassed, it will never become obsolete. In contrast, each of us in the scientific realm knows that that which he has worked on will become obsolete in ten, twenty or fifty years'.³² Weber goes on to suggest that scientific progress proceeds through the steady accumulation and refutation of knowledge. The instruments of scientific research, which ensure an even greater precision and progress, comprise 'the concept' and its refinement and 'the rational experiment as the means for a reliably checked experience'. Although Simmel was concerned with conceptualization and with intellectual experiments in the sense of typification of forms of human sociation,

his contemporaries, including Weber, lamented the absence of clarity with regard to both. Indeed, they tended to characterize his work as lacking systematization and clarity and consistency of conceptualization. Hence, Becher has correctly argued that 'expressions such as "mode of observation", "viewpoint", "standpoint", "research tendency" would be more accurate here. This would also correspond with Simmel's perspectivism. The concept of "method", taken in its strict sense, is false.'³³

IV

If we accept this claim, then we must look elsewhere for the starting point of Simmel's analysis of modernity. Simmel's approach to his object of study as well as his most sustained account of modernity is to be found in *The Philosophy of Money*. Here, from the very outset, Simmel rules out the possibility of some naive accumulation of empirical knowledge as an end in itself since

the ever-fragmentary contents of positive knowledge seek to be augmented by definitive concepts into a world picture and to be related to the totality of life.³⁴

Hence, 'the very standpoint of a single science, which is also based on the division of labour, never exhausts the totality of reality'. Yet in *The Philosophy of Money* at least, Simmel is in no doubt that this totality is apprehendable.

In turn, this totality is not an abstract postulate but is approachable from specific individual phenomena and problems. It is not the starting point of his analysis, rather its goal. Hence, in his investigation of money, Simmel maintains that he must 'regard the problem as restricted and small in order to do justice to it by extending it to the totality and the highest level of generality'.³⁵ In this respect, the specific object of study, money

is simply a means, a material or an example for the presentation of relations that exist between the most superficial, 'realistic' and fortuitous phenomena and the most idealised powers of existence, the most profound currents of individual life and history.³⁶

Simmel's intention 'is simply to derive from the surface level of economic affairs a guideline that leads to the ultimate values and things of importance in all that is human'.

The starting point of his analysis is thus 'what is apparently most superficial and insubstantial'. Indeed, the unity of the whole study lies 'in the possibility . . . of finding in each of life's details the totality of its meaning'. In this respect, it follows the same method as art – in contrast to philosophy's concern with 'the totality of being' – which 'sets itself a single, narrowly defined problem every time: a person, a landscape, a mood'. It is Simmel's conviction that 'it is possible to relate the details and superficialities of life to its most profound and essential movements'.³⁷

It follows from all this that empirical scientific research is restricted in the sense that it cannot approach the totality that alone gives meaning to 'each of life's details'. Hence,

Science always finds itself on the path towards the absolute unity of the conception of the world but can never reach it; regardless of the point from which it starts, it always requires from that point a leap into another mode of thought – of a religious, metaphysical, moral or aesthetic nature – in order to expand and integrate the inevitably fragmentary nature of its results into a complete unity.³⁸

Of these other modes of thought, it is the aesthetic perspective or '*Anschauungsweise*' to which Simmel himself most often has recourse.

Indeed, elsewhere, Simmel seems to suggest that the interactions between individuals and society as a whole constitute a totality that is only apprehendable aesthetically:

The totality of the whole . . . stands in eternal conflict with the totality of the individual. The aesthetic expression of this struggle is particularly impressive because the charm of beauty is always embedded in a whole, no matter whether it has immediate distinctiveness or a distinctiveness that is supplemented by fantasy as in the case of a fragment. The essential meaning of art lies in its being able to form an autonomous totality, a self-sufficient microcosm out of a fortuitous fragment of reality that is tied with a thousand threads to this reality [My emphasis.].³⁹

Some fragments of our existence and, more especially, some modes of apprehension are more capable of grasping the totality. Simmel's sociological texts are richly populated with these fortuitous fragments of reality, with seemingly superficial social phenomena, with snapshots, with a myriad of social vignettes.

What this also suggests is that the aesthetic totality may itself exist as a fragment. Such a principle was later elevated into a universal principle in his later philosophy of life (*Lebensphilosophie*). In his study of *Rembrandt* (1916), for example, Simmel maintains that 'each moment of life is the totality of life'.⁴⁰

because life is thereby nothing other than continuous development by means of material oppositions, because it is not composed from individual pieces and its totality therefore does not exist outside of the individual element.⁴¹

However, at the time of publication of his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel had not yet fully developed his philosophy of life and his interest in sociology was still much in evidence.

Nonetheless, there are passages in this work which suggest that Simmel's 'categories for interpreting the world' are already grounded in an essentialism that is far removed from an empiricist framework for the apprehension of social reality. Rather than viewing Simmel's philosophy as located within a neo-Kantian paradigm,⁴² certain crucial arguments suggest a very different alternative, as when Simmel maintains that

If we describe the sum total of fragments that make up our knowledge at any one moment in relation to the goal we want to attain . . . then we can do so only by presupposing that which lies at the basis of the Platonic doctrine: that there is an ideal realm of theoretical values, of perfect intellectual meaning and coherence, that coincides neither with the objects . . . nor with the psychologically real knowledge that has been attained. On the contrary, this real knowledge only gradually and always imperfectly approximates to that realm which includes all possible truth.⁴³

Yet it is not merely that our fragments of knowledge approximate imperfectly to the totality. Rather, Simmel views the human subject as playing an active role within this totality:

the formula of our life as a whole, from the trivial practice of everyday to the highest peak of intellectuality, is this: in all that we do, we have a norm, a standard, an ideally preconceived totality before us, which we try to transpose into reality through our actions.⁴⁴

Even more explicitly, Simmel sees an essential quality of our action as being that

we follow some prefigured possibility and, as it were, carry out an ideal programme. *Our practical existence, though inadequate and fragmentary, gains a certain significance and coherence, as it were, by partaking in the realisation of a totality* [My emphasis.].⁴⁵

Precisely how that totality is realized is not clarified by Simmel.

Elsewhere, Simmel takes the problematic relationship between the universal and the particular to be a feature of modern times in so far as 'the evolution of the modern naturalistic spirit tends to dethrone universal concepts, and to emphasise singular instances as the only legitimate content of conceptions'.⁴⁶ Yet Simmel maintains that the importance of universals 'has not altogether disappeared'. Indeed, he asserts that

we would attain a completely satisfying relation to the world only if every aspect of our world view reconciled the material reality of singular instances with the depth and scope of a formal universality. Historicism and a sociological world view are attempts to confirm universality and yet to deny its abstractedness, to transcend the singular instance, to derive the singular from the general without sacrificing its material reality; for society is universal but not abstract.⁴⁷

By the time of writing this passage, Simmel had clearly moved away from his earlier psychologistic naturalism towards a preoccupation with social forms and 'a formal universality'. But although this passage is illustrative of his indebtedness to Platonism, it is in fact the reverse position which is his sociological starting point, namely the derivation of the essence of social phenomena from a particular instance. In other words, social reality is viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*.

It should already be evident that he sees some fragments of our existence and, more especially, some modes of apprehension as being more capable of apprehending a totality. We already know that, for Simmel, art forms 'an autonomous totality' out of fortuitous fragments of reality. In the preface to *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel emphasized that the empirical realm could never be capable of realizing this totality. The empirical needs to be located within a totality that it is itself incapable of creating. Hence, in a passage which unwittingly takes up a theme of Benjamin's later works, Simmel insists that

even the empirical in its perfected state might no more replace philosophy as an interpretation, a colouring and an individually selective emphasis of what is real than would the perfection of the mechanical reproduction of phenomena make the visual arts superfluous.⁴⁸

Indeed, Simmel maintains that the whole of his study of money is grounded in a world picture 'which I consider to be the most appropriate expression of the contemporary contents of science and emotional currents'.⁴⁹ Even from the preface we can surmise that Simmel favours a 'relativist interpretation' of social phenomena. This is confirmed in his theory of value as well as in the text as a whole. He also favours a perspective that we must term modernist.

Simmel is insistent in his *Philosophy of Money* that 'not a single line of these investigations is meant to be a statement about economics'. Almost as explicit is Simmel's lack of concern with 'the historical phenomena of money' even though this is his stated concern in the second part of his text. This becomes clear when we learn that this historical dimension has as its basis 'feelings of value', an analysis of 'praxis in relation to things and the reciprocal relationships between people'. Simmel's concern is, rather, with the effect of money 'upon the inner world – upon the vitality of individuals, upon the linking of their fates, upon culture in general'. The historical dimension is replaced by a phenomenology of human emotions.

Such preliminary remarks should suggest that the totality within which the fragments of social life are to be located or even the totality that they themselves are is not historical. Rather, this totality, this whole, rests upon the 'attitude' of the human observer. In seeking to demarcate Simmel's thought from the post-First World War generation, Margarete Susman points out that

for Simmel, the philosophical perspective was always a view from the centre into the totality, which was only able to extract a single sector from the whole. This relationship of the individual to the totality Simmel termed the 'attitude' of the thinker. This attitude signifies for him the relationship of a mind to the totality of the world.⁵⁰

Susman points out that this notion of attitude towards the world is fundamentally mystical and 'obtains a metaphysical justification only through the feelings'.

Though the notion of 'attitude' to the world belongs, more accurately, to Simmel's later philosophy, it also plays a subterranean role in his *Philosophy of Money*. We have already pointed out that Simmel did not view empirical knowledge as alone providing the key to the totality. In keeping with the later notion of our 'attitude' to the world, Simmel maintains that, psychologically, what we refer to as verification of empirical phenomena is merely a function of the creation of a specific 'feeling' for the object in question. He refers to

the theory according to which everything held to be true is a certain *feeling* which accompanies a mental image; what we call proof is nothing other than the establishment of a psychological constellation which gives rise to such a feeling. No sense perception or logical derivations can directly assure us of a reality.⁵¹

Such intuitionism as the basis for grounding knowledge is hardly the firmest foundation for the development of a sociology of modernity. However, it could form the starting point for what we might term a sociological impressionism that is rooted in an aesthetic stance vis-à-vis social reality.

This brief examination of Simmel's emphasis upon the relationship between the aesthetic mode of apprehension and the totality should leave little doubt that Simmel viewed the aesthetic perspective as a legitimate one for acquiring insights into social reality. In evaluating Simmel's work, we should take this aesthetic dimension seriously and clearly distinguish it from a tendency towards the aestheticization of reality since the two are not synonymous. Indeed, in some respects, the aesthetic dimension in theorizing can be seen to be coterminus with modernity itself. Bubner, for instance, maintains that 'the *autonomous development of the arts* in fact dates from the middle of the previous century, which we have since become accustomed to characterise as modernity without an end to this development being perceived'.⁵² Furthermore, Bubner highlights a tendency that is also apparent in Simmel's work, namely the tendency to see art as 'not so much an object' but rather that 'art serves as a medium in which philosophy seeks to make certain its own theoretical status'. In the context of Simmel's social theory of modernity, the aesthetic dimension also provides a degree of 'self-understanding' with regard to its own role in delineating modernity. One might even maintain that this aesthetic dimension makes Simmel's social theory of modernity possible.

If Simmel's social theory exhibits a somewhat problematic relationship towards the possibility of grasping the totality of existence, how does he view the role of the fragment in this context? More specifically, with the aim of understanding *moderne*, what is the justification for starting out from 'a fortuitous fragment' of reality, from 'each of life's details', from a 'snapshot' or 'fleeting image' of social interaction? Why not commence with 'the social structure' as a whole, with the 'social system' or with the central 'institutions' of society? In Simmel's case, the second of these questions is the easier to answer.

Concepts such as 'social structure', 'social system' and even 'social institution' play a very subordinate role in his sociology. From his early works onwards, Simmel was at pains to avoid the reification or hypostatization of 'society'. Already in 1890, Simmel was insisting that 'society is not an entity fully enclosed within itself, an absolute entity, any more than is the human individual. Compared with the real interactions of the parts, it is only secondary, only the result.'⁵³ Instead, Simmel commenced from 'a regulative world principle that everything interacts with everything else, that between every point in the world and every other force permanently moving relationships exist'.⁵⁴ This is not merely a heuristic principle but also a substantive feature of modernity since 'the dissolution of the societal soul into the sum of interactions of its participants lies in the direction of modern intellectual life itself'. Sociology should therefore not concern itself with a reified notion of society but with 'what is specifically societal; the form and forms of sociation as such are distinct from the particular interests and contents in and through which sociation is realised'.⁵⁵ Thus, from the outset, it is social interaction and forms of sociation and, later, 'the phenomenological structure of society' (1908) that constitute the key elements of sociology.⁵⁶

If one of the features of modernity is that social reality is felt to be in a state of ceaseless flux, then the concepts that can best express this fluid reality must be relational concepts. Interaction (*Wechselwirkung*) and sociation (*Vergesellschaftung*) are key concepts for Simmel and what interests him is relationships between phenomena. Society constitutes a social labyrinth within which individuals and groups intersect. This web or network of social relationships is itself symptomatic of what Kracauer describes as the 'core principle' of Simmel's social theory, namely 'the fundamental interrelatedness [*Wesenzusammengehörigkeit*] of the most diverse phenomena'. This implies that

All expressions of cultural life . . . stand in an inexpressible plurality of relationships to one another, none is capable of being extracted from the contexts in which they find themselves associated with others.⁵⁷

Each individual element is 'enmeshed' within this 'context of diversity'. The 'liberation of things from their individual isolation' takes place either through tracing real relationships between social phenomena or through revealing possible relationships by recourse to analogies.⁵⁸

Since there exists, in principle at least, no hierarchy of significance in forms of interaction, we might expect that he would be equally interested in the fortuitous and seemingly insignificant social phenomena. In the first version of his 'Sociology of the Senses' (1907),⁵⁹ Simmel argues that just as 'the science of organic life' now concerns itself with 'the smallest agents, the cells'⁶⁰ of human life, so too social science has recently come to concern itself with 'the beginnings of microscopic investigation'. It, too, originally started out from

States and trade unions, priesthoods and forms of family structure, the nature of guilds and factories, class formation and the industrial division of labour – these and similar major organs and systems appear to constitute society and to form the sphere of science concerning it.⁶¹

Without denying the existence of these 'structures of a higher order', Simmel's interest lay not in these structured interactions but in 'countless others which, as it were, remain in a fluid, fleeting state but are no less agents of the connection of individuals to societal existence'.⁶² The manner in which people look at one another, the fact that they write letters to one another, that they eat a midday meal together, that they are sympathetic or antithetical to one another, that they dress and adorn themselves for others are also momentary or persistent relations between people that go to make up society. Here Simmel's concern is quite explicitly with the 'fortuitous fragments' of social interaction:

On every day, at every hour, such threads are spun, are allowed to fall, are taken up again, replaced by others, intertwined with others. Here lie the interactions – only accessible through psychological microscopy – between the atoms of society which bear the whole tenacity and elasticity, the whole colourfulness and unity of this so evident and so puzzling life of society.⁶³

Simmel is convinced that their investigation produces a 'deeper and more accurate' understanding of society than does the study of society's major structures and institutions.

We can no longer take to be unimportant consideration of the delicate, invisible threads that are woven between one person and another if we wish to grasp the web of society according to its productive, form-giving forces; hitherto, sociology has largely been concerned to describe

this web only with regard to the finally created pattern of its highest manifest levels.⁶⁴

For his sociology of modernity, Simmel required to examine 'the delicate, invisible threads' which, as fleeting moments of interaction, were themselves a feature of modernity. They also provide fundamental insights into the workings of society. His brief sketch for a sociology of the senses, for instance,

rests upon the belief that the appropriate procedures, in sociology too, will draw from the reality of its object more deeply and accurately than the mere treatment of the major simply supra-individual total structures is capable of.⁶⁵

With reference to a sociology of the senses, Simmel maintains that 'each sense, according to its distinctive features, brings typical contributions to the construction of a societal existence, the nuances of its impressions correspond to the unique aspects of the social relationship'.⁶⁶ Access to such 'otherwise unrealisable sociological depth [*Färbung*] is only available by means of this distinctive approach.

There exists another neglected dimension of Simmel's approach which his 'Sociology of the Senses' merely touches upon, namely the significance of a 'psychological microscopy' for the analysis of modernity. Since he defines modernity as 'psychologism', as the experiencing the world as an inner reality, Simmel focuses time and time again upon the 'inner life' of human beings, upon the *psychology* of modernity. This is an interesting emphasis given sociology's attempts at the end of the nineteenth century to demarcate itself as an independent discipline not merely from history, from philosophy, but also from psychology. Simmel, who originally started out from the *Völkerpsychologie* of Lazarus and Steinthal, retained a sensitivity to psychological processes that proved essential to his analysis of the modes of *experiencing* modernity. Simmel was not merely a master in the sociology of fleeting encounters and interactions; he was also a key figure in the development of a sociology of emotions and intimate interaction – as Birgitta Nedelmann has persuasively argued⁶⁷ – and, one must add, of a psychology of emotional life.

Perhaps we are now in a better position to answer the first question posed: what is the justification for starting out from the 'fortuitous fragment' of social reality? Is the 'fortuitous fragment', the snapshot,

the fleeting image of social reality merely a fragment? Simmel's 'psychological microscopy' is appropriate to a conception of the world which presupposes that 'we are all fragments', that the past 'comes down to us only as fragments', and that knowledge itself must necessarily be fragmentary. This could lead some of his students such as Ernst Bloch to see that in Simmel's work it is 'always merely the colourful, nervous, purely impressionable margins of life that are painted'.⁶⁸ It led Kracauer to conclude that Simmel was 'a master in the . . . elaboration of fragmentary images of the world'.

Yet what was the aim of this 'elaboration' of the fortuitous fragments of social reality? From a certain perspective, these 'fragmentary images' are the key to the totality of social reality. That perspective is an aesthetic one. It is a mode of apprehending the world that Simmel developed in the mid-1890s which coincides with the start of his most typical sociological works. Its early formulation is to be found in the important essay 'Sociological Aesthetics' (1896):

For us the essence of aesthetic observation and interpretation lies in the fact that the typical is to be found in what is unique, the law-like in what is fortuitous, the essence and significance of things in the superficial and transitory. It seems impossible from any phenomenon to escape this reduction to that which is significant and eternal. Even the lowest, intrinsically ugly phenomenon appears in a context of colours and forms, of feelings and experiences that bestow upon it a fascinating significance. We only need to involve ourselves deeply and lovingly enough in the most indifferent phenomenon – that in isolation is banal or repulsive – in order to be able to conceive of it too as a ray or symbol of the ultimate unity of all things, from which beauty and meaning flow and for which every philosophy, religion and moment of our most heightened emotional experience seeks out symbols. If we pursue this possibility of aesthetic preoccupation to its conclusion, we find that there no longer exists any distinction between the amount of beauty in things. Our world view becomes that of 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.⁶⁹

If we accept that Simmel himself adopts an aesthetic perspective in the articulation of his social theory, then the justification for commencing with the social fragment is quite apparent since the fortuitous fragment is no longer merely a fragment: the 'unique' contains the 'typical', the fleeting fragment is the 'essence'. There

exists no ontological ordering of these fragments which permits the observer to say that one is more significant than the other. Every fragment, every social snapshot contains within itself the possibility of revealing 'the total meaning of the world as a whole'. This notion of the superficial fragment as providing the key to the fundamental aspects of social reality is also to be found in Simmel's analysis of the metropolis (1903) where he maintains that

from each point on the surface of existence – however closely attached to the surface alone – one may drop a sounding into the depth of the psyche so that all the most banal externalities of life finally are connected with the ultimate decisions concerning the meaning and style of life.⁷⁰

Once more it is clear that it is not merely that the fragmentary and superficial can be the starting point of sociological reflection but that its significance lies in its being 'connected' with the essential. Simmel thus oscillates between asserting that the fragment is the totality and that the fragment, by virtue of its connections with the essential, provides the gateway, as it were, to the totality.

