

# Georg Simmel's Aphorisms

*Richard Swedberg and Wendelin Reich*

## Abstract

This article contains an analysis of Georg Simmel's aphorisms and an appendix with a number of these in translation. An account is given of the production, publication and reception of the around 300 aphorisms that Simmel produced. His close relationship to Gertrud Kantorowicz is discussed, since she was given the legal right to many of Simmel's aphorisms when he died and also assigned the task of publishing them by Simmel. The main themes in Simmel's aphorisms are presented: love, Man, philosophy, *Lebensphilosophie* and art. Two of Simmel's aphorisms are also given an extended analysis. It is suggested that the skill of writing a good aphorism, both when it comes to style and content, has much to do with what we call *the art of compression*. It is also suggested that what ultimately attracted Simmel to the form of aphorism was its capacity to hint at something that is richer than the reality we are currently experiencing.

## Key words

aphorisms ■ Gertrud Kantorowicz ■ *Lebensphilosophie* ■ Georg Simmel ■ sociology

SIMMEL WROTE in many different genres. He produced monographs and essays, and he contributed occasionally to newspapers. To these genres can be added a few that he experimented with for a while, only to abandon them later. These included the writing of verse and miniatures he called 'snapshots *sub specie aeternitatis*'.

Simmel also wrote a number of aphorisms, and it is to these that this article is devoted. The secondary literature on Simmel has little to say about them and the aphorisms themselves are so far only available in German. Many questions surround Simmel's aphorisms, which we will try to address. When were they written and how were they received? How are they related to Simmel's other work, say in philosophy and sociology? And what made

Simmel choose this particular genre – what did it allow him to say that other genres did not?

### **The Production, Publication and Reception of Simmel’s Aphorisms**

All in all, Simmel produced something like 300 aphorisms.<sup>1</sup> His first publication dates from 1897, when he published ten aphorisms anonymously in *Der Jugend* (Simmel, 2004[1897]). The second instalment had to wait till 1915, when another 16 aphorisms appeared in *Der Kunstfreund*, this time under Simmel’s own name (Simmel, 2004[1915]). As he felt that death was approaching in mid-1918, Simmel decided that a number of aphorisms should be selected from his diary for publication. He also wanted some unpublished material, which contained aphorism-like statements, to be put into a publishable form. Eventually all of this resulted in several articles, two of which contain the main bulk of Simmel’s production of aphorisms. These are ‘From the Diary in Simmel’s Estate’ and ‘Love (A Fragment)’ (Simmel, 2004a, 2004b). Together they contain a little more than 200 aphorisms.<sup>2</sup>

But there is more to the history of Simmel’s aphorisms than what has been said so far. This is especially true for the great majority of Simmel’s aphorisms, which come from his *Nachlass* – the papers and manuscripts that were left behind after his death.<sup>3</sup> When Simmel knew that death was approaching, he decided not only to make arrangements to have aphorisms selected from his diary and various unpublished writings, he also – very importantly – chose Gertrud Kantorowicz to be in charge of this.

Gertrud Kantorowicz (1876–1945) was a student of art history and a poet as well as Simmel’s intimate friend and one-time lover. He asked her to select and work on the aphorisms in his diary and to do the same with his unfinished writings on love, which contain some more aphorisms. In his will, Simmel assigned the legal right of the latter material and the aphorisms in the diary to Gertrud Kantorowicz (and the rest to his wife). Georg Simmel died on 26 September 1918 in Strasbourg. Present at his death bed were two people: Gertrud Simmel and Gertrud Kantorowicz.

A crucial question in this context is how much Gertrud Kantorowicz changed or added to Simmel’s aphorisms when she worked on them. Since the original manuscripts have been lost, it is impossible to give a precise answer. According to Otthein Rammstedt, the general editor of Simmel’s *Collected Works* and the author of the most thorough study of Simmel’s *Nachlass*, Gertrud Kantorowicz was very careful to follow Simmel’s ‘intentions’ in her work on both sets of aphorisms (Rammstedt, 2004: 103).