In the observation of human action, there exists, for Simmel, an 'infinitely varied mixture' between 'the same, steady recurrence of a few basic themes [Grundtöne]' and the 'changing wealth of their individual variations'. However varied the individual manifestation and variations may be, from the standpoint of 'the most general observation of life' they can be reduced to the basic 'dualism of movements of thought and life'. In order to fully grasp the significance of an epoch, we cannot search for laws and causal explanations: 'Rather, only in *symbols* and *examples* can this deep living opposition in all that is human be grasped.'⁷¹ If we generalize from this conception of the basic oppositions in life to the social world as a whole, then we have a key to the significance of fragments in Simmel's approach to social reality. His essays are populated with examples that are, at the same time, the instances of basic typical human interactions. Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* itself can also be characterized as a preoccupation with symbols of 'all that is human'. Time and time again, Simmel refers to money as a symbol 'of the completely dynamic character of the world', of 'the behaviour of objects', of 'the relativistic character of existence', of human relationships, of society itself in ceaseless interaction. This was quite apparent to Simmel's contemporaries who saw money as 'a timelessly

valid symbol of the essential forms of motion themselves' (Köhler),⁷² who saw Simmel as captivated by money's symbolism (Schmidt)⁷³, and who noted Simmel's preoccupation with money as a 'pure symbol, an abstract expression of abstract relationships' (Durkheim).⁷⁴

But with regard to the profusion of examples that is so typical of Simmel's work, and especially of *The Philosophy of Money*, there is a danger that the wealth of examples become overpowering. This can lead to a situation which Adorno contrasts with Benjamin's approach when he argues that one should not pursue 'the innocuous illustration of concepts through colourful historical objects as Simmel did when he depicted his primitive metaphysics of form and life in the cup-handle, the actor, Venice'.⁷⁵ What Adorno specifically objects to in Simmel's approach to social reality is the manner in which the preoccupation with the fragment and the exemplary instance – shared by Benjamin as well – never leads to their historical concretion but to their reduction to the eternal realm, to 'simply interchangeable examples for ideas'.⁷⁶ In other words, Simmel's snapshots of social reality are consistently viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*.

However, the emphasis upon the example and the symbol reveals another dimension of Simmel's approach that is closely related to his conception of 'aesthetic observation and interpretation'. In *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst* (1907), Hamann views Simmel as a master of symbolism:

The *symbolism* of facts, i.e. wherever possible to speak of one fact as opposed to another merely on the basis of analogies, is quite in keeping with impressionistic thought. *Likelessness, symbols* replace ideas. The most significant work in this direction is Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*.⁷⁷

The social fragment can thus function as a symbol of some wider totality, whereas a systematic, logical analysis of the fragment is rejected. Its historical origins are also seldom examined systematically. Indeed, some critics also saw that his very commitment to modernity prevented him from developing a consistent, rigorous analysis. For Troeltsch, Simmel 'together with modernity . . . transformed the self into . . . mere "life"', into 'a fleeting wave'. Instead of rigorous analytical concepts, 'the realm of ideas resembled a forest that had been felled, where only the stumps remained standing, with roots that were dying out, incapable ever again of being a forest, but rather, aesthetically overgrown with all kinds of ornament'.⁷⁸ The nuances of Troeltsch's sceptical image suggest that though the basis exists for

exists no ontological ordering of these fragments which permits the observer to say that one is more significant than the other. Every fragment, every social snapshot contains within itself the possibility of revealing 'the total meaning of the world as a whole'. This notion of the superficial fragment as providing the key to the fundamental aspects of social reality is also to be found in Simmel's analysis of the metropolis (1903) where he maintains that

from each point on the surface of existence – however closely attached to the surface alone – one may drop a sounding into the depth of the psyche so that all the most banal externalities of life finally are connected with the ultimate decisions concerning the meaning and style of life.⁷⁰

Once more it is clear that it is not merely that the fragmentary and superficial can be the starting point of sociological reflection but that its significance lies in its being 'connected' with the essential. Simmel thus oscillates between asserting that the fragment is the totality and that the fragment, by virtue of its connections with the essential, provides the gateway, as it were, to the totality.

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an analysis of modern life, in Simmel's works it remains incomplete and fragmentary.

Nonetheless, to view the fragment as a symbol of a wider whole certainly does liberate the fragment from its isolation and locate it in a broader context. So, too, does the extensive use of analogies. But it is analogies rather than likenesses (*Gleichnisse*) that we find most often in Simmel's work. As Kracauer remarks, 'Simmel is incorrigible in his demonstration of analogies' in order to convince us of the often hidden connections between the most diverse social phenomena. More accurately than Hamann, Kracauer points both to the 'very infrequent number of likenesses' compared with analogies in Simmel's work and to the difference between the two: 'The analogy: a relationship between objects; the likeness: the presentation of relationships between subject and object'.⁷⁹ Whereas the former's value 'lies exclusively in its objective validity', the latter is 'a creation of fantasy'. But the problem with Simmel's extensive recourse to argument by analogy lies not merely in his lack of interest in the validity of his analogies – which, stimulating as they are, abound in his *Philosophy of Money* – but in their substitution for analytical accuracy. Where recourse to analogies becomes too excessive, the reader is likely to lose track of the central direction of a work, as Conrad Schmidt pointed out with reference to *The Philosophy of Money*:

In the proliferate intertwining of analogies, that start out as astounding but then subsequently in this abundance become merely monotonous and depressing, one loses one's direction at every moment . . . the basic ideas, . . . when one has extracted them from the unique, disguised philosophical linguistic finery and the glittering decorations of analogies, seem too simple.⁸⁰

Schmidt's negative judgement of the value of analogies is more sympathetically supported by Kracauer who argues that 'this wandering from relationship to relationship, this extension into the far and near, this intermeshing secures no resting place for the mind which seeks to grasp a totality: it loses itself in infinity'.⁸¹

Nonetheless, Kracauer elsewhere points to the basic significance of Simmel's predication and revelation of 'the essential interrelatedness of the most diverse phenomena' and his extensive use of analogies:

The unmasking of the intertwining threads that exist between phenomena forms merely one of the (unending) tasks that Simmel develops out of his fundamental convictions. His other task must be

to conceive of what is diverse as a totality and somehow to master this totality and to experience and express its essence. From the principle that everything exists in relationship with everything else there follows directly the unity of the world. Each individual constellation possesses the characteristic that it is merely a fragment of the major world totality, without whose prior interpretation and encompassment one can merely bring to light, in a fragmentary manner, incomplete complexes.⁸²

Kracauer goes on to argue that Simmel came closest to grasping this totality in his *Philosophy of Money*. There, Simmel's conviction that 'everything exists in relationship with everything else' is confirmed by his emphasis upon money as the symbol of exchange in society, indeed by his conviction that society is constituted by exchange relationships. Exchange as 'a sociological phenomenon *sui generis*' indeed embodies 'le transitoire, le fugitif, le contingent' as Baudelaire characterized modernity.

VI

Simmel's theory of modernity does not take the form of a historical analysis, but rather an account of the modes of experiencing the social reality of modernity. In this respect, Simmel shares a central preoccupation with Kracauer and Benjamin. Indeed, in Benjamin's case, the very project of retracing the 'prehistory of modernity' can only be understood as an attempt to recapture social experience lost in the very process of modernity itself. This subsequently made itself felt, in Benjamin's case, in the need for a materialist theory of experience, one which, although only sketched out, rested upon the distinction between individual lived experience (*Erlebnisse*) and concrete experience (*Erfahrung*). Simmel too seems to have conceived of a limited number of privileged forms of experiencing social reality.

It is no accident that the social experiences which provide the basis for Simmel's insights into modernity should coalesce around individual inner experiences (*Erlebnisse*). This is particularly true of the emphasis Simmel places upon inner nervousness provoked by metropolitan life and by alienating relationships in a mature money economy. In this respect, it was not difficult for his contemporaries to detect a social psychology of modernity in his writings or even, as Goldscheid intimated, a psychological counterpart to Marx's *Capital*. In another respect, this emphasis upon the inner life of the individual was quite

in keeping with Simmel's intention to preserve and later – with the increasing acceptance of the inevitable widening division between subjective and objective culture – to reconstitute individuality. This is the critical intention that lies somewhat veiled in his sociology but is quite explicit in his later writings on the philosophy of life.

But in terms of our present interests, there is a more significant aspect of Simmel's emphasis upon individual inner experience. In one of his very few explicit references to the nature of modernity, he characterizes modernity as indeed this preoccupation with inner experience. The context is an essay on Rodin's sculpture ('Rodin' 1909; revised 1911)⁸³ as not merely the expression of modernity but also the resolution of its inner tensions. Rodin's sculpture is an artistic expression of 'the many sided, vibrant element of the modern soul'. Whereas ancient sculpture sought out 'the body's logic, Rodin seeks its psychology'. As we have already seen, for Simmel 'the essence of modernity' was 'psychologism, the experiencing [*das Erleben*] and interpretation of the world in terms of the reactions of our inner life and indeed as an inner world'.⁸⁴ Already implicit in Simmel's conception of modernity is the absence of concrete experience (*Erfahrung*) derived from interaction with and intervention in an external world. The latter has become 'an inner world'. In other words, *Erfahrung* has been reduced to *Erlebnis*. This important distinction is not made explicit by Simmel as it was later to be by Benjamin.

Rather, this definition of modernity sums up Simmel's treatment of it. Modernity consists in a particular mode of experiencing the world, one that is reduced not merely to our inner responses to it but also to its incorporation in our inner life. The external world becomes part of our inner world. In turn, the substantive element of the external world is reduced to a ceaseless flux. The fleeting, fragmentary and contradictory moments of our external life are all incorporated into our inner life. Viewed in this manner, modernity presents a distinctive problem for its analysts, one that we posed at the outset of this study: how is it possible to capture a fleeting, fragmentary and contradictory social reality that has been reduced to individual inner experience?

Simmel provides two not unrelated answers, one explicitly the other implicitly. The first response is to look for those forms of human expression which can capture the fleeting nature of inner experiences in order that we can recognize them and temporarily at least hold them constant. The form of human expression which best performs this task is, for Simmel, the work of art. This he makes quite explicit in his essay on Rodin. In the light of his definition of the essence of

modernity, Simmel views music – upon which he so seldom wrote subsequent to his rejected dissertation on its origins – as 'the genuinely modern art' since it is 'the most dynamic of all the arts'. Similarly, modern art emphasizes colourfulness and facets of the object rather than total structures in landscapes and in portraiture, 'modernism emphasises the face' rather than the body since it more readily illustrates 'human beings in the stream of their inner life'.⁸⁵

Simmel's admiration for Rodin's sculpture stems both from its embodiment of modernity and its resolution of modernity's contradiction. Starting out from the assumption that art is 'an agent or reflection of general culture', Simmel maintains that two modern sculptors have given the plastic arts a new object (Meunier) and a new form (Rodin). Meunier took 'the immediate experience' of physical labour as action to be the subject of art and created an object that viewed the heroic in the everyday and the universal. In so doing, Meunier achieved in the aesthetic sphere what Maeterlinck's philosophy of life saw as the feature of the individual, namely that 'our happiness, our value, our greatness does not live in the extraordinary, in heroic breakthroughs, in prominent deeds and experiences, but rather in everyday existence and each of its regular nameless moments'.⁸⁶ In passing, we may note that this is not merely another expression of Baudelaire's notion of modern heroism but also the starting point for much of Simmel's sociology.

In contrast, Rodin provides modern sculpture with a new form or style, 'that expresses the response of the modern soul to life'. Simmel's account of the aim of Rodin's art illustrates his own conception of art as a totality and even art as a model for his own social theory, as when he maintains that,

In contrast to mechanistic naturalism and to conventionalism, Rodin certainly seeks out the impression but . . . the impression of the supra-momentary, the timeless impression; not that of the particular side or individual moment of objects, but of the object as such . . . Just as the major achievement of Stefan George is to have given a monumental form to the lyrical expression of subjective experience, so too Rodin progresses along the path towards a new monumentality – that of becoming, of motion.⁸⁷

What Rodin has achieved is discovery of 'the artistic timelessness of pure movement', an obsession with movement as such that reflects 'the modern soul that is so much more unstable, in its attitudes and self-created fates much more changeable' than in earlier times.

But the real achievement of Rodin's art lies not merely in its presentation of 'the modern *transmutabilita'*, 'without a fixed decisive pole or resting point' but in his art being a resolution of the contradiction of modernity. At the very end of his essay on Rodin, Simmel states not merely his artistic ideal but also; implicitly, the aesthetic ideal of his social theory:

If one . . . regards salvation from the trouble and whirl of life, the peace and conciliation beyond its movements and contradictions as the permanent goal of art, then one might think that artistic liberation from the disquiet and unbearableness of life is achieved not merely by the flight into its opposite, but also in fact by the most complete stylisation and increased purity of its own content . . . Rodin saves us precisely because he shows us the most perfect image of this life that germinates in the passion of movement . . . Insofar as he allows us to experience our deepest life once more in the sphere of art, he saves us from precisely that which we experience in the sphere of reality.⁸⁸

In the dimension of social theory, the presentation of the restless motion of everyday modern life – its snapshots, as it were – takes the form of highlighting their eternal forms *sub specie aeternitatis*. This is, as it were, the ideal of Simmel's social theory that, like the perfect work of art, is so seldom realized.

Yet if this aesthetic ideal motivates much of Simmel's social theory, an almost contrary image illuminates the source of his insights. Although Simmel spent some considerable amount of time explicating and classifying the problem of sociology in his earlier works at least, we very seldom find any reference to the task or role of the sociologist. This may not be surprising if we consider that he was contemptuous of those narrow definitions and demarcations of disciplines which then, as now, predominated in the social sciences. But it might also suggest that, where Simmel seldom chose to identify himself as a 'sociologist', he was willing to describe himself as a philosopher. His major work in social theory prior to the *Soziologie* is undoubtedly *The Philosophy of Money*, that is, a 'philosophy' rather than a 'sociology' of money, however much it might contain an elaborate social theory. Hence, it is not surprising to find that Simmel provides us with clues as to his identification with philosophy in the broadest sense, as a mode of reflection upon reality. In one of his essays, Simmel combines this with reflections upon the experiential sources of such reflections, some of which unwittingly anticipate Benjamin's outline of a theory of

experience of modernity. The essay also supplements the argument that Simmel may, in part, be regarded as a sociological *flâneur* which has been outlined elsewhere.

In his essay 'The Philosophy of Adventure' (1910, subsequently 'The Adventure' 1911)⁸⁹ Simmel seeks to explicate the features of an adventure as '*a form of experience*'. Since he identifies himself as a philosopher and describes the philosopher as 'the intellectual adventurer' in the world who 'treats this unsolvable as if it were soluble',⁹⁰ we may justifiably take this account as a description of Simmel's own attitude. Combined with the earlier image of 'The Stranger' (1908) – which both Coser and Landmann take to be the key to Simmel's social experience as the basis for his social theory⁹¹ – the notion of the adventure expresses the experience of the 'extraordinary'. As a 'wanderer' through the everyday world, Simmel is able to adopt 'a distinctly "objective" attitude' to social reality since he possesses that lack of attachment and the necessary distance of the wanderer.⁹² The stranger is not a part of the everyday world in which he or she moves. Similarly, the most general feature of the form of the adventure is 'that it falls outside the context of life' in the sense of the continuity of everyday, routinized life. But just as the concept of the stranger only makes sense in terms of his or her location *within* a social environment, so the adventure is not merely 'a foreign body in our existence' but also 'a form of being inside' it.

Before analysing the experience of the adventure, Simmel briefly makes two analogies which, in their different ways, are significant for a theory of modernity. The first is the analogy with dreaming. Simmel maintains that

for memory, the adventure easily acquires the nuance of dreaming. Everyone knows how quickly we forget dreams, because they too place themselves outside the meaningful context of the totality of life. What we characterise as 'dream-like' is nothing other than a remembrance which is connected with fewer strands than other experiences to the unified and continuous process of life . . . The more 'adventurous' an adventure is, that is, the more perfectly it accords with the concept, the more 'dream-like' it will be for our memory.⁹³

This process may even take the form of being so dream-like that we conceive of the adventure as if it had been undertaken by someone else. It confronts us in our remembrance of it as something strange. As we shall see, the 'dream-like' nature of social phantasies is a central preoccupation of Benjamin's theory of

experience. It is also highly relevant to Kracauer's deciphering of the hieroglyphics of society.

Simmel's second analogy refers to the circumscribed nature of the adventure that, more definitely than other experiences, has a demarcated beginning and end. Here Simmel detects the affinity between the adventurer and the artist, 'for it is indeed the nature of the work of art that it cuts out a piece from the endless continuous series of perception or experience, releases it from connections with all this sidedness and that sidedness and gives it an autonomous, determinate and cohesive form as if from an inner core'.⁹⁴ In other words, it extracts one part of human existence and creates a totality out of it that is experienced as 'a closed entity' in the same way as we experience an adventure. Both acquire a self-enclosed autonomy. This could also stand as an instance not merely of Simmel's conception of the work of art but also as a description of his own procedure especially in his essays and including 'The Adventure'.

Simmel shared this 'unique attitude to life' of the adventurer. The experience of the adventure in the social context constitutes an apparent break from the flatness of reified existence, from the indifference that he saw as so apparent in modern society. The adventure takes on a dynamic; it is filled with a different form of experiencing time. The isolated and fortuitous experience that often forms the content to experience also illuminates Simmel's method of social analysis in so far as it commences from 'the fortuitous fragment of reality'. The fortuitousness and uniqueness are heightened in experience. Again, anticipating another of Benjamin's motifs, that of the gambler, Simmel records the affinity between the adventurer and the gambler. The gambler 'is indeed at the mercy of the meaninglessness of coincidence' but seeks to invest it with meaning. The gambler sets out from the conviction 'that in the coincidence there resides a meaning, some kind of necessary – though not a necessity that accords with rational logic – significance'.⁹⁵ The game challenges the seriousness of everyday routine. Hence, what Simmel describes as the quickened time of the adventure also accords with the experience of time by the gambler:

Its atmosphere is . . . unconditional presentness, the quickening of the process of life to a point that possesses neither past nor future and therefore contains life within itself with an intensity that, compared with the content of what has gone before, is often relatively indifferent.⁹⁶

Here is yet another unwitting anticipation of Benjamin's notion of the shock experience (*Chokerlebnis*). The 'unconditional presentness' of the game as such rather than the prospect of winning is what motivates the gambler. For the adventurer, it is this same 'intensity and tension' that fills out our experience of the isolated coincidence.

It is worth noting here that over a decade earlier, in his 'Sociological Aesthetics' (1896), Simmel refers explicitly to the shock experience in a context almost identical with Benjamin's subsequent treatment. There, Simmel argues that modern life itself 'makes us more and more sensitive to the shocks [*Chocs*] and turmoils which we confront in the immediate proximity and contact with people and things'.⁹⁷ This experience is given a much more specific location than merely 'modern life' in his *Philosophy of Money*.

Both the gambler and the adventurer seek out the tension of immediate presentness that resides in the game or the adventure. In this respect, the erotic adventure of a fleeting sexual relationship, is itself only a heightened form of the more general erotic pleasure derived from the adventure as such: 'the adventure is the exclave of the life-context, that which has been torn away [das Abgerissene]'. But the intensity and tension with which the immediate present of the adventure is experienced rests upon the fact that we cannot live in permanent tension; we cannot experience an endless adventure. Rather, 'from the most secure bourgeois activity to the most irrational adventure there exists a continuous series of manifestations of life . . . In that the adventure characterises the one extreme in this series, so necessarily does the other play a part in its character.'⁹⁸ In this way, the adventure is 'only one piece of existence amongst others', even though the radical nature and amount of tension experienced 'makes the mere lived experience [*Erlebnis*] into an adventure'. The adventure is abstracted from 'the fragmentary and varied quantity and circumstances' in which average everyday existence takes place.

But this placing of the adventure once more on the continuum of life experiences, suggests that, in the last resort, Simmel is not prepared to consider the radical nature of the disjunction between the adventure and everyday existence. The fleeting, transitory attraction of the adventure only exists in so far as it is removed from the everyday. That is, the contradiction between the two is removed by the elevation of the adventure into an autonomous sphere. It is not that the adventure, like the dream, radicalizes or even shatters the everyday mundane conceptions. Rather it stands 'over and above life'. Like

art for Simmel it constitutes an image of life beyond all decisions. The adventure, like art, exists in a timeless realm:

Precisely because the work of art and the adventure stand juxtaposed to life . . . the one and the other are analogous to the totality of a life itself, as it is presented in the brief outline and the condensation of the dream experience. Thereby, *the adventurer is also the most powerful example of the unhistorical person, of the contemporary essence. On the one hand, he is determined by no past . . . on the other, the future does not exist for him.* [My emphasis.]⁹⁹

The experience of modernity is precisely this immediate presentness. But since the adventurer has no historical boundaries, it is a motif that is also rendered eternal by Simmel.

It should come as no surprise, therefore, to discover that several decades later Benjamin associated the adventure with this lived experience in the nineteenth century. In a section of his Arcades Project on idling (*Müssiggang*), Benjamin comments that ‘the intentional correlate of “lived experience” [*Erlebnis*] has not remained the same. In the nineteenth century, it was “the adventure”. In our day it appears as “fate”’.¹⁰⁰ In both cases, it centres around the notion of the ‘total lived experience’, broken away from any concrete historical experience. The implication of Benjamin’s analysis is that any autonomy which the merely lived experience attains is a false one. It suggests the need to examine more closely those experiences which were significant for the development of Simmel’s theory of modernity.

VII

In one of his incomplete sketches for his *Passagenarbeit*, Walter Benjamin points to the social experiences that inform Baudelaire’s work, experiences which are the foundation for his reception of *modernité*. These social experiences, Benjamin argues, are

nowhere derived from the production process – least of all in its most advanced form the industrial process – but all of them originated in it in extensive roundabout ways . . . The most important among them are the experiences of the neurasthenic, of the big-city dweller, and of the customer.¹⁰¹

Such experiences are also paramount in Simmel’s treatment of modernity. But it is not merely that Simmel devotes some considerable attention to their analysis but also that his own reflections are largely derived from these same social experiences, though in a different context. A contemporary commentator characterized Simmel as an ‘intellectual neurasthenic’.¹⁰² His son Hans recalled his father saying that ‘Berlin’s development from a city to a metropolis in the years around and after the turn of the century coincides with my own strongest and extensive development’.¹⁰³ At the centre of much of Simmel’s analysis in his *Philosophy of Money* stands the consumer of commodities and the exchange process. His other essays on fashion and style, for instance, also testify to his preoccupation, not with the production process and hardly at all ever with industrial production but rather with the forms of experiencing the indirect consequences of such a process.

Yet Simmel’s presentation and reception of *modernité*, unlike Baudelaire’s, is not a poetic one. Nor, on the other hand, can it be characterized as a rigorous historical analysis of modernity. Yet at the same time, Simmel’s presentation of *modernité* does contain elements of both tendencies. His sociological impressionism and his aesthetic stance vis-à-vis his object of study brings him close to an artistic response to modern life.¹⁰⁴ As Hamann comments, ‘impressionist thought is quite transformed into art’.¹⁰⁵ On the other hand, especially in his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel does seek to provide not merely a description but also an explanation for the modernist way of life.

The social location of Simmel’s reflections upon *modernité* constitute both the source of his insights and their limitation. If we commence our analysis of the social location of Simmel’s sociology with its relationship to metropolitan life, then it will not be difficult to move on to the other two sources that Benjamin also gives for Baudelaire’s inspiration. The experiences of the neurasthenic appear at the very start of Simmel’s analysis of metropolitan life which, at the same time, also closes with an indication of the extent to which its features are related to the development of the money economy.

Simmel’s attachment to Berlin and his location within it during the period of its most rapid expansion, as well as its significance for his own work, can be readily documented. Margarete Susman – one of his students – points to the fact that ‘metropolitan, lively, restless Berlin on the corner of Leipziger – and Friedrichstrasse was decisive for his life and thought’.¹⁰⁶ His friend Karl Joël argued that Simmel’s

Philosophy of Money, which ‘has overheard the innermost tone of modern life’, ‘could only be written in these times and in Berlin’.¹⁰⁷ Simmel himself maintained that the ‘specific achievement, that I have in fact brought to fruition in these decades, is indoubtedly bound up with the Berlin milieu’.¹⁰⁸ But though such statements testify to the significance of Berlin for Simmel’s work, they do not begin to answer either the question as to his precise location within it or how Simmel himself conceived of it.

At a somewhat abstract level, we might view Simmel as a sociological *flâneur*, but not one ‘who goes botanizing on the asphalt’.¹⁰⁹ Rather, Simmel’s social vignettes are not always those of someone who wanders through the whole class structure. Sometimes, as in his account of urban transport or his outline of a sociology of the senses, Simmel expresses the response of a member of the bourgeoisie towards the working class. They are the observations of someone who stands outside the lower social strata, even of someone who remains distanced from many social contexts. And yet this very distance was also the source of many of his insights into social situations.

In order to clarify this location, it is necessary to point out that, even in his famous essay on metropolitan life, Simmel is unwittingly describing a particular type of urban social environment – that of capital cities. The social ecology of industrial cities is not of specific interest to Simmel. On the other hand, the fact that capital cities, as institutional and administrative centres, are often the location for the cultural hegemony of the bourgeoisie and furnish a large middle class population with a livelihood, is reflected in Simmel’s examples of urban social interaction. Yet neither is this specification of the class structure of metropolitan centres the focus of Simmel’s concern. Though at the end of his life in Strasbourg, he felt cut off from the Berlin milieu and its metropolitan life, this does not mean that Simmel’s relation to Berlin was that of the documentary reporter. His social vignettes are not informed by a social documentary interest in big city life. The ‘snapshots’ of social interaction and the fragments of sociability that lie at the heart of his analysis are those of someone who can retreat from the asphalt. Whereas for the *flâneur*, as Benjamin puts it, ‘the joy of watching is triumphant’, for Simmel it is perhaps the search for ‘the transitory, fleeting beauty of our present life’ – as Baudelaire characterized Constantin Guy’s aesthetic interest – that is paramount. Simmel is a privileged observer within his social milieu but he is also a sociologist who seeks to typify what he observes. The typification exists not as critical social reportage, as in Kracauer, for

instance, but as the search for the essentiality of social situations and interactions. Even the notion of ‘snapshots’ viewed from the aspect of eternity – as Simmel entitled several of his essays – is misleading in this respect. There are no specific persons in Simmel’s snapshots. Rather, there are fleeting images of human types, of types of sociability and interaction that are viewed *sub specie aeternitatis*. This search for the ‘essence’ of forms of social interaction leads Simmel firmly away from their ‘historical’ analysis. In the present context, we can plausibly argue that Simmel’s approach to modernity results in him rendering it eternal. In contrast, as we shall see, Benjamin’s conviction, even in his early *One-Way Street*, was that ‘this burdened totality of modernity was in decline’.¹¹⁰

Thus, when Kracauer maintains that Simmel is ‘a person of the multitude and a loner, an empathetic person, a sociable person who possesses, moreover, a knowledge of the entire situations in which he places himself’,¹¹¹ such qualities can only be applied to a somewhat restricted social range of situations. Simmel does provide us with a masterly account of the consequences of urban life – in themselves based on a money economy – but it is a very distinctive one that does not encompass the ‘entire situation’ of urban life but highly selective aspects of it.

Nonetheless, the urban context is as central to Simmel’s account of modernity as it is to those of Kracauer and Benjamin and as it was to Baudelaire. Just as Benjamin argues that ‘the *flâneur* is the priest of the genius loci’¹¹² so too is Simmel’s account of *modernité* located in specific spatial configurations. Simmel was the first sociologist to reveal explicitly the social significance of spatial contexts for human interaction. Spatial images of society were later to be crucial to Kracauer’s own ‘topography of social space’ as well as Benjamin’s analysis of the relation between the *flâneur* and the arcades, the bourgeois *intérieur* and the spatial location of commodities. But no other social theorist was so preoccupied with social distance, with detachment from reality, with ‘the intersection of social circles’ as was Simmel. In the analysis of modern society, all are located primarily within an urban context.

The metropolis is the focal point for the other social experiences that are the basis for the analysis of *modernité*. Even when we characterize Simmel’s own approach to his subject matter as sociological impressionism, this too, according to Hamann, has its origins in city life. Benjamin, too, suggests that ‘the technique of Impressionist painting, whereby the picture is garnered in a riot of dabs

of colour, would be a reflection of experiences with which the eyes of a big-city dweller have become familiar'.¹¹³ In Simmel's case, the affinity might be with the myriad of social vignettes that populate his works. The riot of social encounters and experiences in the metropolis is also one of the sources of neurasthenia, a central consequence of urban life. Simmel's analysis of the consumer is located within the context of the metropolis, as are his related accounts of fashion, style and trade exhibitions. The metropolis and modern urban life in general are the location of the consequences of the modern money economy. The last chapter of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money*, dealing as it does with 'The Style of Life', not merely seeks to demonstrate that the consequences of urban life result largely from the extension of the money economy but also that we may view its most extreme consequences within the metropolis. The three central experiences of a dramatic increase in nervous life, the experience of the metropolitan dweller, and the participant in a mature money economy must now be examined in greater detail.

Neurasthenia

Almost as a paradigm for modernity, Simmel describes the inner core of modernity amid 'the clamorous splendour of the scientific technological age'. The individual's inner security is replaced by 'a faint sense of tension and vague longing', by a 'secret restlessness', by a 'helpless urgency' which 'originates in the bustle and excitement of modern life'. This restlessness is manifested most obviously in urban life:

The lack of something definite at the centre of the soul impels us to search for monetary satisfaction in ever-new stimulations, sensations and external activities. Thus it is that we become entangled in the instability and helplessness that manifests itself as the tumult of the metropolis, as the mania for travelling, as the wild pursuit of competition and as the typically modern disloyalty with regard to taste, style, opinions and personal relationships.¹¹⁴

The extreme consequences that we find in urban life are the result of the extension of the money economy. Not surprisingly, therefore, Simmel sees this nervous tension as a feature of 'modern times, particularly the most recent' which 'are permeated by a feeling of tension, expectation and unreleased intense desires'.¹¹⁵ The neurosis which 'lies below the threshold of consciousness' originates in 'that

increasing distance from nature and that particularly abstract existence that urban life, based on the money economy, has forced upon us'.¹¹⁶

At the very outset of his essay on the metropolis, Simmel maintains that 'the psychological foundation of the metropolitan personality type is the *increase in nervous life*, which emerges out of the rapid and unbroken change in external and internal stimuli'.¹¹⁷ Such 'psychological preconditions' for the modern nervous personality are created by the metropolis itself - 'with every crossing of the street, with the speed and diversity of economic professional, social life'. In its extreme form, this constant bombardment of the senses with new or ever changing impressions, produces the neurasthenic personality which, ultimately, can no longer cope with this jostling array of impressions and confrontations. This leads to attempts to create a distance between ourselves and our social and physical environment. Though Simmel views this distance as 'an emotional trait' that is peculiar to the modern period, its 'pathological deformation is so-called agoraphobia: the fear of coming into too close a contact with objects, a consequence of hyperesthesia, for which every direct and energetic disturbance causes pain'.¹¹⁸ This is the extreme form of the modern 'sense of being oppressed by the externalities of modern life' to which we become increasingly indifferent. Urban existence, as an extreme form of the objectification of social relationships brought about by the money economy, requires a distance between the individual and his social environment. It requires

an inner barrier . . . between people, a barrier, however, that is indispensable for the modern form of life. For the jostling crowdedness and the motley disorder of metropolitan communication would simply be unbearable without such psychological distance. Since contemporary urban culture, with its commercial, professional and social intercourse, forces us to be physically close to an enormous number of people, sensitive and nervous modern people would sink completely into despair if the objectification of social relationships did not bring with it an inner boundary and reserve.¹¹⁹

This 'psychological distance' of which Simmel speaks here, can take the extreme form of agoraphobia and hyper-sensitivity. It can also take the form of total indifference, an indifference that is located in the blasé attitude to life. In his essay on the metropolis, Simmel maintains that

There is perhaps no psychological phenomenon that is so unreservedly associated with the metropolis as the blasé attitude. The blasé attitude results first from the rapidly changing and closely compressed contrasting stimulations of the nerves . . . A life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all. In the same way, through the rapidity and contradictoriness of their changes, more harmless impressions force such violent responses, tearing the nerves so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent . . . There thus emerges an incapacity to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy.¹²⁰

However, Simmel goes on to suggest that 'this physiological source of the metropolitan blasé attitude' is closely bound up with one derived from the money economy. The levelling process operating in the latter – the reduction of everything to the common denominator of exchange value – also produces a personality type who

has completely lost the feeling for value differences. He experiences all things as being of an equally dull and grey hue, as not worth getting excited about . . . Whoever has become possessed by the fact that the same amount of money can procure all the possibilities that life has to offer must also become blasé. As a rule, the blasé attitude is rightly attributed to satiated enjoyment because too strong a stimulus destroys the nervous ability to respond to it.¹²¹

Yet it has an opposite source, derived not from 'the attraction of things' but from their mode of acquisition as when

the more the acquisition is carried out in a mechanical and indifferent way, the more the object appears to be colourless and without interest.¹²²

This is especially true in the advanced money economy where almost everything can be acquired through financial transactions. Yet, paradoxically, the blasé response to this condition is for ever-new attractions, out of which

there emerges the craving today for excitement, for extreme impressions, for the greatest speed in its change . . . the modern preference for 'stimulation' as such in impressions, relationships and information – without thinking it important for us to find out why these

stimulate us – also reveals the characteristic entanglement with means: one is satisfied with this preliminary stage of the genuine production of values.¹²³

Stimulation itself becomes the cure for total indifference. In 'The Berlin Trade Exhibition' (1896), Simmel was already arguing that the 'over-excited and exhausted nerves'¹²⁴ of modern urbanites produced a thirst for yet more amusement, such as was afforded by the distractions of world exhibitions. With reference to big city life, Simmel maintains that individual self-preservation, in the context of urban life and commodity exchange, is purchased at the price of devaluing the objective world and devaluing individuals too. This need for self-preservation also affects the mode of interaction in city life. It manifests itself in an 'external reserve' towards others that has its origins not merely in indifference – as in the blasé attitude – but 'a slight aversion, a mutual strangeness and repulsion, which will break into hatred and struggle at the moment of a closer contact, however caused'.¹²⁵

The neurotic forms of behaviour that Simmel outlines result largely from the oscillation between close confrontation with objects and people and an excessive distance from them. As Troeltsch pointed out, this oscillation is to be found within Simmel's own characterization of modernity. In *Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen* (1917), Simmel argues that

There exists a deep inner connection between too close a captivation with things and too great a distance from them which, with a kind of fear of contact, places us in a vacuum. We knew for a long time that we were suffering equally from both of them.¹²⁶

Troeltsch adds that 'this is stated with a degree of self-criticism'. In 1917 Simmel added that we 'were indeed ripe for the restoration of our health'.¹²⁷

Even this brief outline of Simmel's preoccupation with the dramatic increase in nervous energy necessitated by urban life and a developed money economy dominated by exchange values should suggest that it is a central theme of his account of modernity. Troeltsch seems to suggest that Simmel himself was afflicted with this modern neurasthenia which he so often describes. Another astute contemporary described him as an 'intellectual neurasthenic'. Altmann, reviewing *The Philosophy of Money*, observes that 'Nervous to the fingertips, of the almost frightening sensibility of the neurasthenic, Simmel is one of

the most ingenious interpreters of psychic emotions, incomparable in the gift to feel the most subtle vibrations of the soul.¹²⁸ Simmel's friend Karl Joël also maintained that 'whoever saw and heard him only externally, would notice particularly strongly in him the fundamental symptoms of the times, a nervous restlessness'.¹²⁹ In other words, Simmel's own social experiences were the foundation for his account of modernity. He not only described the features of modernity that he saw in contemporary society, he also lived them out. 'The experience of the neurasthenic' is reflected in his writings as a preoccupation with what 'lies below the threshold of consciousness'. In a somewhat different context, Everett Hughes characterizes Simmel as 'the Freud of the study of society'.¹³⁰ Though such a description is in keeping with his sociological account of neurasthenia, it is clearly deficient in so far as Simmel was unconcerned with tracing symptoms back to their subconscious origins. Indeed, Simmel's procedure may be characterized as almost the converse: what lies below the threshold of consciousness is traced to the processes operating on the surface of society. Simmel's account of neurasthenia is in terms of its social preconditions in urban life and the developed money economy.

But we must guard against the assumption that this neurasthenia was always conceived negatively by Simmel and his contemporaries. As someone whose very approach to his subject-matter rested upon an aestheticization of reality, this hypersensitivity was essential to Simmel's '*Anschauungsweise*'. Its role in creativity is not dissimilar to that of Simmel's contemporary, Stefan George. In his study of European aestheticism, Wuthenow speaks of George's 'highly developed sensitivity and avowed nervousness' and asserts that 'the "neurasthenia" of modernism is positively applied as an expression of refinement, as the extension or sharpening of the capacity for apperception and as the expansion or deepening of the realm of experience'.¹³¹ In Simmel's case, one may point to the emphasis upon the notion of distinction (*Vornehmheit*) or refinement and its association with creativity, which abounds in his work, at least from *The Philosophy of Money* onwards. At the biographical level, Simmel stood close to the George circle around the turn of the century, influenced their thought and even, according to some contemporary observers, imitated George's mode of dress. This circle of intellectuals and artists was very much distanced from the urban crowds. This was in contrast to Baudelaire, as Wuthenow points out, when he suggests that 'George held himself haughtily at a distance from the

crowd to which Baudelaire avowedly offered himself'.¹³² As we have already argued, Simmel's own interest in urban life is hardly that of the documentary reporter but that of someone who could retreat to his salon to prepare what von Wiese somewhat disparagingly termed 'the sociology of an aesthete'.¹³³ Furthermore, this heightened social distance would suggest that whereas, in Benjamin's terms, the first moment of *modernité* that is expressed in Baudelaire's work is still concerned with concrete experience, with *Erfahrung*, the second moment of *art nouveau* (*Jugendstil*) gains its inspiration from inner experiences (*Erlebnisse*) that are the product of a distance from social reality and a retreat into the *intérieur*. But in order to arrive at this inward retreat, we must first confront Simmel's account of the metropolis.

The Social Experience of the Metropolis

How does Simmel conceive of the metropolis? What are its features and what is it that interests Simmel about the metropolis? What features of modernity have their roots in urbanism? Is the metropolis actually their source or is it part of a wider whole such as the money economy? In order to answer these questions we must turn not merely to his essay on the metropolis but to some of his other writings.

Within the context of Simmel's sociology of space, the city as such is to be defined in terms of its sociological rather than its territorial boundaries. Though it is a distinctive social space that 'fundamentally acts upon social interactions within it', the city is 'not a spatial entity with sociological consequences, but a sociological entity that is formed spatially'.¹³⁴ The metropolis is not merely the focal point of social differentiation and complex social networks, but also the location of indefinite collectivities – crowds whose impulsiveness and enthusiasm rests in part upon the fact that 'they either find themselves out in the open or in a . . . very large space'.¹³⁵ This openness, that also manifests itself in the city as a transportation centre bringing together diverse social strata, contrasts sharply with the social distance signified by 'a concentrated minority' in the ghetto. This fixing of the spatial locations is also illustrated by Simmel in the concept of the rendezvous which 'characterises both meeting together itself as well as its location'. It is something individual and unique. Similarly, the individualization of place – in cities originally by name and then by number (a feature instanced both by Simmel and later by Benjamin for Paris) – contrasts with the continuous flow and levelling of social interaction in the city.