She did treat the diary and the material on love in different ways, however. From the diary she ‘selected and revised’ as well as ‘group[ed]’ the aphorisms that were to be published (Rammstedt, 2004: 97, 103). In this part of her work ‘Simmel’s small compilation “From a Collection of Aphorisms”, which had appeared in 1915, served as a model’ (Rammstedt, 2004: 103; cf. Simmel, 2004[1915]). While it is unclear if, and to what

extent, Gertrud Kantorowicz made any changes in the form of the aphorisms, she considered her main task to be to transmit Simmel's thoughts without any changes (Karlsruhe and Rammstedt, 2004: 545–9).

But she viewed her work on what Simmel had to say about love in a somewhat different manner (Karlsruhe and Rammstedt, 2004: 496, 537–40). The task that Simmel had given to her, it appears, was to form his writings on this topic into a coherent whole. This was a difficult task, especially in view of the fact that Gertrud Kantorowicz came to feel that Simmel, towards the end of his life, had begun to work out a final synthesis of his thought (Kantorowicz, 1959[1923]).

Did this mandate to expand on Simmel's ideas also include the aphorisms that were part of the writings on love? Presumably this was *not* the case; and our guess is that Gertrud Kantorowicz treated them in the same way as she treated the aphorisms in Simmel's diary. That is, she revised them and then grouped them.

The aphorisms from the diary appeared in an article in December 1919 and the aphorisms on love as part of an article from June 1921. Both of these articles were published in *Logos*, a philosophical journal that Simmel was fond of and had himself assigned as place of publication (Simmel, 1919, 1921).

Simmel's aphorisms from the diary were given a very positive reception, as evidenced by the fact that the special issue of *Logos*, in which they appeared, sold very well. Paul Siebeck of J.C.B. Mohr, the publisher of the journal, sent out feelers as to whether it would perhaps be possible to publish all of Simmel's diary, or at least the *Logos* article, as a separate item. Nothing came of this attempt, however, presumably because Gertrud Kantorowicz (who held the legal right to the material) rejected Siebeck's proposal.

It is hard not to wonder about the text on love and Simmel's relationship to Gertrud Kantorowicz. Is there a deeper significance to the fact that Simmel gave her the material on love to work on – and perhaps also that it took her so long to get it ready for publication? At the time when Simmel assigned this task to Gertrud Kantorowicz, his wife did not know that the two had had a relationship that had resulted in the birth of a girl in 1907.<sup>4</sup> Was this relationship still going on a decade later, in 1918? It would seem that it did, although no details are known.<sup>5</sup> The two had first met in 1897; and Simmel later told Gertrud Kantorowicz that she had helped him to regain his 'creativity [and] his full life' (Hahn, 2005: 92). The two seem to have continued to be very close during the 1910s. Simmel's last words to Gertrud Kantorowicz were: 'fifteen years and no shadows' (Susman, 1993: 282; see also Landmann, 1961).

A few years after the publication of the two articles with Simmel's aphorisms, these were included in a book called *Fragmente und Aufsätze*, which Gertrud Kantorowicz had edited (Simmel, 1923). Some minor changes were carried out in connection with the new publication (Simmel, 2004d: 559–65, 567–9). Gertrud Kantorowicz also prefaced the anthology with a

short introduction, in which she presented Simmel's as well as her own philosophy of life (Kantorowicz, 1959[1923]).

When Gertrud Simmel committed suicide in July 1938, in order to make it easier for her son Hans and his family to leave Nazi Germany, the diary with the aphorisms changed owner. As of 1 October, Jewish medical doctors were forbidden to practise, something that made Hans Simmel try even harder to leave the country with his family (Käsler, 1991: 177). After the so-called *Kristallnacht* of 9 November, Hans Simmel was taken to Dachau, where he was held for four weeks till mid-December. In April 1939 he packed Simmel's 'big brown leather-bound diary' and some other material that he wanted to ship off to the United States, where he and his family had decided to emigrate.<sup>6</sup> Exactly how many volumes of diary Simmel had written, and what it (or they) contained besides aphorisms, is not known. Hans Simmel also packed his father's working library, copies of his books with annotations and a few manuscripts, including 'On Love (A Fragment)'.