The big city provides the possibility for total indifference towards one's neighbours, not merely in the sense of those with whom one lives in close proximity but also those whom one confronts in everyday social contexts. Confronted with the crowd of potential interactions, the individual seeks some form of self-preservation that in city dwellers is associated with indifference. It also results from another feature that Benjamin chose to emphasize in his own analysis of urban life by quoting from Simmel:

The person who is able to see but unable to hear is much more . . . troubled than the person who is able to hear but unable to see. Here is something . . . characteristic of the big city. The interpersonal relationships of people in big cities are characterised by a markedly greater emphasis on the use of the eyes than on that of the ears. This can be attributed chiefly to the institution of public conveyances. Before buses, railroads and trams became fully established during the nineteenth century, people were never put in the position of having to stare at one another for minutes or even hours on end without exchanging a word.¹³⁶

Simmel also points to our sense of smell as a dissociating sense – having to confront the odour of other social groups (Simmel's questionable examples are 'the negro' in the US, 'Jews and manual workers').¹³⁷

The social reserve prevalent in social interaction in big cities as a means of preserving social distance and maintaining the individual self intact threatened by the tumult of continuously changing stimuli, brings us back to the theme of the inner consequences of metropolitan life. But before returning to Simmel's 'Metropolis and Mental Life', a further example from his 'Sociology of Space' is instructive.

As an instance of the consequence of change of place and travel – both having increased with urbanization – Simmel points to an interesting social consequence that seems to operate in the opposite direction to the indifference and hostility to those we come into contact with in big cities:

Acquaintance on a journey . . . often develops an intimacy and open-heartedness for which there exists really no inner reason. It seems to me that three elements are at work here: detachment from one's usual milieu, the communality of momentary impressions and encounters and consciousness of the succeeding and definite parting of the ways.¹³⁸

Acquaintance on a journey, seduced by the feeling that one is under no obligation, and that one is confronted by a person from whom one will be shortly parted for ever and who is actually anonymous, often leads to quite remarkable confidences, to unlimited compliance compared with our impulse to express ourselves which we have learned to control in the light of experience of its consequences in our usual long-term relationships.¹³⁹

A not dissimilar anonymity was to become much more commonplace in another social context that Simmel does not describe, namely psychoanalysis. Here, however, we have another instance of Simmel's unswerving interest in the vignettes of social interaction, and that even formed the starting point for much of the literature that was originally produced to distract travellers on long railway journeys in the nineteenth century. Of more general significance here, however, is the fact that Simmel was the first sociologist to explicitly emphasize the analysis of social space, an interest that was extended by Kracauer and Benjamin in their own analysis of modernity.

Yet if we return to Simmel's 'Metropolis and Mental Life' essay, we find that it is not merely the dramatic expansion of nervous life in the urban population, nor merely the sociological significance of the spatial organization of cities that interests Simmel. In that essay, the opening passage provides the context for a central theme of his work around the turn of the century. There, Simmel maintains that 'the deepest problems of modern life derive from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of social culture, and of the technique of life'.¹⁴⁰ Sociology must seek to solve 'the equation which structures like the metropolis set up between the individual and the super-individual contents of life' and inquire 'how the personality accommodates itself in the adjustments of external forces'. This is predicated upon the assumption that 'the person resists being levelled down and worn out by a social-technological mechanism' such as the metropolis.

But this 'social-technological mechanism' is one that we have created but which, as a reified objective culture, stands over against our subjective culture as something alien. Elsewhere, Simmel asserts that

No one, in fact, will fail to concede that the style of modern life, precisely as a result of its mass character, its hasty variety, its equalisation, extending beyond all possible boundaries, of countless

hitherto conserved entities has led to unheard of levelling of the personal form of life itself.¹⁴¹

But Simmel has already pointed to the opposite consequence, perhaps the result of this very levelling, namely the attempt to accentuate individuality and subjectivity. As compensation for this levelling process we find the 'exaggerated subjectivism of the period' to which Simmel so often refers.¹⁴²

This extreme subjectivism as a response to the extreme objectification of culture reaches its apogee in the metropolis which is

the genuine showplace of this culture which grows beyond all that is personal. Here, in buildings and educational institutions, in the wonders and comforts of space-conquering technology, in the formations of communal life and in the visible state institutions, there is offered such an overpowering wealth of crystallised, impersonalised mind, as it were, that the personality cannot maintain itself when confronted with it.¹⁴³

This preponderance of the objective over the subjective in the metropolis has its deeper origins in the fact that the metropolis is the seat of the money economy. Indeed 'the money economy dominates the metropolis'. The extension of the money economy and the domination of the intellect ultimately coincide. The pure objectivity of the treatment of people and things leads to an indifference as to what is distinctive since money transactions are concerned only with exchange values. On the other hand, the heightening of this very intellectuality in metropolitan people acts as a form of self preservation since the reaction to the shocks and tempo of urban confrontations 'is shifted to that organ which is least sensitive and quite remote from the depth of the personality'.¹⁴⁴

The subjective objectivity or 'dissociation' in dealings with other human beings in the urban context 'without which this mode of life could not at all be led', is in fact 'only one of its elementary forms of socialisation'. Like the developed money economy, it has a positive side, 'namely, it secures for the individual a kind and measure of personal freedom for which there exists no analogy under other circumstances'. Yet this very freedom, in turn, has an obverse potentiality.

For the mutual reserve and indifference, the psychological conditions of life of broad sectors are never felt more strongly by the individual

with regard to their impact upon his independence than in the densest throng, because the bodily proximity and confined space makes the mental distance all the more readily visible. It is clearly merely the obverse of this freedom if, under particular circumstances, one nowhere feels so lonely and lost than in the metropolitan crowd. For here, as elsewhere, it is in no way necessary that human beings' freedom be reflected in their emotional life as a sense of well-being.¹⁴⁵

The individual's struggle for self-assertion, when confronted with general indifference, may take the form of stimulating a sense of distinctiveness from one's fellow urbanites. This also takes excessive forms which

ultimately entice one to adopt the most tendentious eccentricities, the specifically metropolitan excesses of aloofness, caprice and fastidiousness, whose significance no longer lies in the content of such behaviour but rather in its form of being different, of making oneself stand out and thus attracting attention.¹⁴⁶

This is made all the more necessary in the light of 'the brevity and infrequency of meetings which are allotted to each individual compared with interaction in a small town' and which necessitate coming to the point as quickly as possible and making as striking an impression in the briefest possible time. The 'calculating exactness of practical life' - resulting from a money economy - also reinforces this tendency since

The relationships and concerns of the typical metropolitan resident are so manifold and complex that, especially as a result of the agglomeration of so many persons with such differentiated interests, their relationships and activities intertwine with one another into a many-membered organism. In view of this fact, the lack of the most exact punctuality in promises and activities would cause the whole to break down into an inextricable chaos. If all the clocks in Berlin suddenly went wrong in different ways even only as much as an hour, its entire economic and commercial life would be derailed for some time.¹⁴⁷

But this very diversity of interests that requires such exact co-ordination is itself the result of a further factor - the division of labour and social and functional differentiation.

For Simmel, cities are 'the seat of the most advanced economic division of labour'. To the division of labour in production is added the associated specialization in consumption - the 'differentiation,

refinement and enrichment of the needs of the public – which is so apparent in the metropolitan context. It is ‘the money economy which dominates the metropolis’. As a result of both, we are confronted with a monumental objective culture that threatens individual creativity and growth. We are faced, Simmel argues, by ‘the atrophy of individual culture through the hypertrophy of objective culture’ whose divergence is particularly apparent ‘in the upper classes’. With the reintroduction of this theme we are once more confronted with the same problematic with which Simmel opened his analysis of the metropolitan life. It is a problematic which Simmel works through here in the context of the metropolitan psyche but which remains a permanent theme in his socio-cultural critique of modern society.

The individual is confronted with the domination of society, historical tradition, external culture and technology all of which threaten to overwhelm him. But there is something contradictory about this apposition. It contradicts, in part, Simmel’s presupposition of the fundamental interrelatedness of all social phenomena in so far as we can conceive of this objective culture becoming so reified that it has no relationship whatsoever to individuals. In other words, some significant sectors of social phenomena become so congealed and solidified that they bear little relation to their creators, except as an overwhelming ‘hypertrophy of objective culture’. Secondly, at the methodological level, social institutions and structures are not of particular interest to Simmel as a sociologist. Perhaps because they are not analysable by him from his particular perspective they become unnecessarily overpowering. They become, as it were, ‘society’ in the sense of that reified abstraction whose introduction into sociology Simmel so consistently opposed.

But is there a more specific social significance of this central theme in Simmel’s work, one that is connected with his account of modernity? We have already seen that the response to this alienating objective culture on the part of its victims is a growing indifference to people and values, an increasingly blasé attitude towards the world and a retreat to the inner sphere. Indifference and a blasé attitude can be readily incorporated into a wider aestheticization of reality that seeks to emphasize the distance between the individual and the world. The retreat into inwardness (*Innerlichkeit*) and the *intérieur* is often taken to be a consistent feature of *Jugendstil*. The inward retreat, for certain strata of society, especially the *Kulturbürgertum* at the turn of the century, was readily combined with the beautification (*Verschönerung*) of life from a subjective standpoint. Reserve and indifference as defence

mechanisms in the metropolis are most likely to be used by those social strata who, from a relatively secure social position, can afford to adopt this response. This cloak of functional objectivity is adopted towards metropolitan man’s ‘merchant, his customer and with his servant, and frequently with the persons with whom he is thrown into obligatory association’.¹⁴⁸ Simmel’s account of metropolitan life would appear to refer particularly to specific social strata.

There is another way in which Simmel’s account of metropolitan life is significant for his work as a whole. It was suggested by one of his contemporaries that metropolitan life itself was the source of Simmel’s methodology in its widest sense. Hamann, who made substantial use of Simmel’s social analysis in *The Philosophy of Money*, argued that at least one current artistic tendency – impressionism, within which rubric Hamann also included many features of *Jugendstil* – also had its basis in the metropolis. Since it has been argued elsewhere that Simmel’s own approach to his object of study in this period may be characterized as a form of ‘sociological impressionism’ in this same wider sense, it is important to see how the experiences that are the basis for Simmel’s account of modernity also have their roots in an aestheticization of reality.

Hamann’s neglected study, *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst* (1907) somewhat unwittingly confronts the features of modernity. His account of the arts, literature and philosophy at the turn of the century centres around a conception of impressionism that fails to distinguish it from *Jugendstil*. Impressionism he views as grounded philosophically in psychologism and socially in subjectivism and individualism. A positive value is placed on the unsystematic, symbolism and imagery, such that

One thinks and speaks in images. Simmel’s psychology derives its attractiveness from the fact that, in a psychologically interesting manner, he does not break down the total individual experiences that motivate people into abstract analytical elements but represents them through vivid images.¹⁴⁹

That is, rather than being impressed by the strength of Simmel’s analysis, we are confronted with the ‘rapid interpretation of the momentary’ and ‘the aestheticisation of thought’. The description of impressionism provided by Hamann – including as it does many undifferentiated elements of *Jugendstil* – can also be read as an account of modernity.

But of greater interest is Hamann's attempt at a sociological explanation for the location and population of impressionism. It is one which draws heavily, as he acknowledges, upon Simmel's work and especially his *Philosophy of Money*. Hamann maintains that

the impressionistic style of life finds a favourable basis in the *metropolis*. The external circumstances of life in such a large city are well suited to explaining much of impressionistic life.¹⁵⁰

The particular features of metropolitan life that Hamann sees as being responsible for the growth of the impressionist stance are those that Simmel had already outlined as characteristic of urban life. The potential social isolation and lack of bonds made possible by urban life provides 'a greater moral normative freedom'. 'The number and variation of relationships', 'this fleetingness and superficiality of interaction' leads to a new evaluation of the momentary, to the unbounded 'charm of the moment'. On the other hand, within the context of objectified relationships, 'precisely this spatial and temporal distance, unburdened by memories and freed from any definite obligation to future behaviour, allows a general amiability to develop'.¹⁵¹ Since the metropolis is the meeting point 'of the most diverse social strata, occupations and characters', it is not merely a concentration of individuals but is 'the focal point in which all threads converge, as a metropole' which continually provides 'new impressions and diversions' in newspapers, diverse political parties and standpoints and the like. The plurality and wealth of possibilities for enjoyment of all kinds provides a kind of erotic search for 'the variation of attractions and the passive ease of pleasure in consumption'. The rapid tempo of life encourages a capacity to react quickly and decisively 'to mere intimations, fragments of a phenomena'. This 'diversity of attractions, relationships and opinions' constitutes the metropolitan milieu.

Hamann goes on to argue that out of this milieu the social strata within which impressionism has the greatest scope for development is 'the commercial strata' with its liberalism, its lack of active contact with production and its desire for an object to which it is not bound. As mediators operating with the ultimate economic mediator - money - use-values are of only momentary interest. With nothing besides money as a 'permanent' possession, 'an aestheticism, a superficial impression' predominates vis-à-vis life. In other words, it is a strata of society which even outside the confines of the metropolis within

which it is usually located experiences its features most strongly. But Hamann's central thesis is stated more simply as follows: namely that

impressionism as a style goes along with a centralising tendency, a developed money economy, the domination of capitalism and the commercial and financial strata who provide its distinctive tone. Modern impressionism as art and life is totally at home in metropolitan centres - Berlin, Vienna, Paris, London.¹⁵²

Hamann maintains in this context, that the connection between the money economy, commerce and the metropolis 'has found an interesting and significant expression in a *Philosophy of Money* by Georg Simmel, in fact in a completely impressionistic philosophy'.¹⁵³ It is one that embodies all the features of impressionism as Hamann interprets it - so much so that he was able to rely heavily upon Simmel's own account to symbolize the impressionist tendency.

The metropolis may well be the focus of a new kind of sociability, 'a general amiability' (Hamann), but only for specific social strata. Both the representation of social relations in the metropolis and its conception as the convergence and intersection of diverse social strands, produce an image of the metropolis as a harmonious whole that may well exist in the experience of specific strata in this configuration but hardly reflects the nature of the metropolis at the turn of the century. Such an interpretation, which shuts out other social realities, is reinforced by a sociology which sees as the central feature of society *sociation* and its purely abstract form for sociability. Arguing against rationalism's dismissal of sociability as 'empty idleness', Simmel pleads for sociability as not merely 'the *play form of association*' but as the pure form of *sociation* itself:

The political, the economic, the purposive society of any sort is, to be sure, always 'society'. But only the sociable gathering is 'society' without qualifying adjectives, because it alone presents the pure, abstract play of form, all the specific contents of the one-sided and qualified societies being dissolved away.¹⁵⁴

Earlier Simmel had declared that 'humanity has created *sociation* as its form of life - which was not, as it were, the only logical possibility'.¹⁵⁵ Similarly, by transforming and dissolving the everyday world of the metropolis into forms of sociability, and thereby into a permanent harmony, the sociologist engages in a form of forgetfulness that obscures or even ignores the other social realities of the metropolis.

In so far as such an intention finds echoes in some dimension of Simmel's sociology, it too results in an image of society that is surprisingly harmonious and ultimately not disturbing. The undifferentiated manner in which social relations intermesh and converge in the metropolis suggests an image that also applies to Simmel's notion of society itself, namely the labyrinth.

The image of the labyrinth symbolizes not merely the metropolis but also the whole of society. But this 'web of group affiliations' or 'intersections of social circles' that partly constitutes the social labyrinth does not reveal the workings of society except at the level of ceaseless everyday interactions. To take as a contrast a literary example by an author preoccupied by the metropolis, it is plausible to argue that Dickens's *Bleak House* especially, as well as several of his mature novels, revolves around a conception of society as a labyrinth whose connections are undisclosed at the outset. By the end of the novel, key characters have revealed how the most unlikely members of the class structure are actually related to one another. However intricate the labyrinth of social connections - and Dickens's conception of society develops into a remarkably complex one by the time he writes *Our Mutual Friend* - there is a principle of differentiation at work which enables central figures to reveal the hierarchy of society as well as merely its connecting elements. Yet precisely this is not Simmel's intention. The labyrinth of society is illuminated aesthetically and not politically. Social circles may well intersect but their contradictions are not exposed. In the aestheticized conception of social reality, either they do not exist or they can be rendered harmless.

But if the labyrinth is a central motif in Simmel's work, what is it that holds it together? Since a labyrinth is not a hierarchical symbol, what is it that renders hierarchical differentiation unimportant? If society is a closely-woven web, where is Simmel's spider? Simmel's contemporaries were certainly aware of this powerful image in his work. Kracauer saw Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* as revealing 'the interwoven nature of the assembled parts of the diversity of the world', as presenting 'a comprehensive picture of the interconnectedness and entanglement of phenomena'.¹⁵⁶ Rudolph Goldscheid, in the same context, spoke of the 'excessive cobweb-like nature of his presentation of real circumstances'.¹⁵⁷ Lukács, with reference to Simmel's sociology, argued that 'this web of interrelationships must remain a labyrinth and cannot be a system'.¹⁵⁸ Yet is this motif of the labyrinth confined to the metropolis? At the end of his essay on the metropolis, Simmel notes that the origins of its specific features lie in the money economy.

The World of Money and Commodities

Benjamin maintained that the third social experience which afforded Baudelaire his insights into modernity was that of the consumer. In Simmel's case, we must extend this experience more broadly to cover experience of the money economy as a whole. For Simmel, the prehistory of modernity lies in the development of the money economy. He saw the latter, rather than capitalism, as responsible for the transformation of social relations and for the origins of major features of metropolitan life. But there is no concrete historical interpretation of the advent of modernity in Simmel's work. The fact that everything flows into everything else, that the world is in continual flux, suggests that Simmel retained his early evolutionism derived from Spencer and others but as an evolutionism without 'stages' or 'breaks'. For Simmel reflections upon the consequences of the mature money economy represents the core of his analysis of modernity.

Simmel commenced his sociological reflections from the metaphysical principle of the fundamental interrelatedness of all phenomena. The various groups in society, the diverse forms of social relationships are connected with one another as in a labyrinth. At the end of his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel asserts another metaphysical principle that not only are all phenomena interrelated, they are also in perpetual flux:

In reality itself things do not last for any length of time: through the restlessness with which they offer themselves at any moment to the application of a law, every form becomes immediately dissolved in the very moment when it emerges; it lives, as it were, only by being destroyed; every consolidation of form into lasting objects - no matter how short they last - is an incomplete interpretation that is unable to follow the motion of reality at its own pace.¹⁵⁹

Such a principle not only incorporates a motif of modernity - the fleetingness of phenomena and our experience of them, a motif that is particularly apparent in different ways in both impressionism and *Jugendstil* - but also reveals its inner intention. The 'fleeting beauty' in the fragments of modern life are to be rendered eternal through art. Simmel's adherence to this dialectic of the permanent and the transitory also throws light upon his description of some of his own essays - 'snapshots *sub specie aeternitatis*'. More generally, Simmel also argues that 'the goal of our thoughts is to find what

is steadfast and reliable behind ephemeral appearances and the flux of events'.¹⁶⁰ In keeping with the contemporary aesthetic currents of the time with which Simmel's work can be identified, this expresses his own intentions, namely to capture the fleeting images of modernity but to translate them into universal 'forms'. This paradoxical project must be qualified since 'whereas timeless objects are valid in the form of permanency, their opposites are valid in the form of transition, of non-permanency'.¹⁶¹ Phenomena may be analysed from either vantage point since

Only because reality is in constant motion is there any sense in asserting its opposite: the ideal system of eternally valid lawfulness. Conversely, it is only because such lawfulness exists that we are able to comprehend and grasp that stream of existence which would otherwise disintegrate into chaos.¹⁶²

Leaving aside here the important question as to whether Simmel ever looked for 'laws' of society, we need to ask what social phenomenon embodies both the interrelatedness of the motif of society as a labyrinth and the notion of the dialectic of flux and permanence in the world?

Simmel's answer is unambiguous. 'There is no more striking symbol of the completely dynamic character of the world than money . . . the vehicle for a movement in which everything else that is not in motion is completely extinguished. It is, as it were, an *actus purus*'.¹⁶³ Yet money is also capable of embodying the opposite tendency by representing not merely 'a single economic value' but also 'abstract economic value in general'. In other words,

As a tangible item, money is the most ephemeral thing in the external-practical world; yet in its content it is the most stable, since it stands at the point of indifference and balance between all other phenomena in the world.¹⁶⁴

Money not merely symbolizes movement within society conceived as a labyrinth; its function within exchange also creates the very connections that constitute the economic labyrinth. It is the spider that weaves society's web.

In a roundabout manner, the experience of the consumer is a prominent source of Simmel's insights into modernity. Simmel's notion of society itself seems at times to rest upon the process prior to consumption, namely exchange. As 'a sociological phenomenon *sui generis*', the significance of exchange for society lies in the following:

as the economic realisation of the relativity of things . . . exchange raises the specific object and its significance for the individual above its singularity, not into the sphere of abstraction, but into that of lively interaction which is the substance of economic value.¹⁶⁵

For Simmel, 'the interaction between individuals is the starting point of all social formations' and its symbolic object par excellence is money since it 'represents pure interaction in its purest form; it makes comprehensible the most abstract concept; it is an individual thing whose essential significance is to reach beyond individualities . . . and which interweaves all singularities and, in this fashion, creates reality'.¹⁶⁶ Exchange

is obviously one of the functions that creates an inner bond between people – a society in place of a mere collection of individuals . . . exchange is a form of socialisation. It is one of those relations through which a number of individuals become a social group, and 'society' is identical with the sum total of those relations.¹⁶⁷

Thus, social interaction is the basis of society and, since exchange is 'the purest sociological occurrence, the most complete form of interaction', exchange is a crucial form of sociation.

Within this context of the centrality of exchange relations, what grounds are there for arguing that consumption itself is crucial for Simmel's analysis of modernity? Simmel's subjectivist theory of value is probably derived from Menger and Böhm-Bawerk. The economy is grounded in exchange not in production. Value and exchange 'are mutually conditioning' and the economy itself 'is a special case of the general form of exchange', since 'exchange is the source of economic values'. It is not surprising, therefore, that Simmel has no specifically social theory of production. Instead he speaks of 'the exchange with nature which we call production' and exchange itself as 'just as productive and value-creating as is production itself'. Since Simmel maintains that 'it is of great importance to reduce the economic process to what really happens in the mind of each economic subject', there exists no difference between exchange in a subsistence and a market economy, nor between the exchange of goods or land and the same 'subjective process of sacrifice and gain in the individual mind' occurs in both instances. Not surprisingly, it is the psychological consequences of money transactions that so preoccupy him in *The Philosophy of Money*.¹⁶⁸

Simmel's analysis of the consequences of a mature money economy hovers between an assertion of the eternal nature of its contradictions and a critique of its reifying aspects. Thus, it is argued that money is

the reification of the pure relationship between things as expressed in their economic motion. Money stands between the individual objects related to it, in a realm organised according to its own norms which is the objectification of the movements of balancing and exchange originally accomplished by the objects themselves.¹⁶⁹

This spectral objectivity realized in money transactions as 'the reflection of exchange among people, the embodiment of a pure function' is challenged by Simmel on the grounds that 'in the last analysis, it is not objects but people who carry on these processes, and the relations between objects are really relations between people'.¹⁷⁰

Within this reified world of monetary relationships – itself, for Simmel, part of a wider reified object culture – each individual's own opportunity for creativity and development becomes increasingly restricted. This theme, already encountered in Simmel's account of the metropolis, is given greater force by virtue of Simmel's attempt to seek out 'the concrete, effective causes' of this widening separation of subjective and objective culture in modern society.

Simmel's unequivocal answer as to the cause of this separation is surprising in the light of his much more thorough analysis of the money economy. The increasing expansion of objective culture of 'the fragmentary life-content of individuals' and the ever-widening gap between the two results from 'the division of labour within production as well as consumption'. In so far as the reification and fragmentation of individuals is a feature of modernity, the discussion of the division of labour as its root cause is significant for understanding Simmel's wider response to modernity. As we shall see, however, it is not the division of labour within production that Simmel follows up in his later writings but rather its effects upon consumption. It is, again, the consequences of an advanced division of labour for consumption and people's awareness of them that continued to interest Simmel. This is true of his earlier interesting account of the world of commodities at 'The Berlin Trade Exhibition' (1896) as well as his essays on 'Fashion' (1895, 1905 and 1911) and 'The Problem of Style' (1908). Even within the context of his discussion of the division of labour in *The Philosophy of Money* such a direction can already be discerned in the title of the chapter within which it is located – 'The Style of Life'.

With regard to the division of labour and specialization within production itself, Simmel does provide an account which at times echoes that of Marx, though with significantly different emphases. Simmel commences by arguing that in the modern production process – though this is hardly specified or differentiated even to the extent of Marx's account in *Capital* which was known to Simmel – 'the product is completed at the expense of the development of the producer' whose total personality 'often even becomes stunted because of the diversion of energies . . . indispensable for the harmonious growth of the self. In other cases, it develops as if cut off from the core of the personality.' Individual workers cannot recognize themselves in what they produce since the significance and meaning of the latter is solely derived 'from its relationship with products of a different origin', namely other commodities. What is produced is a fragment that lacks the concrete definition 'that can be easily perceived in a product of labour that is wholly the work of a *single person*'.¹⁷¹ The relationship of workers to what they produce within an advanced division of labour is contrasted with the work of art which, for Simmel, is 'the most perfectly autonomous unity, a self-sufficient totality' that, because of its close connection with its producer, 'expresses a subjective spiritual unity'. This expressive function is totally lost in modern production, where it is increasingly plausible 'for the worker to consider his work and its result as purely objective and autonomous, because it no longer touches the roots of his whole life-system'.

This sense of alienation on the worker's part is reinforced by 'the separation of the worker from the means of production' since where the capitalist's function is 'to acquire, organise and allocate the means of production, these means acquire a very different objectivity for the worker than for those who work with their own materials'.¹⁷² In turn this process is strengthened by 'the fact that, in addition to the means of production, work itself is separated from the worker' wherever 'labour power has become a commodity'. Under such circumstances, 'labour now shares the same character, mode of valuation and fate with all other commodities'.¹⁷³ But rather than engage in a historically specific analysis of the ramifications of this process, Simmel maintains that it is merely 'one side of the far-reaching process of differentiation by which specific contents of the personality are detached in order for them to confront the personality as objects with an independent character and dynamic'.¹⁷⁴ In other words, this historically specific process is to be understood within the context of a universal, unhistorical separation of subjective and objective culture.

This process of the separation of the worker from the means of production is even more apparent in the case of automatic machine production which is

the result of a highly advanced breakdown and specialisation of materials and energies, akin to the character of a highly developed state administration . . . In that the machine becomes a totality and carries out a growing proportion of the work itself, it confronts the worker as an autonomous power, just as he too is no longer an individual personality but merely someone who carries out an objectively prescribed task.¹⁷⁵

But machine production is also imbued with other characteristics. Firstly, it is the embodiment of objectified knowledge (what Simmel terms 'the objective mind') that is far greater than that of the individual producer. Not only does the resulting product 'contain energies, qualities and additional potentialities that lie quite outside the grasp of the individual producer' but an advanced division of labour also

imbues the product with energies derived from a very large number of individuals . . . This accumulation of quality and excellence in the object that forms their synthesis is unlimited, whereas the growth of individuals, in any period of time, and by their very nature, has quite definite natural limits.¹⁷⁶

According to Simmel, the perfection of the machine-made product, moreover, cannot match that produced by the single individual. Such judgements provide yet another indication of his adherence to the threatened notion of the individual producer – in this case, the artisan but more often than not the artist.

However, not merely the production process but also the product itself stands over against its producer as an alien object, since 'the product of labour in the capitalist era is an object with a decidedly autonomous character, with its own laws of motion and a character alien to the producing subject', and 'is most forcefully illustrated where the worker is compelled to buy his own product'.¹⁷⁷ But individual workers are also confronted with a greatly increased range of possible items of consumption. Here the process at work is one of levelling of quality and price:

The broadening of consumption . . . is dependent upon the growth of objective culture, since the more objective and impersonal an object

is the better it is suited to more people. Such consumable material . . . cannot be designed for subjective differentiation of taste, while on the other hand only the most extreme differentiation of production is able to produce the objects cheaply and abundantly enough in order to satisfy the demand for them.¹⁷⁸

As 'a bridge between the objectivity of culture and the division of labour', consumption too is transformed in this process, not merely quantitatively but also qualitatively.

Here, Simmel contrasts custom production with mass consumption. Whereas the former 'gave the consumer a personal relationship to the commodity', in the latter case the commodity is something external and autonomous to the consumer. Not only does the division of labour destroy custom production, '*the subjective aura of the product* also disappears in relation to the consumer because the commodity is now produced independently of him [my emphasis]'.¹⁷⁹ Whereas the loss of aura is a central theme of Benjamin's work on modernity, Simmel emphasizes the objectification of consumption as part of 'the objectivity of the style of life' itself in the modern period.¹⁸⁰ The individual becomes increasingly estranged not merely from the wider cultural milieux but also from 'the more intimate aspects of our daily life'. Our earlier attachment to our immediate surroundings – even the furniture which we grew up with – has broken down. Simmel discerns three reasons for this. Firstly, 'the sheer quantity of very specifically formed objects makes a close and, as it were, personal relationship to each of them more difficult'.¹⁸¹ This dramatic increase in the quantity of 'concurrent differentiation' of commodities is dealt with at the personal level in *The Philosophy of Money*, and in the public sphere in his essay 'The Berlin Trade Exhibition'. The second factor responsible for our estrangement from our objective culture – 'consecutive differentiation' or changes in fashion – is dealt with only briefly in *The Philosophy of Money* but more fully in Simmel's reworked essay 'Fashion'. The third factor, 'the plurality of styles' is also dealt with at greater length in Simmel's essay 'The Problem of Style'. The examination of these three factors will lead us on to a consideration of how Simmel viewed the individual's response to this growing objectification of modern culture.

Within the private sphere, the wealth of commodities with which we encumber our lives brings about a 'sense of being oppressed by the externalities of modern life' which 'confront us as autonomous objects'. Housework now takes on the form of a 'ceremonial

fetishism' – though why this was not the case earlier cannot be traced back to the paucity of utensils as Simmel does. The 'impersonal origin and easy replaceability' of 'those numerous objects that swarm around us', leads to a situation in which this clutter of commodities becomes 'an interconnected closed world that has increasingly fewer points at which the subjective soul can interpose its will and feelings'.¹⁸² This process of estrangement is completed by the 'independent, impersonal mobility' of commodities that reaches its apogee in the slot machine and the five cents store.

In the public sphere, 'the universe of commodities' (Benjamin) is revealed in world exhibitions. In 'The Berlin Trade Exhibition' (1896)¹⁸³ Simmel highlights a number of important features of this phantasmagoria of commodities. World exhibitions are, for Simmel, a form of socializing as well as a form of bringing together the most diverse range of commodities. Diverse commodities are exhibited in the social context of amusement, a distinctive form of sociability since

The close proximity within which the most heterogeneous industrial products are confined produces a paralysis in the capacity for perception, a true hypnosis . . . in its fragmentation of weak impressions there remains in the memory the notion that one should be amused here.¹⁸⁴

Any sensitive person 'will be overpowered and feel disorientated by the mass effect of what is offered here'. Yet 'precisely this wealth and colourfulness of over-hastened impressions is appropriate to over-excited and exhausted nerves' need for stimulation'. Such exhibitions represent a concentration of commodities produced from ever-increasing specialization within production. On the other hand,

it seems as if the modern person wishes to compensate for the one-sidedness and uniformity of what they produce within the division of labour by the increasing crowding together of heterogeneous impressions, by the increasingly hasty and colourful change in emotions. The differentiation of the active spheres of life evidently complement one another through the comprehensive diversity of their passive and receptive spheres.¹⁸⁵

In other words, the tedium of the production process is compensated for by the artificial stimulation and amusement of consumption. In the case of world exhibitions, however, it is the totally 'passive' sphere

that is paramount since their visitors are there merely to observe and marvel, not to touch or purchase.

Simmel's other major interest in world exhibitions is in their aesthetic dimension. On the one hand, visitors must be impressed by the vastness of what is on offer. On the other, the fleeting life of the commodity is also reflected in their architecture. Thus, whereas the architecture reflects 'the conscious negation of the monumental style', 'the character of a creation for transitoriness' becomes the dominant impression. This transitory impression must still embody something of 'the eternity of forms' in order not to totally reveal the illusory nature of the seemingly permanent character of the contents of such exhibitions. But not merely the architecture itself but the whole layout of exhibitions does reveal an aesthetic dimension, an 'aesthetic super-additum', which aims 'to give new aesthetic significance through the arrangement of their coming together – just as the ordinary advertisement has advanced to the art of posters'. This 'aesthetic productivity' manifests itself in

the increase in what one might term the shop-window quality of things that is evoked by exhibitions. Commodity production . . . must lead to a situation of giving things an enticing external appearance over and above their usefulness . . . one must attempt to excite the interest of the buyer by means of the external attraction of the object, even indeed by means of the form of its arrangement.¹⁸⁶

What Simmel hints at here is the process by which the exchange value of commodities is not merely enhanced but also masked by their aesthetic appeal.

In contrast, 'consecutive differentiation' of commodities manifests itself most clearly in fashion. Whereas Simmel's fuller treatments of fashion as a social phenomenon emphasize its universal and almost eternal character arising out of the dual nature of humanity with regard to uniformity and differentiation, his brief discussion in *The Philosophy of Money* concentrates upon its most modern manifestations. In general, fashion is a social form which combines 'the attraction of differentiation and change with that of similarity and conformity' and which is usually located within social classes in order to express social differences. But the weakening of class barriers and increased upward mobility, together with 'the predominance of the third estate' have increased the pace of changes in fashion. Both the breadth and speed of the spread of fashions creates the illusion that fashion itself is 'an

independent movement, an objective and autonomous force which follows its own course independently of the individual'. In other words, 'it becomes less dependent upon the individual and the individual becomes less dependent upon fashion. Both develop like separate evolutionary worlds.'¹⁸⁷ This assumption of the individual becoming less dependent upon fashion seems to contradict Simmel's earlier analysis of trade exhibitions and his subsequent discussion of the plurality of styles. More remarkably, the analysis of fashion both here and in its fuller treatment elsewhere, gives little importance to the very factors which Simmel had already highlighted in his essay on the Berlin trade exhibition, namely commodity production. Rather, fashion is related to the 'dualistic nature' of mankind, 'the antagonistic tendencies of life', the dual tendencies 'in the individual soul as well as in society', 'the psychological tendency towards imitation', and so on. Fashion itself is viewed as 'a universal phenomenon in the history of our race'. In other words, this treatment of fashion is symptomatic of Simmel's tendency to reduce modernity to eternity, to ultimately concern himself with a social analysis *sub specie aeternitatis*.¹⁸⁸

Nonetheless, in its most extensive form (1911),¹⁸⁹ the essay on fashion does contain a number of specific references to modernity, however much its opening passages confirm Simmel's tendency to render modernity eternal. Within social life and 'its fragmentary reality', it is possible to see the whole history of society as a dialectic and ultimately a compromise between two tendencies: adherence to and absorption in a social group on the one hand, and individual differentiation and distinction from group members on the other. This is a duality that is 'revealed finally in biological forms as the opposition between inheritance and selectivity'.¹⁹⁰ The origins of the first 'social embodiment of these contradictions' lies in 'the psychological tendency towards imitation'. The second tendency towards 'individual differentiation' is embodied in a different kind of personality who, going beyond the given and the past, is orientated towards creating something for the future. Hence, 'the goal-orientated person is the counterpoint to the imitative person'. These two tendencies constitute 'the living preconditions for fashion as a permanent phenomenon in the history of our species'. In passing, Simmel notes that this wider contraction - expressed not merely in fashion but in the contrast between individualism and socialism - is embodied in 'social institutions as the - never permanent - reconciliation' of these two antagonistic tendencies.¹⁹¹ Here, too, we may note that this is

another reason why his social analysis does not concentrate upon fixed social institutions since for Simmel they too are always in a state of flux.

Fashion is a form of life that embodies 'the tendency to social equalisation' as well as social differentiation. This is revealed by the fact that, on the one hand, 'fashions are always class fashions', 'a product of class division' and, on the other, that fashions spread from one class to another, usually from above to below, in the course of their own dissemination and, finally, disintegration. Fashion can be 'ugly' and yet 'modern', as if we are 'aesthetically quite indifferent' to its content, as if fashion 'demonstrates its complete indifference to the actual norms of life'. In this sense, fashion is abstract:

This abstraction of fashion, rooted in its deepest essence and as 'estranged from reality' bestows a certain aesthetic cachet of modernity itself upon quite non-aesthetic areas, also developed in historical phenomena.¹⁹²

But, in contrast to its earlier, more personal origins, 'the invention of fashions in the present period is also increasingly incorporated into the objective work conditions of the economy. Hence,

There not merely emerges an article somewhere that then becomes fashionable, rather articles are produced for the express purpose of being fashionable. At certain intervals of time, a new fashion is required *a priori* and now there exist creators and industries which exclusively carry out this task. The relationship between abstraction as such and objective-social organisation is revealed in the indifference of fashion as a form to any significance that lies in its specific content - and in its increasingly more determined transition to social-productive economic structures.¹⁹³

It would be a short step to translate this analysis into an account of the relationship between fashion's embodiment of exchange value and the need to increase '*a priori*' the circulation of commodities. Fashion's abstraction, in Simmel's sense, is not too far removed from the abstractions of commodity exchange. This even becomes apparent when he notes that 'the domination of fashion' is most unbearable where it takes over those spheres of life - religion, the economy, politics - in which only objective decisions should be made. But this is not the direction of Simmel's analysis. It is, rather, to reiterate, once more, the 'aesthetic attraction' of fashion that is created by 'the distance from the significant content of things', even though this too

might be translated into the categories of exchange and use-value. Indeed, it echoes Baudelaire's aesthetics of modernity.

In what other respects does Simmel's analysis of fashion relate to his theory of modernity? Simmel characterizes modernity here and elsewhere as increasingly fragmented social life and individuality, a fragmentation that requires some counterbalance. This is to be found in adherence to fashion which bestows upon individuals a certain supra-individuality. Hence

For contemporary life with its individualistic fragmentation this element of homogeneity possessed by fashion is particularly important . . . Changes in fashion indicate the amount of deadening of nervous excitement; the more nervous an epoch is, the more rapidly will its fashions change, because the need for the attraction of differentiation, one of the essential agents of fashion, goes hand in hand with the languishing of nervous energies.¹⁹⁴

This latter characteristic Simmel associates with higher social strata. The general feature of fashion outlined here is, of course, related to his account of the neurasthenia of modern life, as Simmel makes evident in his amplification of the origins and consequences of changes in fashion.

The dialectic of changes in fashion necessarily incorporates its logical contradiction – the expansion or extension of fashion must lead to its own destruction. The assimilation of fashion must reach a point at which it ceases to be a fashion. This dialectic is accelerated in the modern period:

The fact that fashion takes on an unprecedented upper hand in contemporary culture – breaking into hitherto untouched areas, becoming more obsessive in existing ones, i.e. incessantly increasing the speed of changes in fashion – is merely the coalescing of a contemporary psychological trait. Our internal rhythm requires increasingly shorter pauses in the change of impressions; or, expressed differently, the accent of attraction is transferred to an increasing extent from its substantive centre to its starting and finishing points.¹⁹⁵

This is indicated at the most seemingly insignificant level by the replacement of the cigar by the cigarette, by the passion for travel which breaks 'the life of the year' into ever-shorter periods. In turn, this implies that 'the specific "impatient" tempo of modern life signifies not merely the craving for the rapid in the qualitative content

of life but also the strength of the formal pleasure of boundaries, of beginnings and ends, of coming and going'.¹⁹⁶

Fashion is, then, part of the more general process of accentuation of time-consciousness in a distinctive sense. Our simultaneous pleasure in newness and oldness indicates that the question 'is not one of being or non-being, rather it is simultaneously being and non-being; it always stands on the water-shed of past and future and thus, as long as it exists on this level, *gives us such a strong sense of presentness as do few other phenomena* [my emphasis].'¹⁹⁷ This 'concentration of social consciousness' upon the transitory only serves to increase its attractiveness since, given the dialectic of fashion, at this very same point there 'already lies its seed of death'.¹⁹⁸ It follows from this that we only denote as fashion that which disappears as quickly as it emerged.