In 1939 all of this material (plus some other items) was sent to the harbour in Hamburg, where it was put in storage by the authorities instead of being shipped to the United States. From this point onwards it is not known what happened to it, except that it has been lost. It may well have been sold for the benefit of the Gestapo, as the law at the time stipulated for goods belonging to Jewish emigrants. But it could also have been looted, or shipped off to the National Socialist Institute for Research into the Jewish Question. Attempts were made after the Second World War to find out what had happened to the material that Hans Simmel had sent to the Hamburg harbour, but they were not successful. The originals of many of Simmel's aphorisms have consequently been lost, together with his diary and other invaluable items.

### **Why Did Simmel Choose the Form of the Aphorism?**

Simmel may have chosen to write aphorisms because they represented a respected literary genre in Germany at the time as well as a popular one (e.g. Fricke, 1984; Spicker, 2007). Starting with Georg Christoph Lichtenberg (1742–99), Germany has produced a wealth of gifted aphorists. Among the practitioners of this type of writing one can find several of Germany's finest authors and philosophers, such as Goethe, Schiller, Heine and Schopenhauer. In Simmel's time, the genre was brought to new heights by Nietzsche in works such as *The Gay Science* (1882) and *Beyond Good and Evil* (1886). Nietzsche was also very interested in the theory of the aphorism (e.g. Marsden, 2006).

It is clear that Simmel had read the aphorisms of Schopenhauer and Nietzsche, two authors he very much admired and discussed in his own work (e.g. Simmel, 1986[1907]; for a reference to Nietzsche's aphorisms, see e.g. Simmel, 1992[1896]: 115). It is also likely that Simmel had read the famous *Waste Books* by Lichtenberg, *Maxims* by La Rochefoucauld and other classics in this genre (for a reference by Simmel to Goethe's aphorisms, see

Hermann, 1993: 165). And it is probably safe to assume that Simmel was familiar with Karl Kraus's aphorisms in *Die Fackel*.

What attracted Simmel to the aphorism? To answer this question one has to take a closer look at the aphorism, its form as well as its content. An aphorism is typically very short, not more than a sentence or two. It is true that it can also be long. One aphorism in Rochefoucauld's *Maxims*, for example, stretches over two pages. The long aphorism reminds us of related literary genres, such as reflections, fragments and diary entries.

But the long aphorism is something of an exception, and as a rule the aphoristic author tries to severely compress what is to be said. Every unnecessary word has to be eliminated. But the act of compression, when it comes to the formulation of an aphorism, must go well beyond this. It is precisely the demand that the aphorism must be short that forces the author to figure out new and clever ways of formulation.

Our suggestion that it is precisely *the act of compression* that accounts for much of the form of an aphorism can also be extended to its content. An aphorism typically attempts to capture what someone has been thinking – with the proviso that the thinking has to be severely compressed and turned into something striking and short. The process of thinking, which can be long, is reduced to one thought; and the thread of logic is twisted into a spring. Again, a certain type of talent and skill is needed to carry out this type of operation.

An aphorism can in principle be about any topic, as long as it is a thought of a certain generality. Often, however, an aphorism is based on an observation. This links the aphorism to reality and removes it from imagination. This is where the writer of aphorisms gets a chance to be something of a sociologist – or at least an unsystematic or impressionistic sociologist (of the type that Simmel was), because aphorisms do not easily lend themselves to theory-construction. John Stuart Mill, who has written an important but little-known article on the aphorism, contrasts the aphorism to philosophy in this respect. 'There are two kinds of wisdom', he says, one that is based on 'long chains of thought' and is 'systematic'; and another that is 'acquired by the experience of life' and is 'unsystematic' (Mill, 1981[1837]: 421). Aphorisms express wisdom of the second type. They are 'detached truths', as Mill calls them, or disembedded truths, as we might call them today (p. 422).

A related point is that there is no specific order in which an author's aphorisms must follow on each other. Nietzsche says that he wrote *The Gay Science* in such a way that the reader can open the book at any point and start reading. And in *Either-Or*, Kierkegaard states that he has left 'the ordering of the individual aphorisms . . . to chance' (Kierkegaard, 1987[1843]: 8).

An aphorism is as a rule signed, which means that there exists some kind of acknowledged relationship between what is said in the aphorism and the person who wrote it. The aphorism differs in this regard from, say, the anonymous proverb or, to choose some modern examples of short, catchy and anonymous statements: bumper stickers and the text on T-shirts.