Here Simmel's analysis of fashion deals with a central feature of modernity: the dialectics of 'le transitoire', 'le fugitif':

Amongst the reasons why fashion today so strongly dominates consciousness there belongs also the fact that major, permanent, unquestioned convictions increasingly lose their force. In this way, the fleeting and changeable elements of life gain that much more free space. *The break with the past . . . increasingly concentrates consciousness upon the present. This emphasis upon the present is clearly, at the same time, an emphasis upon change . . .* [My emphasis]¹⁹⁹

But if the domination of fashion consciousness and 'presentness' is a characteristic of the modern period, can we specify its location more precisely? Simmel provides one reason why some people are predisposed more than others to become fashion addicts. Since fashion consciousness relies upon a mixture of emotions of affirmation and envy, it is 'the genuine arena for individuals who are inwardly lacking in independence and needing support, yet whose awareness of self, at the same time, nonetheless requires a certain distinction, attention and particularity'.²⁰⁰ In other words, such individuals need fashion as a means of expressing their own absent individuality. It is an important social medium through which people 'seek to preserve, all the more fully, inner freedom',²⁰¹ whilst providing a vehicle for the individual to indicate externally his or her position in relation to society as a whole. Through fashion, individuals also seek to counteract 'the superiority, autonomy and indifference of the cosmos' in which they live. This proves to be an illusion since 'in the last instance, they have gained no domination over things but rather only over their own

falsified phantasy. Yet the sense of power that flows from this indicates its lack of foundation, its illusory nature in the rapidity with which such manifestations of fashion pass by.²⁰²

Fashion is even more precisely located by Simmel both in relation to specific social strata and distinctive social milieu. Fashion is most closely associated not with upper or lower social strata, whose tempo of life is too slow, but with the middle classes with whose emergence has coincided a wider dissemination of fashion consciousness. It is also located in the metropolis which is a 'breeding ground for fashion', with its rapid changes in impressions and relationships, its levelling and simultaneous highlighting of individuality, its crowdedness and corresponding social distance and 'above all, the economic upward movement of low strata in the speed that they take on in the metropolis must favour the rapid change in fashion'.²⁰³ Hence, fashion cannot be so expensive as it was earlier. It is therefore associated with the cheapening of what is produced and an even quicker change in fashion. Whereas those spheres of industry less subject to fashionable changes in their product can increasingly proceed with 'the rationalisation of production' relatively independently of the market, those concerned with production of a purely fashionable commodity experience an opposite tendency since 'the form of feverish change is here so fundamental that they exist as in a logical contradiction in relation to the developmental tendencies of the modern economy'.²⁰⁴

Yet this does not prevent the fashionable commodity itself from creating its own contradiction since 'compared with this feature [of 'feverish change'], however, fashion also reveals the highly remarkable characteristic that each individual fashion to a certain extent emerges *as if it wishes to live for eternity* [my emphasis]'.²⁰⁵ As such, it embodies the transitory and the eternal. It is 'the eternal return' of the ever-same. Indeed, the circulation of fashion is like that of the commodity: ever-new but ever-same.

Fashion is, for Simmel, the symbol of consecutive differentiation and world exhibitions the epitome of concurrent differentiation of modern culture. The roots of both lie, in part, in 'the multitude of styles that confronts us when we view the objects that surround us'.²⁰⁶ Not surprisingly, the whole of the last chapter of Simmel's *Philosophy of Money* is devoted to 'The Style of Life', to its seemingly surface, superficial manifestations that are, at the same time, the clue to its very essence.²⁰⁷ The 'bewildering plurality of styles' had already been noted in his 'Sociological Aesthetics' (1896), as an instance of modern disloyalty to any one style.²⁰⁸ In *The Philosophy of Money* this is

explained as 'the result of the enlargement of our historical knowledge, which in turn is associated with modern man's penchant for change'. Indeed, the entire visible environment of our cultural life has disintegrated into a 'plurality of styles'. Given their independent objectivity, we are now confronted with 'these forms on the one side, and our subjectivity on the other'.

In his later reflections on 'The Problem of Style' (1908),²⁰⁹ Simmel argues that, by virtue of the very plurality of styles, individuals seek to express their subjectivity in the 'unmistakeable, inimitable cachet' of the household objects they surround themselves with. Within the aesthetic sphere of the household in better-off strata - and the contemporary *Jugendstil* movement sought to stylize 'every pot and every chair' as Olbrich sarcastically put it - the stylized objects of the *intérieur* signify a balance between the expression of individuality and the indication of 'supra-individuality' since we share this style with many others. In this way,

a supra-individual form and law is produced between the subjective personality and its human and objective environment; the stylised expression, form of life, taste - all these are limits, forms of distance in which the exaggerated subjectivism of the times find a counterbalance and a cloak.²¹⁰

The 'background or basis of daily life' must be stylized since 'in their rooms, human beings are the main object, the focal point as it were'. In order for 'an organic and harmonious total feeling' to emerge, the *intérieur*, with its 'spatial confinement' in order that it 'does not mix with immediate life', must be given a focal point that can only be fulfilled by the stylized work of art and not by the 'necessary accessories' of everyday life. This modern thirst for stylization has its roots in the seemingly paradoxical attempt on the part of the individual to escape from the excessive subjectivism and individualism fostered in modern society:

What impels modern people so strongly toward style is the unburdening and masking of the personality that is the essence of style. Subjectivism and individuality have accelerated almost to breaking point and in the stylised creations of form . . . there lies a tempering and toning down of this extreme individuality into something general and more universal.²¹¹

But we need to ask whether the modern individual actually escapes from the burden of the excessive subjectivism of the times by its sublimation in the stylized *intérieur*.

theory of cultural alienation which culminates in the tragedy of culture, in the inevitable conflict and ever-widening gap between subjective and objective culture, in which individuals are locked within the experience of the eternal present of modernity. Money as the ultimate means expresses the preponderance of means over ends which 'finds its apotheosis in the fact that the peripheral in life, the things that lie outside its basic essence, have become masters of its centre and even of ourselves'. At the centre of the constant expansion of our objective culture (including both its material and ideational components) lies the production of technical means:

what nature offers us by means of technology is now a mastery over the self-reliance and the spiritual centre of life through endless habits, endless distractions and endless superficial needs. Thus, the domination of the means has taken possession not only of specific ends but of the very centre of ends, of the point at which all purposes converge and from which they originate as final purposes. Man has thereby become estranged from himself; an insuperable barrier of media, technical inventions, abilities and enjoyments has been erected between him and his most distinctive and essential being.²¹³

Simmel's response to this alienation of the individual was not to go in search of 'the laws of motion' of the society that produced this estrangement; nor was it to search for the internal contradictions within the existing socio-economic formation that might lead to its transcendence. Indeed, in so far as Simmel saw an alternative social formation such as socialism as a possibility, he maintained that it too would produce the same processes that generated estrangement and would probably accelerate their alienating consequences. This is despite the fact that Simmel was by no means so hostile to socialism as was Weber, having himself positively espoused a socialist standpoint in the first half of the 1890s.

But with a conception of modern society whose internal dynamic stood in danger of being reduced to the *inevitable* clash of objective and subjective culture, no alternative social formation could be conceived other than the one which already existed. And since a mature money economy, with all its concomitant objectifying, differentiating and levelling effects, was its defining characteristic, individuals remained caught within its web. They would have to find their own way out of its alienating consequences or remain incorporated within it and live out their lives within the alienating forms which it offered. As Böhringer has argued,

Money, Simmel stated, objectified the 'style of life', forces metropolitan people into 'objectivity', 'indifference', 'intellectuality', 'lack of character', 'lack of quality'. Money socializes human beings as strangers. Just like things, so money also transforms human beings into *res absolutae*, into objects. Simmel's student, Georg Lukács, correctly noticed that this objectification (in his words: reification and alienation) did not remain external, cannot, as Simmel maintained, be the 'gatekeeper of the innermost elements', but rather itself becomes internalized.²¹⁴

Reconciliation with this objectified world is thus obtained through the internalization of its basic features. Just as money reconciles the irreconcilable, so we too can participate in the 'positive consequences of the negative trait of lack of character' of the modern world: 'the ease of intellectual understanding which exists even between people of the most divergent natures and positions', 'the trend towards conciliation springing from indifference to the basic problems of our inner life' and adoption of 'the relativistic view of the world (which) seems to express the momentary relationship of adjustment on the part of our intellect'.

This reconciliation with the objectified world takes place within the context of our creation of distance from it. Just as money 'carries out the function of imposing a distance between ourselves and our purposes . . . more purely and completely' than other mediations, so too 'the individual mind can enrich the forms and contents of its own development only by distancing itself still further from that (objective) culture and developing its own at a much slower pace'.²¹⁵ We can, 'under favourable circumstances, secure an island of subjectivity, a secret, closed-off sphere of privacy', even though this is merely one instance of the deeper subjectivism of the modern times. It is, in fact, an instance of that which Simmel characterized as modernity – the experiencing of the external world as an inner world.

This world of modernity which Simmel so brilliantly describes is a world that is temporally located in the immediate present, indeed in an eternalized present. When Habermas defines what is modern as that which 'assists in the objective expression of a spontaneous, self-renewing presentness [*Aktualität*] of the spirit of the times',²¹⁶ he could have chosen no better instance than Simmel's analysis of the mature, modern money economy. Simmel's theory of cultural alienation signifies precisely this 'self renewing presentness'. The conflict between subjective and objective culture is self-renewing. The experience of objectification is broken off from past experience whilst

the future holds in store merely the reproduction of this same conflict between subjective and objective culture. The experience of time in modernity is evocatively highlighted by Simmel in his description of the gambler's experience of time as 'unconditional presentness' and in his typification of the adventurer as 'the most powerful example of the unhistorical person, of the contemporary essence. On the one hand, he is determined by no past . . . on the other, the future does not exist for him.' Within the workings of the money economy and the circulation of commodities, this immediate presentness is constantly recreated in fashion which 'gives us such a strong sense of presentness as do few other phenomena' and which 'increasingly concentrates consciousness upon the present', even though 'each individual fashion . . . emerges as if it wishes to live for eternity'. That eternity, however, is filled with the endless reproduction of ever-new fashions.

That which is new, the immediately present, does not necessarily point towards a new future. Rather, as Habermas maintains, 'the cult of the new in fact signifies the glorification of an actuality that is born out of new, subjectively determined pasts. The new consciousness of time . . . not merely expresses the experience of a mobilized society, an accelerating history, a discontinuous everyday world. In the over-evaluation of the transitory, the fleeting and the ephemeral, in the celebration of the dynamic, there is expressed just as much the desire for an untarnished, still-intact present'.²¹⁷ In Simmel's case, it might even be argued that the recognition of the present as transitory is countered by the search for the eternal forms that are present in the transitory itself. The ceaseless, transitory nature of the present can be analysed by Simmel because he views society itself as ceaseless social interaction. Its 'most complete form' is the exchange process itself.

Does Simmel's analysis of modernity therefore remain with the fleeting, the transitory, the ephemeral? Is the origin of the experience of modernity to be located in the mature money economy? Money's role in the exchange and circulation process certainly produces a world in permanent flux, fleeting and transitory; it is itself 'continuous self-alienation'. Further, 'as a tangible item money is the most ephemeral thing in the external-practical world'. On the other hand, 'in its content it is the most stable, since it stands at the point of indifference and balance between all other phenomena in the world [my emphasis]'.²¹⁸ If we search, in this context, for the source of the fleeting, fortuitous and arbitrary experiences created by the money economy, we return to the money economy itself. This apparent paradox arises out of the fact

that the money economy – as the domination of exchange values – inverts the world of reality. As Scheible comments, 'the exchange principle, rendered universal, brings about a genuine reversal of the poles of the static and the dynamic. That which is apparently stable, use value, declines totally into the economic dynamic, whilst the dynamic principle, exchange, because of the universality in which it prevails, becomes the ultimate "stabilizing pole"'.²¹⁹ In Simmel's words, 'all concrete things drive on in restless flight' towards their monetary evaluation and their devaluation. Their resting place is thus in what is most transitory.

There is little doubt that Simmel provides us with a remarkable account of the world of money exchange and, by implication, the world of commodity exchange and circulation. This is the location for the experiences of modernity. It is, for Simmel, also their source. But viewed as a closed universe of commodity exchange and circulation, it cannot illuminate anything other than the way in which such a world appears to us and is experienced by us. Simmel certainly recognized the subtleties of this world of commodity exchange. But it is necessary to ask whether a vision of society as rooted in the exchange and circulation processes (the world of ceaseless social interaction) is the adequate location of the origin of modernity or whether it is the sphere in which its manifestations appear to us.

If the experience of modernity lies in the immediate present that is always transitional, then in this context, it is a transition to the ever-same circulation of commodities (including money), to the eternal reproduction of the fleeting, the transitory and the fortuitous. Its analysis falls back upon the analysis of a form without a content. Indeed, since Simmel accepted the basic tenets of marginalist economics, he could not break out of the sphere of exchange and circulation into the sphere of production, into the origins of these processes. Despite this, the one social theorist whose work Simmel seeks to explicitly challenge in *The Philosophy of Money* – Marx – would probably have applauded and concurred with his description of the experience of modernity, of the way in which the world of commodity exchange appears to us. But Marx is a better guide out of the world of appearances generated by the exchange and circulation processes precisely because, like the classical political economists before him, he did not regard them as the end point of his analysis.

Marx does point out that the world of commodity exchange, the world of circulation of exchange values (including money as the universal equivalent) does appear to take on a formally independent

existence. But the circulation process, for instance, cannot itself be a self-renewing process. It must be explained by something that exists outside itself. This is also true of money circulation which 'as the most superficial (in the sense of: driven out onto the surface) and the most abstract form of the entire production process, is in itself quite without content . . . simple money circulation . . . consists of an infinite number of indifferent and accidentally adjacent movements.'²²⁰ In turn, this movement cannot be explained in terms of itself since 'the factors which affect the mass of commodities thrown into circulation . . . are all circumstances which lie *outside* simple money circulation itself. They are relations which express themselves in it; it provides the names for them as it were; but they are not to be explained by its own differentiation.'²²¹ Thus, although '(at first sight), circulation appears as a *simply infinite* process' and although it is 'the first totality among the economic categories',

*circulation . . . does not carry within itself the principle of self-renewal. The moments of the latter are presupposed to it not posited by it. Commodities constantly have to be thrown into it anew from the outside, like fuel into a fire . . . Circulation, therefore, which appears as that which is immediately present on the surface of bourgeois society, exists only so far as it is constantly mediated . . . Its immediate being is therefore pure semblance. It is the phenomenon of a process taking place behind it.*²²²

For Marx that process is the production of commodities. The social relations necessary for the production of commodities, the relations between capital and labour, are what the exchange and circulation presupposes.

This kind of argument enables us to question whether Simmel accurately located the origins of the experience of modernity. If the world of exchange and commodity circulation is not an independent, self-renewing process, then its origins must be sought elsewhere. The contradictions between the money economy as it appears to us and the production of that which is exchanged and circulated within the mature money economy is sometimes hinted at by Simmel in his specific analyses (e.g. of world exhibitions). But ultimately, the major contradiction in his theory of cultural alienation remains the uneven development of subjective and objective culture. Since the objective culture is not seen as internally contradictory and transitory, then there can be no world confronting the individual other than the eternal present. Modernity is then itself an eternal present.

3

Siegfried Kracauer

'Exemplary Instances' of Modernity

The place which an epoch occupies in the historical process is determined more forcefully in the analysis of its insignificant superficial manifestations than from the judgments of the epoch upon itself.

Siegfried Kracauer

Spatial images are the dreams of society. Wherever the hieroglyphics of any spatial image is deciphered, there the basis of social reality presents itself.

Siegfried Kracauer

If the material base were in order, then one could live calmly in the superstructure.

Siegfried Kracauer

. . . a loner. A discontent, not a leader . . . A rag-picker early in the dawn, who with his stick spikes the snatches of speeches and scraps of conversation in order to throw them into his cart, sullenly and obstinately, a little tipsy, but not without now and then scornfully letting one or other of these discarded cotton rags - 'humanity', 'inwardness', 'depth' - flutter in the morning breeze. A rag-picker, early - in the dawn of the day of the revolution.

Walter Benjamin on Siegfried Kracauer

I

In the 'autobiographical statement' accompanying the posthumously published study, *History. The Last Things Before the Last* (1969), Siegfried Kracauer viewed his total life's work as attempts 'to bring out the significance of areas whose claim to be acknowledged in their own right has not yet been recognised'.¹ Kracauer himself included

Conclusion

tempus fugit, aeternitas manet.

Boleslaw Prus, *The Doll*

There are no wholes in this world; rather, it consists of bits of chance events whose flow substitutes for meaningful continuity.

Siegfried Kracauer

In the fields with which we are concerned, knowledge comes only in flashes. The text is the thunder rolling long afterwards.

Walter Benjamin

In his 1939 Exposé for the Arcades Project, Benjamin declared that he would illuminate 'the new forms of life and the new creations' of the nineteenth century in the immediate forms in which they appeared – as phantasmagoria. For him, the world dominated by these phantasmagoria is modernity. His prehistory of modernity was to illuminate what he took to be the original site of modernity without, at the same time, denying that modernity reappears in various guises. Indeed, Benjamin declared that

no epoch has existed that did not feel itself, in the most eccentric sense, to be 'modern' and consider itself to be standing immediately before an abyss. The despairing, wide-awake consciousness, standing immersed in a decisive crisis, is chronic in humanity. Every period appears to itself as unavoidably new. This 'modernity', however, is precisely that which is diverse just like the diverse aspects of one and the same kaleidoscope.¹

Benjamin had gone in search of the original sense of modernity in the mid-nineteenth century in Paris. He had hoped to chart the decline

of the arcades as a primal site at the turn of the century. Around the turn of the century, however, the *Jugendstil* movement in particular had declared its modernity, its adherence to the principles of an *art nouveau*. This site was investigated by Simmel as perhaps the first sociologist of modernity. His site was located firmly in Berlin, the capital of the 'new' Second German Reich. Three decades later, one of his students, Kracauer, re-examined the same site in the context of the city's development into a vanguard of modernity. The reactionary currents in this same modernity were destined, however, to contribute to that city's total destruction barely two decades later. Earlier, in fact, both Kracauer and Benjamin had been compelled to leave it.

Of the three figures investigating social dimensions of modernity, Simmel is the one whose work seems most totally bound up with Berlin, albeit in a very cosmopolitan circle within it.² Both Kracauer and Benjamin were to draw contrasts between Berlin and Paris. In Kracauer's case, his best Weimar work is arguably that associated with his analysis of the vanguard city of Berlin. For Benjamin, the first personal reawakening of the past was the reconstruction of his 'Berlin Childhood around Nineteen Hundred'. Around that time, the sober Baedeker's *Berlin and its Environs* had to concede that Berlin 'does not compete in antiquity or historical interest with the other great European capitals'. It did, however, point to 'its special and characteristic interest as the greatest purely modern city in Europe'. As a special attraction, which gave cause for both Kracauer and Benjamin to comment upon it in a very different manner, was the fact that 'its streets are a model of cleanliness'.³ The sparklingly new and even the clean were amongst the 'diverse aspects' which the kaleidoscope of modernity revealed.