## Main Themes in Simmel's Aphorisms

Simmel produced, to repeat, something like 300 aphorisms. Certain themes appear and reappear in these, as a rough content analysis indicates.<sup>7</sup> One of these themes is, of course, *love*. The other main categories are *Man*, *philosophy*, *Lebensphilosophie* and *art*. A smaller number of aphorisms deal with additional topics, such as religion, science and the notion of fragments.

We have selected a few aphorisms to illustrate each of these themes. More aphorisms can be found in the appendix, which contains 69 aphorisms ('A Selection of Georg Simmel's Aphorisms'). All of Simmel's aphorisms will hopefully exist in translation one day. In the meantime we have wanted to provide the reader who does not read German with the pleasure of reading more aphorisms than those that are cited in this article.

### *Theme 1: Man*

Many aphorisms address the issue of human beings and their nature ('Man'), which they try to capture in some skilful way. This type of aphorism is common also in Simmel's work, as the following examples show:

Man is the quintessential searching being.

Man is the quintessential hungry being. The animal is satisfied when it has eaten.

What is decisive and characteristic of man is what he is desperate about.

This type of aphorism fits nicely into John Stuart Mill's view of the aphorism. According to Mill, to recall, an aphorism attempts to express a type of wisdom that is unsystematic and based on experience of life. It is clear that Simmel had a certain affinity for precisely this kind of wisdom. According to his son, for example, Simmel always asked everybody he met about their experiences and their view of things. 'He then linked this material to his own views and thoughts' (Hans Simmel, 1976: 253).

### *Theme 2: Philosophy*

The literature on aphorisms sometimes divides the genre into various subgenres, such as philosophical aphorisms, literary aphorisms and so on.<sup>8</sup> Schopenhauer and Wittgenstein are two authors who excelled in the genre of philosophical aphorisms. And to these, we suggest, one can perhaps add Simmel.

The philosopher who influenced Simmel the most was Kant; and one can clearly see his imprint on some of Simmel's aphorisms. One case in point is the following:

Not only to treat each human but also each object as a goal in itself – that would be a cosmic ethic.

One of Kant's best-known ideas is that it is unethical to treat human beings as means; they should always be treated as ends in themselves. Simmel, we realize, takes this insight and extends it to objects. But Simmel, to recall, was an expert on Kant and surely knew his lectures on ethics from the 1770s. In these Kant speaks of 'Duties towards Inanimate Objects' (as well as 'Duties towards Animals and Spirits'). He argues that these are duties 'aimed indirectly at our duties towards mankind' (Kant, 1963[1775–80]: 241).

Does this mean that Simmel simply recycled Kant's thought as an aphorism, and that his aphorism should be seen as an imitation without too much value? Our answer is no, since Kant's lectures on ethics were not published till after Simmel's death, more precisely in 1923. But there also exists another answer, and for that we need to look at another philosophical aphorism in Simmel's work. It reads as follows:

We believe ourselves to understand things first when we have reduced them to what we do not understand and cannot understand – to causality, axioms, God, character.

Simmel knew Schopenhauer's work very well and must therefore have read the following aphorism:

The fundament upon which all our knowledge and learning rests is the inexplicable. It is to this that every explanation, through few or intermediary stages, leads; as the plummet touches the bottom of the sea now at a greater depth, now at a less, but is bound to reach it somewhere sooner or later. The study of this inexplicable devolves upon metaphysics. (Schopenhauer, 2004: 117)

So did Simmel steal Schopenhauer's idea? It is clear that the thought is essentially the same – but, then again, that is often the case with an aphorism. Take, for example, the following aphorism by Benjamin Franklin: 'Lost time is never found again'. What makes Franklin's aphorism memorable is essentially its form; and the clever formulation makes the content – which is not original to Franklin – come alive and appear in new light. The same is true, we suggest, for the two philosophical aphorisms just cited by Simmel.

### *Theme 3: Lebensphilosophie*

Many of Simmel's aphorisms are inspired by the philosophy of life or *Lebensphilosophie*, which was very close to Simmel's heart. What distinguishes the philosophy of life from philosophy in general, we read in one of his essays, is that the former is much broader and also linked to the *Zeitgeist* of the late 19th century (Simmel, 1971[1918]). *Lebensphilosophie* appeared towards the end of the 19th century in continental Europe, with Bergson and Dilthey as two of its main proponents (e.g. Bollnow, 1958; Müller, 1960; Lukács, 1973). Vitality, the desire to live and a preference for lived

experience over its abstract and rational forms all characterize this type of thought.

The following two aphorisms draw on *Lebensphilosophie*:

I place myself within the concept of life as in the centre, from where there is a road to the soul and the ego, on the one hand, and to the idea, the cosmos, the absolute, on the other hand.

Only in that which we call creative does life come to its self. Everything reproductive, combinatorial and that which works with an overload of historical objective content makes life less alive; solid crystals begin to swim in its stream, obstruct its course and increasingly block it.

In the first of these aphorisms, the inspiration from the philosophy of life is evident in the focus on the individual or the 'I'. The individual is the central figure in *Lebensphilosophie* because it is inside the individual that life is present and experienced. What this means is discussed, among other things, by Simmel in his analysis of expressionist painting in 'The Conflict in Modern Culture' (Simmel, 1971[1918]). What made the painters who belonged to this school so eager to break with the conventional way of painting was precisely that they wanted to express how they felt. And this meant that they had to find a new way of depicting reality that conveyed their feelings.

The result of this approach was that the paintings of the expressionists looked distorted, if judged from an objective-photographic perspective. But they were nonetheless true to reality – to the painters' inner reality. Simmel mentions the paintings of van Gogh as an example: these vibrate with life, precisely because they distort objective reality.

Simmel has been called a sociological Monet, because of his extreme sensitivity to reality around him. Would it be appropriate to also call him a sociological expressionist? Was he, more precisely, also able to express life at the expense of objective reality in his sociology? This question is addressed, in its own way, in the second aphorism that was cited above and that draws on *Lebensphilosophie*. The central argument here is that life is to be found in creativity, and that everything else is objective and ultimately an obstacle to creativity. Translated into Simmel's sociology, this becomes a celebration of the content of social life at the expense of its form – the very opposite of how Simmel viewed his sociology. According to Simmel, what mattered most to the sociologist was the form, not the content.

Simmel, from this perspective, had backed himself into something of a corner. But so had Max Weber, whose sociology attempted to show the steady growth of bureaucracy and rationality, only to have charisma mysteriously emerge at various points in history. Durkheim's solution to Simmel's problem was similar to that of Weber. He introduced 'life' into his sociology through the notion of collective effervescence. Society had its occasional eruptions, but usually proceeded at a much less intense and 'social' pace.

Not only Simmel, in short, faced the problem of how to square life with sociological analysis.

*Theme 4: Love*

The theme of love plays a very special role in Simmel's aphorisms, and there are several reasons why they deserve extra attention from the reader. One is that the theme of love is a major concern in Simmel's authorship as a whole; another is that he had chosen Gertrud Kantorowicz to work on his unfinished manuscript on love. She, more than anyone else, knew what he was trying to express.

In these aphorisms Simmel looks at love in its many forms and at related topics, such as sex, eroticism, free love, marriage and so on. A rough contents analysis indicates that most of the aphorisms from 'Love (A Fragment)' deal with eroticism and love.<sup>9</sup>

Simmel was very interested in 'eroticism', a notion that he tried to infuse with a meaning of his own. Gertrud Kantorowicz comments on his views on this topic in a brief note on Simmel's last writings, in which she links them to his (and her) *Lebensphilosophie*:

All Simmel's hints at 'erotic nature', and his ever renewed efforts at grasping it, can mean only that the conflict between being and becoming comes to a resolution where love, torn from blind life and become sovereign, again becomes *life*. (Kantorowicz, 1959[1923]: 7)

Simmel was careful to make clear that what he meant by 'erotic' should not be confused with sex. He also insisted that eroticism is symmetrical in nature; giving and taking balance each other. Two of his aphorisms on this topic read:

However, the principal question is: does all erotics have sexuality as its source and lasting substance, or is erotics a primary, independent substance of the soul? Already the simple fact that there exists love, which is related to sexuality neither by content nor genetically, speaks for the latter.

The erotic nature is perhaps the one for which taking and giving is one; it gives by taking, it takes by giving.