Though the traces and fragments of modernity were to be found everywhere in modern society – which meant, as often as not, that in their most obvious locations, their secrets remained undeciphered – there are nonetheless two locations which stand out above all others: the metropolis and capitalist social relations. For Simmel, Berlin at the turn of the century was his prime site; for Kracauer, Paris and, above all, Berlin in the Weimar period; and for Benjamin, at a personal level, that same Berlin but, in his most ambitious social theory of modernity, Paris in the mid-nineteenth century. With regard to capitalism, Simmel chose to emphasize the exchange and circulation process within the mature money economy; Kracauer highlighted the process of rationalization of production and social relations; and

Benjamin focused upon the process of commodity exchange and circulation and the attendant fetishism of commodities.

Simmel's examination of the metropolis as the social space within which the experiences of modernity are located is significant in a number of respects. As a complex, interwoven web or labyrinth of social relations, it is the location in which transitory, fleeting and fortuitous interactions take place that require only fragments of the individual personality to be involved. Indeed, the bombardment of the senses with a myriad of impressions and the constant juxtaposition to anonymous individuals produces an accentuated nervousness that requires modification by various forms of inward retreat and social distance, and even produces a state of complete indifference. Not surprisingly, therefore, this often provided the starting point for Simmel's pathbreaking sociology of the emotions and the senses. And as a sociologist preoccupied with forms of sociation and interaction, Simmel drew attention to the indefinite collectivities that assembled and dissolved within the social space of the city. Yet the crowd and other random configurations of people in the metropolis only gained significance through their confinement or dispersal within social space. Again, Simmel was one of the first to draw attention to that which, in a different manner, preoccupied both Kracauer and Benjamin – the social space of the metropolis.

Kracauer's analysis of the labyrinth of the metropolis, however, is one that is in many ways more precise and more threatening. He undertakes a rigorous investigation of the hieroglyphics of social space that focuses more directly upon the inanimate structures of the architectural and other spatial configurations of the metropolis. This 'forest of symbols' contains traces of meaning that require to be uncovered, fragments of lost experience that must be reconstructed. If, in the context of the secret symbolic world of the metropolis, Simmel chose to emphasize the protection of the nervous system by the creation of a quite conscious social distance (in a broader context, epitomized by the stranger) and the view of the city from above, as it were, Kracauer highlighted the 'dream-like expressive images' of the city that could only be deciphered by one who viewed things from below. In this respect, Benjamin's description of Kracauer as 'a ragpicker' is an apposite one – the collector of fortuitous images, of 'fortuitous creations' out of the configurations that, from the everyday standpoint, we choose to pass by and ignore. His contrast between Paris and Berlin brings out a further feature of this activity, namely the location of the fragments of spatial and other figurations within history in Paris

and their location in Berlin within an unhistorical present in which the past is absent. The city thereby takes on the form of a temporal as well as a historical location. In his bleakest analyses of the vanguard city of Berlin, this temporal location is not merely that of the absolutely new but that of an empty, unhistorical time. Its facades hide the traces of history and humanity that could give meaning to its symbols. Kracauer's interiors, too, require an ideological-critical unmasking in order to become 'filled by reality itself', however barren it may be.

In Benjamin's case, it was Paris that originally provided him with the model of the metropolis as a labyrinth, both in terms of his own direct experiences in the course of his sojourns with Hessel and in the reflections stimulated by the surrealist visions of Aragon and others. But the mature concern with the metropolis as the site of lost or fragmentary remembrances was gained a few years later with his attempt to reconstruct his own childhood in Berlin at the turn of the century. Armed with that which Baudelaire declared to be 'the naive gaze of childhood' – which Benjamin had to restore – and his own concern for the redemption of the past, he turned once more to Paris as the site for the prehistory of modernity in the nineteenth century. Although never brought to fruition, Benjamin hoped to complete the circle, as it were, by extending that prehistory of modernity down to turn of the century and down to his own primal experiences of the city that were located in the deeper world of real objects of experience.

Yet this whole project was in no way construed as a celebration of the metropolis. For, as Benjamin observed in relation to Kracauer's study of white-collar employees in Berlin, 'at the moment in which the first traces of an active love for the capital city reveals itself, one goes in search for the first time of its defects'.⁴ If, in the Arcades Project, Benjamin wished to show how Baudelaire 'lies embedded in the nineteenth century', then a crucial part of that ground was 'Paris as *the* city of modernity'. The various layers of intersecting labyrinths constituted by the arcades and other 'dream houses', the streets themselves, the mythical nether world that lay beneath them, the masses who populated the streets and, finally, the labyrinth of human consciousness itself with its phantasmagoria of illusions all required careful excavation in order to reveal the primal site of modernity. In so doing, however, the metropolis became one site whose extension lay within capitalist social relations themselves.

This was stated quite explicitly at the end of Simmel's essay on the metropolis, except that what he had in mind was the social relations generated and transformed by a mature money economy. Money,

and the exchange relations which it required, was significant because it was a means for 'the presentation of relations that exist between the most superficial, "realistic" and fortuitous phenomena and . . . the most profound currents of individual life and history'. Money relations could be readily viewed as fleeting, transitory and fortuitous. Yet although this was to recommend them to a social theory of modernity, their phenomenal forms were not Simmel's sole concern. He might start out with 'what is apparently most superficial and insubstantial', but his interest extended to 'the inner substance of life' and 'the essential forms of movements'. This did not, in the end, imply an analysis that economically went beyond the exchange and circulation spheres. Rather, in his later work, Simmel was to assert that 'the "fetishism" which Marx assigned to economic commodities represents only a special case of . . . [the] general fate of contents of culture', which followed their own 'immanent logic of development'. Since the future held in store an *eternally* tragic relationship between subjective and objective culture, the features of modernity which Simmel highlighted were condemned to be eternally present too.

Kracauer's analysis of modernity in relation to capitalism starts out in his early writings from a similar disjunction between the 'enormous material advance' of capitalism, and the attendant expansion of a restricted form of instrumental reason, and the impoverishment of individuality. Yet when, from the mid-1920s onwards, he came to develop his most powerful analysis of the 'insignificant superficial manifestations' of modernity, he focused not merely upon 'the thoroughly rationalised, civilised society' of capitalism but the manifestations and consequences of a concrete process of rationalization of production that permeated those spheres that were seemingly only indirectly related to the production process. Nonetheless, the 'daydreams' of this society, for example, did ultimately accord in a distorted manner with the maintenance of the essential social, economic and political relations of an increasingly contradictory social formation. In this respect, the experiences of modernity were located within an increasingly precarious present whose 'extremes' were the focal point for the illumination of modernity.

At times, Benjamin's analysis of capitalist social relations seems to possess affinities with that of Simmel, if we interpret the latter's focus upon capitalism in terms of the exchange and circulation of commodities (and not merely money). Certainly the production process only figures in a roundabout way in Benjamin's analysis

of modernity, though the significance of his treatment of artistic production runs counter to this. However, what did become a central focus of Benjamin's analysis was the working out and exemplification of commodity fetishism within the fragments of modernity, in such a way that one could see beyond and behind the reified world of 'the commodity's halo'. Benjamin's exposure of the 'secret life' of the commodity rested upon a distinctive application of the theory of commodity fetishism that focused upon the dialectic of the ever-new face of the commodity and its ever-same circulation and exchange. Like Kracauer, Benjamin was fascinated by the fantasy world which such a process generated and reproduced. But his intention was not the celebration of this world of illusion. The search for the origins of modernity in the nineteenth century had as its goal the bringing to consciousness and destruction of phantasmagorias of capitalism. As Kracauer discerned in relation to the first of Benjamin's forays into modernity in *One-Way Street*, Benjamin had embarked upon his project because he wished 'to wake the world from its dream'. Long before Benjamin took his own life in 1940, that dream had become a nightmare.

For all three authors, the actual analysis of modernity was conceived in a novel and often radical manner. The discontinuity of modern experience, the recognition of its transitory, fleeting and arbitrary or fortuitous nature posed problems of investigation which, in their diverse ways, they sought to solve. They all sought, as it were, to complete the fragment, indeed to redeem it aesthetically, politically or historically. Viewed historically, modernity could be investigated as an eternal present, as a contradictory (and transitory) actuality and as a prehistory. For Simmel, Kracauer and Benjamin, this was not carried out in order to produce comprehensive, abstract theories of modernity, Simmel's 'fortuitous fragments of reality', Kracauer's 'insignificant superficial manifestations' and Benjamin's 'dialectical images' or 'monads' all redeemed the smallest, most insignificant traces of modernity in the everyday world. In their different ways, they each sought to decipher the secrets of modernity's fragments.

Each of their investigations of modernity is a testimony to that which Habermas has viewed as being absent in the work of more comprehensive theories of modernization, namely attention to and regard for the actual modes of experiencing modernity in everyday life. Since Simmel saw modernity as the translation of the world of experience into an inner world, he not merely went in search of 'the delicate, invisible threads' of experience of modern forms of interaction but

also became preoccupied with the development of a social theory of the senses and the emotions. In other words, inner experience itself became the subject of social investigations.

For Kracauer, the world of modernity was one in which its various components had either been robbed of indigenous meaning or had been forced into a limited instrumental meaning. When Kracauer sought out the meanings residing in the profane fragments, he confronted two features not emphasized in Simmel's analysis of modernity. The first was the ideological responses within modernity in the form of 'day-dreams' that accorded with a particular form of social domination. The second was the significance of mass symbols in understanding modernity's fragments, first announced in 'The Mass Ornament'. Kracauer went on to uncover the dark side of modernity, as it were, to reveal what lay hidden in 'the back courts of society'. Whereas Simmel could still conceive of the preservation of a quasi-autonomous sphere of creativity for the individual in the artistic and moral realms against the growing fragmenting power of objective culture, Kracauer maintained that the individual retreat from modernity was no longer possible. On the other hand, the future of the mass culture of modernity was rendered both ambiguous and precarious.

The world of modernity, for Benjamin, was a world of fantasy and illusion generated, ultimately, by the domination of commodity production, circulation and exchange. Even the poet of modernity, Baudelaire, could only give expression to this reified world allegorically since 'the allegorical perspective is always built upon a devalued phenomenal world' whose fundamental aspect was constituted by the commodity. With an increasing urgency, Benjamin sought to break through this reified world by means of his dialectical images in order to awaken the 'dreaming collectivity' from its dream. This could only be achieved by the remembrance of what had been forgotten about this reified world. Adorno hoped that Benjamin's theory of the experience of modernity would include 'the whole opposition between individual lived experience [*Erlebnis*] and concrete experience [*Erfahrung*] in a dialectical theory of forgetfulness. One might even say, in a theory of reification. For all reification is a form of forgetfulness [*ein Vergessen*]: objects become reified in that movement in which they are taken up, without being presently relevant in all their aspects, in which something about them is forgotten.'⁵ The mere experience of the ever-new forgets that its fundamental precondition is the ever-same reproduction of the social relations necessary for the ever-new to appear. To speak of postmodernity, on this view, would therefore be premature.

Notes

INTRODUCTION

1. G. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, translated by T. Bottomore and D. Frisby, London/Boston 1978 (second German edition 1907).
2. W. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, translated by E. Jephcott and K. Shorter, New York 1978/London 1979.
3. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 55.
4. S. Kracauer, *Das Ornament der Masse*, Frankfurt 1977, p. 50.
5. S. Kracauer, *Schriften*, 1, Frankfurt 1971, p. 207.
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7. T. W. Adorno, 'Benjamins "Einbahnstrasse"', in T. W. Adorno et al., *Über Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt 1968, pp. 58–9.
8. W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, translated by H. Zohn, London 1973.
9. Adorno, 'Charakteristik Walter Benjamins', in T. W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt 1970, p. 26.
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11. S. Kracauer, *Georg Simmel, Ein Beitrag zur Deutung des geistigen Lebens unserer Zeit*, typescript, probably 1919, 147 pages, Siegfried Kracauer Nachlass, Deutsche Literaturarchiv, Marbach/Neckar, p. 92.
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14. T. W. Adorno, *Über Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt 1970.
15. W. Benjamin, *Briefe*, 2, Frankfurt 1966, p. 808.
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MODERNITÉ

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5. F. Tönnies, *Community and Association*, translated by C. P. Loomis, London 1955, p. 4.
6. Habermas, 'Die Moderne', p. 446.
7. C. Baudelaire, 'The Painter of Modern Life', in C. Baudelaire, *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, translated and edited by J. Mayne, London 1964, pp. 1–40.
8. W. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, (Werkausgabe), I, 3, Frankfurt 1980, p. 1152.
9. D. Oehler, *Pariser Bilder 1 (1830–1848). Antibourgeoise Ästhetik bei Baudelaire, Daumier und Heine*, Frankfurt 1979, p. 193.
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25. Oehler, *Pariser Bilder 1*, p. 248.
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27. Baudelaire, 'Painter of Modern Life', p. 14.
28. Ibid., p. 29. On the significance of dandyism for modernity see Oehler, *Pariser Bilder 1*, pp. 199–200; I. Wohlfarth, 'Perte d'auréole: The Emergence of the Dandy', *Modern Language Notes*, 48, 1970, pp. 529–71.
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38. Marx and Engels, 'Communist Manifesto', p. 70.
39. Quoted in E. Pankoke, *Sociale Bewegung – Sociale Frage – Sociale Politik*, Stuttgart 1970, pp. 19–47. English translation, 'Social Movement', by D. Frisby, *Economy and Society*, 11, 2, 1982, pp. 317–46.
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50. Ibid.
51. Marx, *Surplus Value*, Part III, p. 514.
52. Marx, *Capital*, vol. 1, p. 187.
53. Marx, *Surplus Value*, Part III, p. 455.
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59. Ibid.
60. Habermas, 'Die Moderne', p. 447.

61. H. Fischer, *Nietzsche Apostata oder Die Philosophie des Ärgernisse*, Erfurt 1931, pp. 13f.
62. K. Marx, *Surveys from Exile*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 171.
63. Ibid., p. 170.
64. Fischer, *Nietzsche Apostata*, p. 16.
65. F. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge 1983, p. 216.
66. F. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke. Kritische Studienausgabe*, edited by G. Colli and M. Montinari, Berlin/New York 1980, vol. 13, p. 238.
67. Ibid., p. 504.
68. On Nietzsche's relation to sociology and his 'anti-sociology' see H. B. Baier, 'Die Gesellschaft – ein langer Schatten des toten Gottes. Friedrich Nietzsche und die Entstehung der Soziologie aus dem Geist der decadence', *Nietzsche Studien*, 10/11, 1981/82, pp. 6–22.
69. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 5, p. 52.
70. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, p. 229.
71. Ibid., pp. 148–9.
72. Ibid., p. 209.
73. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 7, p. 817.
74. Ibid., pp. 814–5.
75. Ibid., p. 815.
76. See R. R. Wuthenow, *Muse, Maske, Meduse. Europäischer Ästhetizismus*, Frankfurt 1978, pp. 10f.
77. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, p. 221.
78. Ibid., p. 62.
79. Ibid., p. 66.
80. Ibid., p. 106.
81. Ibid., p. 120.
82. Ibid., p. 120.
83. Ibid., p. 94.
84. F. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols. The Anti-Christ*, translated by R. J. Hollingdale, Harmondsworth 1968, p. 96.
85. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, pp. 92–3.
86. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 13, p. 236.
87. Nietzsche, *Sämtliche Werke*, vol. 6, p. 27.
88. Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, pp. 93–4.
89. Ibid., p. 94.
90. Quoted in J. Stambaugh, *Nietzsche's Thought of Eternal Return*, Baltimore/London 1972, p. 17. I have found this a useful guide to Nietzsche's doctrine.
91. Ibid.
92. Ibid., p. 25.
93. Ibid., pp. 36–7.
94. Quoted in K. Lichtblau, 'Das "Pathos der Distanz". Präliminarien zur Nietzsche-Rezeption bei Georg Simmel' in H. J. Dahme and

- O. Rammstedt (eds) *Georg Simmel und die Moderne*, Frankfurt 1984, pp. 231–81, esp. pp. 260–1.
95. The influence of Nietzsche upon Simmel has not yet been fully examined. The article by Lichtblau is a valuable exception. See also Simmel's most detailed treatment of Nietzsche in G. Simmel, *Schopenhauer und Nietzsche*, Leipzig, 1907.
96. M. Weber, *Economy and Society* edited by G. Roth and C. Wittich, Berkeley/Los Angeles/London 1978, p. 506.
97. On the neglected reception of Nietzsche's work by Benjamin see H. Pfotenhauer, 'Benjamin und Nietzsche' in B. Lindner (ed.) 'Links hatte noch alles sich zu enträteln . . .' *Walter Benjamin in Kontext*, Frankfurt 1978, pp. 100–26. Benjamin's major secondary source on Nietzsche's doctrine of the eternal return was K. Löwith, *Nietzsche's Philosophie der ewigen Wiederkunft des Gleichen*, Berlin 1935.
98. On the significance of Blanqui's work for Benjamin see F. Rella, 'Benjamin und Blanqui' in M. Brodersen, *Benjamin auf Italienisch. Aspekte einer Rezeption*, Frankfurt 1982, pp. 77–102.
99. See Pfotenhauer, 'Benjamin und Nietzsche'.
100. Quoted in W. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk* (Gesammelte Schriften V), edited by R. Tiedemann, Frankfurt 1982, p. 173.
101. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 673.
102. Ibid., p. 683.

GEORG SIMMEL: MODERNITY AS AN ETERNAL PRESENT

1. Berman, *All That Is Solid*, p. 28. There Berman adds that 'In Simmel – and later in his youthful followers Georg Lukács, T. W. Adorno and Walter Benjamin – dialectical vision and depth are always entangled, often in the same sentence, with monolithic cultural despair', thereby displaying the absence of a careful reading of Simmel's works and a misinterpretation of his 'followers', of whom Adorno was not one. Only Lukács actually studied with Simmel, whilst the latter's relationship to Benjamin is examined below.
2. See, for instance, 'The Concept and Tragedy of Culture', in G. Simmel, *The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, translated and edited by P. K. Etzkorn, New York 1968, pp. 27–46.
3. On Simmel's early work see my 'Georg Simmel and Social Psychology', *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, 20, 2, 1984, pp. 107–27. On Simmel's contribution to a sociology of the emotions see B. Nedelmann, 'Georg Simmel – Emotion und Wechselwirkung in intimen Gruppen', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 25, 1983, pp. 174–209.
4. P. Fechter, 'Erinnerungen an Simmel', in K. Gassen and M. Landmann (eds), *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel*, Berlin 1958, p. 159.

5. F. Wolters, 'Erinnerungen an Simmel', in Gassen and Landmann (eds), *Buch des Dankes*, p. 195.
6. K. Jöel, 'Eine Zeitphilosophie', *Neue Deutsche Rundschau*, vol. 12, 1901, pp. 812–26.
7. D. Koigen, 'Sociologische Theorien', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vol. 31, 1910, p. 24.
8. E. Troeltsch, *Der Historismus und seine Probleme*, Tübingen 1922, p. 593.
9. E. Troeltsch, 'Der historische Entwicklungs begriff in der modernen Geistes und Lebensphilosophie', *Historische Zeitschrift*, vol. 124, (1921), p. 431.
10. H. J. Becher, *Georg Simmel, Die Grundlagen seiner Soziologie*, Stuttgart 1971, pp. 23–4. From a different perspective, I have discussed Simmel's 'philosophy of the times' in my *Sociological Impressionism*, London 1981, ch. 5.
11. C. Baudelaire, 'Painter of Modern Life', p. 40.
12. G. Simmel, 'Das Problem des Stiles', *Dekorative Kunst* vol. 11, 7, 1908, p. 313.
13. H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, London 1975, p. 57.
14. In particular, see G. Simmel, *Rembrandt. Ein Kunsthistorischer Versuch*, Leipzig 1916.
15. S. Kracauer, *Georg Simmel, Ein Beitrag zur Deutung des geistigen Lebens unserer Zeit*, typescript, probably 1919, 147 pages, Siegfried Kracauer Nachlass, Deutsche Literaturarchiv, Marbach/Neckar, p. 92.
16. G. Simmel, 'Tendencies in German Life and Thought since 1870', *International Monthly* (New York), 5, 1902, pp. 93–111, 166–84.
17. Ibid., p. 93.
18. Ibid., p. 95.
19. Ibid., p. 99.
20. Ibid., p. 101.
21. The levelling tendencies are examined in detail in G. Simmel *Philosophy of Money*, although the theme is already present in G. Simmel, *Über soziale Differenzierung*, Leipzig 1890. For a discussion of this early work see my *Georg Simmel* Chichester/London/New York 1984, pp. 76–93.
22. Simmel, 'Tendencies in German Life and Thought', pp. 176–7.
23. Ibid., p. 179.
24. F. Tönnies, 'Considérations sur l'histoire moderne', *Annales de l'institut international de sociologie*, vol. 1, 1895, pp. 245–52, esp. p. 246.
25. G. Simmel, 'Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben', in *Jahrbuch der Gehe-Stiftung zu Dresden*, vol. 9, 1903, p. 187.
26. G. Simmel, 'Die Kunst Rodins und das Bewegungsmotiv in der Plastik', *Nord und Süd*, vol. 129, 1909, II, pp. 189–96; expanded version as G. Simmel, 'Rodin', in *Philosophische Kultur*, Leipzig 1911. All references are to the third edition (Potsdam 1923).
27. Simmel, 'Rodin', p. 196.
28. Ibid., p. 197.