In a marriage, as opposed to an erotic relationship, the form wins out over the content, and the symmetry of giving and taking disappears. In an aphorism that gives associations to Simmel's famous analysis of dyads and triads, we read:

Precisely when you are a twosome, you are alone: for then you are divided, you are 'opposite', you are the other. And when you have become a unit, you are alone again: for now there is nothing there that could overcome the loneliness of being but one.

*Theme 5: Art*

The erotic is close to art, and Simmel had an artistic nature. He knew many artists, including Rilke, George and Rodin; he collected art when he could afford to; and he often wrote on art. Simmel had drawings by Rodin in his study and was famous for his interest in East Asian art. He was also extremely sensitive to colours; and his son tells how once or twice per year his father arranged to have an 'orgy of colours' at home. Simmel bought a huge amount of flowers which were placed in vases all over the apartment, for the pleasure of family members as well as invited guests (Hans Simmel, 1976: 261–2).

Two of Simmel's aphorisms on art are the following:

The artist is capable of doing what the logician is not: to extend a concept without it losing content.

Music and love are the only accomplishments of humanity which do not, in an absolute sense, have to be called attempts with unsuitable means.

Art has inspired many fine aphorisms, such as Stendahl's 'Beauty is a promise of happiness'. Simmel is the author of an aphorism that is just as beautiful. It reads:

Art is our thanks to the world and to life. After both have created the sensuous and spiritual forms of cognition of our consciousness, we thank them by, once again with their help, creating a world and a life.

At the center of this aphorism is gratitude, a topic that fascinated Simmel and which is discussed in his essay 'Faithfulness and Gratitude' (Simmel, 1950[1908]). The basic idea is that gratitude is a secondary social form or the result of a major social form, just as faithfulness is the result of love. Gratitude, to be more precise, comes when you are given something, but cannot respond in kind. So you feel grateful – and reciprocate in that way.

*Theme 6: Fragments and Other Minor Topics.*

While it is possible to discern several major themes in Simmel's aphorisms, some topics are only discussed in a single or in a very small number of these. One case in point is *the home*, a topic that Simmel also discusses in 'Female Culture'. The home, according to Simmel, represents 'an immense cultural achievement of woman' (Simmel, 1984[1911]: 92). The two aphorisms on the home read as follows:

It is inexpressible happiness to be at home somewhere abroad – because this is the synthesis of our two longings: for being on the road and being at home – a synthesis of becoming and being.

In the end all our roads are determined by whether they take us away from home or lead us there.

Another minor topic is that of *fragments*, to which a few aphorisms are devoted. Fragments is a special topic in the genre of aphorisms; and the reason for this is that fragments of writing are often equated with aphorisms, or as being very close to these (e.g. Spicker, 1997: 341–4). Most of Simmel's own aphorisms are similarly the product of his fragments or *Nachlass*.

Speaking of Simmel's *Nachlass*, Otthein Rammstedt provides us with another reference to fragments. He cites what Gertrud Kantorowicz wrote to a friend late in 1918 about a conversation she had had with Simmel that took place when he felt very close to his end. Simmel told her that all that had earlier seemed so fragmentary and unclear 'now felt very right and whole' to him (Rammstedt, 2004: 95).

More generally, the notion of fragments plays a key role also in Simmel's production as a whole (e.g. Axelrod, 1977). It can be found, for example, in his sociology, including the important 'How is Society Possible?' In this essay Simmel argues that we are never able to see the whole individual; all we see are fragments. The roles that people assume fatally obscure that every individual is unique. Simmel then adds, aphoristically: 'All of us are fragments, not only of general man, but also of ourselves' (Simmel, 1971[1908a]: 10).

Simmel's aphorisms on fragments are the following:

When man describes himself as a fragment, not only does he mean that he has no *whole* life, but more profoundly, that he has no whole *life*.

Only the whole of world and life, as we can know it, live it, and as it is given to us, is a fragment. But the individual piece of destiny and effort is often rounded off in itself, something harmonious and unbroken. Only the whole is a piece; the piece can be a whole.

This is what is astonishing: everybody knows himself a thousand times better, knows a thousand times more of himself than of any other person, including those next to him. And yet the other never seems to us so fragmentary, so incomplete, so little a whole and united in itself, as we appear to ourselves.