29. Ibid., p. 188.
30. See my *Sociological Impressionism*, p. 102f.
31. M. Weber, *Wissenschaft als Beruf*, Munich/Leipzig 1919, p. 14.
32. Ibid., p. 15.
33. Becher, *Georg Simmel*, p. 14.
34. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 53.
35. Ibid., p. 56.
36. Ibid., p. 55.
37. Ibid., p. 56.
38. G. Simmel, *Kant und Goethe*, Berlin 1906, p. 65.
39. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, pp. 494–5.
40. Simmel, *Rembrandt*, p. 2.
41. Ibid., p. 51.
42. See, for instance, H. J. Lieber and P. Furth, 'Zur Dialektik der Simmelschen Konzeption einer formalen Soziologie', in Gassen and Landmann (eds), *Buch des Dankes*, pp. 39–59.
43. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 450.
44. Ibid., p. 451.
45. Ibid.
46. Ibid., p. 202.
47. Ibid.
48. Ibid., p. 53.
49. Ibid., p. 56.
50. M. Susman, *Die geistige Gestalt Georg Simmels*, Tübingen 1960, p. 36.
51. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 452.
52. R. Bubner, 'Über einige Bedingungen gegenwärtiger Ästhetik', *Neue Hefte für Philosophie*, 5, 1973, pp. 38–73, esp. p. 38.
53. Simmel, *Über soziale Differenzierung*, p. 13.
54. Ibid.
55. G. Simmel, 'Das Problem der Soziologie', *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft*, vol. 16, 1894, p. 272.
56. G. Simmel, 'Exkurs über das Problem: wie ist Gesellschaft möglich?', in G. Simmel, *Soziologie*, Berlin 1908; in English as 'How is Society Possible?', in K. H. Wolff (ed.), *Essays on Sociology, Philosophy and Aesthetics by Georg Simmel*, Columbus 1959, pp. 337–56, esp. p. 352.
57. S. Kracauer, 'Georg Simmel', *Logos*, vol. 9, 1920, p. 314.
58. Ibid., pp. 324f.
59. G. Simmel, 'Soziologie der Sinne', *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 18, 2, 1907, pp. 1025–36. The passages quoted below from the opening and concluding remarks to this essay do not appear in its reworked version, 'Exkurs über die Soziologie der Sinne', in Simmel, *Soziologie*, 5th edn, Berlin 1968, pp. 483–93.
60. Simmel, 'Soziologie der Sinne', p. 1025.
61. Ibid.
62. Ibid., p. 1026.

63. Ibid.
64. Ibid., p. 1035.
65. Ibid., p. 1026.
66. Ibid., p. 1027.
67. B. Nedelmann, 'Georg Simmel - Emotion und Wechselwirkung in intimen Gruppen', *Kölner Zeitschrift für Soziologie und Sozialpsychologie*, Sonderheft 25, 1983, pp. 174-209.
68. E. Bloch, *Geist der Utopie*, 2nd edn, Frankfurt 1964, p. 93.
69. G. Simmel, 'Soziologische Aesthetik', *Die Zukunft*, vol. 17, 1896, p. 206. There is an English translation as 'Sociological Aesthetics' in K. P. Etkorn (ed. and trans.), *Georg Simmel. The Conflict in Modern Culture and Other Essays*, New York 1968, p. 69. For similar passages elsewhere, see Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, pp. 462f.
70. G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental Life', in Wolff (ed.) *Sociology of Georg Simmel*, p. 413.
71. Simmel, 'Soziologische Aesthetik', p. 204.
72. M. Frischeisen-Kohler, 'Georg Simmel', *Kantstudien*, vol. 24, 1920, p. 13.
73. C. Schmidt, 'Eine Philosophie des Geldes', *Sozialistische Monatshefte*, vol. 5, 1901, pp. 180-5.
74. E. Durkheim, 'Philosophie des Geldes', *L'Année Sociologique*, vol. 5, 1900-01, pp. 140-5.
75. T. W. Adorno, 'A Portrait of Walter Benjamin', in *Prisms*, translated by S. Weber and S. Weber, London 1967, p. 231.
76. Ibid.
77. R. Hamann, *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst*, Cologne 1907, p. 130. Hamann's study contains a wealth of material on the relationship between impressionism, the metropolis and the money economy which substantiates other contemporary characterizations of Simmel as a sociological impressionist. The key work which Hamann himself relies upon is *The Philosophy of Money*.
78. Troelsch, 'Der historische Entwicklungsbegriff' pp. 593-4.
79. Kracauer, 'Georg Simmel', p. 318.
80. Schmidt, 'Eine Philosophie des Geldes', p. 181.
81. Kracauer, 'Georg Simmel', p. 331.
82. Ibid., p. 320.
83. See note 23 above.
84. Simmel, 'Rodin', p. 196.
85. Ibid.
86. Ibid., p. 182.
87. Ibid., p. 188.
88. Ibid., p. 197.
89. G. Simmel, 'Philosophie des Abenteuers', *Der Tag*, Berlin, 7 and 8 June 1910. Reprinted with minor changes as 'Das Abenteuer' in G. Simmel,

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- Philosophische Kultur*, Leipzig 1911. All references are to the third edition (Potsdam 1923).
90. Simmel, 'Das Abenteuer', p. 20.
91. See L. Coser 'The Stranger in the Academy' in L. Coser (ed.), *Georg Simmel*, Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1965.
92. See 'The Stranger' in D. Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, Chicago/London 1971, p. 143.
93. Simmel, 'Das Abenteuer', p. 14. The discussion of dreaming is also important in Benjamin's development of a theory of experience in relation to modernity. As well as his Baudelaire study, the following secondary sources are also useful: J.-M. Gagnebin, *Zur Geschichtsphilosophie Walter Benjamins*, Erlangen 1978, ch. 2; K. Greifraath, *Metaphorische Materialismus*, Stuttgart 1980.
94. Simmel, 'Das Abenteuers', p. 15.
95. Ibid., p. 17.
96. Ibid., pp. 26-7.
97. Simmel, 'Soziologische Aesthetik', pp. 215-6.
98. Ibid., p. 29. Here the contrast with surrealism and Benjamin's reception of it is most marked. See 'Surrealism' in W. Benjamin, *One-Way Street*, pp. 224-39.
99. Ibid., p. 16.
100. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, p. 962.
101. W. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, p. 106.
102. A. Koppel, 'Für und wider Karl Marx', *Volkswirtschaftliche Abhandlungen der Badischen Hochschulen*, vol. 8, no. 1, Karlsruhe 1905, p. 20.
103. G. Simmel, 'Auszüge aus den Lebenserinnerungen', in H. Böhringer and K. Gründer (eds), *Ästhetik und Soziologie um die Jahrhundertwende: Georg Simmel* Frankfurt 1976, p. 265.
104. For discussion of Simmel's sociological impressionism, see my *Sociological Impressionism*, esp. chs. 3, 4.
105. Hamann, *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst*, p. 134.
106. Susman, *Die geistige Gestalt Georg Simmels*, p. 2.
107. Joël, 'Eine Zeitphilosophie', p. 813.
108. Simmel, 'Auszüge aus den Lebenserinnerungen', p. 265.
109. See my *Sociological Impressionism*, ch. 3.
110. T. W. Adorno, 'Benjamins "Einbahnstrasse"', in T. W. Adorno, et al., *Über Walter Benjamin*, Frankfurt 1968, p. 59.
111. Kracauer, *Georg Simmel*, p. 36.
112. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, p. 196.
113. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 130, n. 44.
114. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 484.
115. Ibid., p. 481.
116. Ibid., p. 479.

117. Simmel, 'Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben' (see note 22 above). There exist two English translations of this essay: 'The Metropolis and Mental Life'. The first, by E. Shils, is available in D. Levine (ed.) *Georg Simmel on Sociability and Social Forms*, Chicago/London 1971, pp. 324–39; the second, by H. H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills, in Wolff (ed.), *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, pp. 409–74.
118. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 474.
119. Simmel, 'Soziologische Aesthetik', p. 78.
120. Simmel, 'Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben', p. 193.
121. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 256.
122. *Ibid.*, p. 257.
123. *Ibid.*
124. G. Simmel, 'Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung', *Die Zeit* (Vienna), vol. 8, 25 July 1896. For a fuller discussion see below. Much earlier, Simmel had already pointed to this thirst for constant stimulation in art exhibitions and related it, amongst other things, to metropolitan life. See Simmel, 'Über Kunstausstellungen' (Druckbogen 1888), Staatsbibliothek Preussischer Kulturbesitz, Berlin.
125. Simmel, 'Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben', p. 195.
126. G. Simmel, *Der Krieg und die geistigen Entscheidungen*, Munich/Leipzig 1917, p. 25.
127. Quoted in Troeltsch, 'Der historische Entwicklungsbegriff', p. 431.
128. S. P. Altmann, 'Simmel's Philosophy of Money', *AJS*, vol. 9, 1904, p. 46.
129. K. Joël, 'Georg Simmel', *Die Neue Rundschau*, vol. 30, I, 1919, p. 243.
130. Everett C. Hughes, Foreword to G. Simmel, *Conflict and the Web of Group Affiliation*, New York 1955, p. 9.
131. Wuthenow, *Muse, Maske, Meduse*, pp. 195–6.
132. *Ibid.*, p. 200.
133. L. V. Wiese, 'Neuere Soziologische Literatur', *Archiv für Sozialwissenschaft und Sozialpolitik*, vol. 31, 1910, p. 300. Extract translated in Coser (ed.), *Georg Simmel*, p. 56.
134. G. Simmel, 'Soziologie des Raumes', *Jahrbuch für Gesetzgebung, Verwaltung und Volkswirtschaft*, vol. 27, 1903, pp. 27–71, esp. p. 35. Interestingly this important, neglected essay on the sociology of space appeared in the same year as the more famous essay on the metropolis. Reworked, it subsequently appeared as 'Der Raum und die räumlichen Ordnungen der Gesellschaft' in chapter 9 of Simmel, *Soziologie*, pp. 460–526.
135. Simmel, 'Soziologie des Raumes', p. 38.
136. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 151.
137. Simmel, 'Soziologie des Raumes', p. 52.
138. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
139. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

140. Simmel, 'Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben', p. 187. For a recent discussion of Simmel's theory of the metropolis see M. P. Smith, *The City and Social Theory*, New York 1979, ch. 3.
141. Simmel, *Soziologie*, p. 563.
142. See, for example, G. Simmel, 'Das Problem des Stiles', *Dekorative Kunst*, vol. 11, 7, 1908, p. 314.
143. Simmel, 'Die Grossstädte und das Geistesleben', pp. 203–4.
144. *Ibid.*, p. 189.
145. *Ibid.*, p. 199.
146. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
147. *Ibid.*, pp. 191–2.
148. *Ibid.*, p. 190.
149. Hamann, *Der Impressionismus in Leben und Kunst*, p. 136.
150. *Ibid.*, p. 201.
151. *Ibid.*, p. 202.
152. *Ibid.*, p. 216.
153. *Ibid.*, p. 217.
154. G. Simmel, 'Soziologie der Geselligkeit', *Verhandlungen des Ersten Deutschen Soziologentages* (1910), Tübingen 1911, pp. 1–16. Translated by E. C. Hughes as 'The Sociology of Sociability', *AJS*, vol. 55, no. 3, 1949, and reprinted in Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, p. 129.
155. Simmel, *Soziologie*, p. 570.
156. Kracauer, 'Georg Simmel', p. 330.
157. R. Goldscheid, 'Jahresbericht über Erscheinungen der Soziologie in den Jahren 1899–1904', *Archiv für systematische Philosophie*, vol. 10, 1904, p. 143.
158. G. Lukács, 'Georg Simmel', in Gassen and Landmann (eds) *Buch des Dankes*, p. 175.
159. G. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 510.
160. *Ibid.*, p. 102.
161. *Ibid.*, p. 511.
162. *Ibid.*
163. *Ibid.*, pp. 510–11.
164. *Ibid.*, p. 511.
165. *Ibid.*, p. 101.
166. *Ibid.*, p. 129.
167. *Ibid.*, p. 175.
168. For a fuller discussion of Simmel's economic categories see my 'Introduction to the Translation' in Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, and my *Sociological Impressionism*. Also H. Brinkmann, *Methode und Geschichte*, Giessen 1974. This psychological dimension gives Simmel's analysis close affinities with contemporary political economy which, as one reviewer of Simmel's work indicated, had its basis in 'applied psychology'. See C. Bouglé, 'Les sciences sociales en Allemagne', in *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, vol. 2, 1894, pp. 329–55, esp. p. 348.

169. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 176.
170. Ibid.
171. Ibid., p. 454.
172. Ibid., p. 455.
173. Ibid., p. 456.
174. Ibid.
175. Ibid., p. 459.
176. Ibid., p. 465.
177. Ibid., p. 456.
178. Ibid., p. 455.
179. Ibid., p. 457.
180. Ibid., p. 459f.
181. Ibid., p. 460.
182. Ibid.
183. See note 122 above.
184. Simmel, 'Berliner Gewerbe-Ausstellung'.
185. Ibid.
186. Ibid.
187. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, pp. 461–2.
188. See G. Simmel, 'Fashion', *AJS*, vol. 62, 1957. Reprinted in Levine (ed.), *Georg Simmel on Individuality and Social Forms*, pp. 294–323.
189. G. Simmel, 'Die Mode', in G. Simmel, *Philosophische Kultur*, Potsdam 1923, pp. 31–64. All references are to this version.
190. Simmel, 'Die Mode', p. 31.
191. Ibid., p. 33.
192. Ibid., p. 35.
193. Ibid., p. 36.
194. Ibid., p. 39.
195. Ibid., p. 42.
196. Ibid.
197. Ibid.
198. Ibid., p. 43.
199. Ibid.
200. Ibid., pp. 44–5.
201. Ibid., p. 54.
202. Ibid., p. 57.
203. Ibid., p. 59.
204. Ibid., p. 60.
205. Ibid.
206. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 462.
207. This last chapter was the one which he recommended the reader commence with, perhaps partly on the grounds that it had the most immediate relevance to modern life. He wrote to his friend Hermann Keyserling in 1908 after the second edition had appeared suggesting he should 'start with the last chapter and only then read further from the first chapter onwards'. See Simmel's letter of 31 October 1908 in M. Landmann (ed.), *Georg Simmel, Das individuelle Gesetz*, Frankfurt 1968, p. 239.

208. See note 65 above.
209. See note 140 above.
210. Simmel, 'Das Problem des Stiles', p. 314.
211. Ibid., p. 314.
212. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 431.
213. Ibid., pp. 483–4.
214. H. Böhringer, 'Die "Philosophie des Geldes" als ästhetische Theorie' in H. J. Dahme and O. Rammstedt (eds) *Georg Simmel und die Moderne*, Frankfurt 1984, pp. 178–82, esp. p. 182.
215. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 449.
216. Habermas, 'Die Moderne', p. 446.
217. Ibid., p. 447.
218. Simmel, *Philosophy of Money*, p. 511.
219. H. Scheible, 'Georg Simmel und die "Tragödie der Kultur"', *Neue Rundschau*, 91, 2/3, 1980, pp. 133–64, esp. p. 158.
220. K. Marx, *Grundrisse*, Harmondsworth 1973, p. 790.
221. Ibid.
222. Ibid., p. 254–5.

SIEGFRIED KRACAUER:
'EXEMPLARY INSTANCES' OF MODERNITY

1. S. Kracauer, *History. The Last Things Before the Last*, New York/Oxford 1969, p. 5.
2. S. Kracauer, *Die Angestellten*, Frankfurt 1930. Reprinted in S. Kracauer, *Schriften I*, Frankfurt 1971. All references are to this later edition.
3. S. Kracauer, *Jacques Offenbach und das Paris seiner Zeit*, Amsterdam 1937. Reprinted Frankfurt 1976. All German references are to this later edition. English translation by G. David and E. Mosbacher as *Offenbach and the Paris of his Time*, London 1937.
4. Kracauer, *History*, p. 5.
5. Kracauer, *Schriften I*, p. 212.
6. Quoted in J. Bundschuh, 'Als dauere die Gegenwart eine Ewigkeit', in *Siegfried Kracauer. Text + Kritik*, 68, pp. 4–11, esp. p. 7.
7. I. Mülder, *Erfahrendes Denken. Zu den Schriften Siegfried Kracauers vom Ersten Weltkrieg bis zum Ende der Weimarer Republik*, dissertation Tübingen University 1984, p. 161. (Published in revised form Stuttgart 1985, all references are to the dissertation.) For the revised published version see I. Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer – Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur: Seine frühen Schriften 1913–1933*, Stuttgart 1985. Mülder's study is not merely the first excellent full-length examination of Kracauer's work as a whole in the Weimar period. It also contains the fullest biography to date of Kracauer's works, superseding that in *Text + Kritik*, 68.

406. On the development of Benjamin's Marxism see the volumes by Buck-Morss and Wolin. Also C. Hering, *Der Intellektuelle als Revolutionär*, Munich 1979; J. Roberts, *Walter Benjamin*, London and Basingstoke, 1982, esp. ch. 3.
407. Benjamin, *Das Passagenwerk*, p. 175.
408. Ibid., p. 573.
409. Ibid., p. 495.
410. Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire*, p. 104.

CONCLUSION

1. Benjamin, *Das Passagen-Werk*, p. 677.
2. On Berlin at this time see *Berlin um 1900*, Catalogue of exhibition in Akademie der Künste Berlin 1984.
3. K. Baedeker, *Berlin and its Environs*, 5th ed., Leipzig 1912, pp. v and 54.
4. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, III, p. 198.
5. Benjamin, *Gesammelte Schriften*, I, p. 1131.

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Since this study has been largely concerned with the works of three authors – Georg Simmel, Siegfried Kracauer and Walter Benjamin – existing bibliographies of their works are provided at the outset.

For Georg Simmel, the most extensive bibliography of his work, together with reviews and secondary literature to 1958, is provided by Kurt Gassen in Kurt Gassen and Michael Landmann (eds), *Buch des Dankes an Georg Simmel*, Duncker and Humblot, Berlin, 1958, pp. 311–65.

For Siegfried Kracauer, there are two sources. The first selective bibliography by Eckhardt Köhn and Stefan Oswald is contained in *Text + Kritik*, 68, October 1980, (Siegfried Kracauer), pp. 84–9. A more comprehensive and accurate bibliography is to be found in Inka Mülder, *Siegfried Kracauer-Grenzgänger zwischen Theorie und Literatur*, Metzler, Stuttgart, 1985, pp. 210–37.

For Walter Benjamin, his collected writings should be consulted. To date, five volumes have been published and a sixth is planned. Excluding *Das Passagen-Werk*, which constitutes volume V of the collected works, most useful is the 'Inhaltsverzeichnis Band I–IV' in Tillman Rexroth (ed.), *Walter Benjamin. Gesammelte Schriften*, IV, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt, 1972, pp. 1135–57.

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