### **Explicating Simmel's Aphorisms: Two Examples**

People find difficulty with the aphoristic form: this arises from the fact that this form is *not taken seriously enough*. An aphorism, properly stamped and moulded, has not been 'deciphered' when it has simply been read; rather, one has then to begin its *exegesis*, for which is required an art of exegesis. (Nietzsche, 1967[1887]: 32–3, emphasis in original)

None of Simmel's aphorisms can be found in the major collections of aphorisms that have been published since Simmel's death, be they in English or German. More surprisingly, Simmel is not even mentioned in the major studies of the aphorism in German literature.<sup>10</sup> Exactly why this is the case is not clear. Simmel's aphorisms are definitely very interesting and full of ideas. His style of writing, on the other hand, does have some

weaknesses, especially when viewed from a literary perspective. His way of writing is sometimes academic, in that he writes in very long Germanic sentences, while at other times it is a bit loose, sounding a bit like an eloquent lecture. It is rare that Simmel writes with the terse elegance that is the hallmark of the great aphorist.

However that might be, one way of achieving a better understanding of the high quality of Simmel's aphorisms may be to submit them to the kind of dissection – *'exegesis'* – that Nietzsche demanded. One way of carrying out such an exegesis is to analyse Simmel's aphorisms, using some of the ideas that were outlined earlier in this article. One important key to the aphorism, we suggested, can be found in its element of compression. By way of concluding, we will submit two of Simmel's aphorisms to this kind of exercise, emphasizing their content (rather than form) along the lines of Nietzsche.

The first aphorism is one which is quite long and reads more like a *pensée* by Pascal than a *maxim* by Rochefoucauld. What makes it extra interesting, as we see it, is that it is written in a decompressed form but has a compressed content – that is, it is very long but has a content that invites the reader to further thought. The aphorism reads as follows:

The concept of consolation has a much broader, deeper meaning than we usually attribute to it. Man is a being who seeks to be consoled. Consolation is something other than help – even the animal seeks the latter; but consolation is the strange experience which lets suffering remain but, so to speak, abolishes the suffering from suffering. It does not concern the evil cause but its reflex in the deepest part of the soul. On the whole, man cannot be helped. That is why he has invented the wonderful category of consolation – which comes to him not only through words spoken by others for this purpose, but also from hundreds of circumstances in the world.

We first of all note that this aphorism is centred around an observation that we have all made, but that few, except for Simmel, have really 'seen'. This is that people console each other, and that this takes the edge off the suffering, even if it is not within the power of consolation to end it. Simmel's aphorism comes from observing reality and includes the relationship of one person to another, something that makes it proto-sociological. Consolation is a specific form of interaction, as Simmel might have phrased it.<sup>11</sup>

But Simmel's aphorism is not only thought-provoking in that it represents a pioneering attempt to describe and explain the phenomenon of consolation. It also raises many interesting questions about this phenomenon. Is consolation another example of a secondary social form, in that it presupposes that someone first has to suffer, just as gratitude presupposes that someone first has been given something? Does consolation reduce the suffering of a person by transferring part of the burden to the one who consoles? Exactly how do we console – with words, with our hands, with art . . . ?

Also: what cases of consolation did Simmel see or experience himself? On what is his observation based? We do not know. But we do know that Gertrud Kantorowicz was known for the ease and grace with which she made other people feel much less burdened in their lives. She had a talent, as it were, for existential consolation. A mutual friend of Simmel and Gertrud Kantorowicz has described her in the following way: ‘The insouciant gesture with which she guided her own and others’ fate like an airy cloud had something emancipatory for all of us, who bore our lives as heavy burdens’ (Hahn, 2005: 193, n.12). A close friend of Gertrud Kantorowicz has also testified that she had precisely this effect on Simmel: ‘She truly made everything that weighed on him easy’ (Susman, 1993: 282).

Helping, consoling and alleviating the burdens of others occupied more generally an important place in Gertrud Kantorowicz’s life. The following account of her last years is a testimony to this:

After taking great risks and freeing Friedrich Gundolf’s brother from Buchenwald through an elaborate ruse, Gertrud Kantorowicz tried to flee across the Swiss border in 1942, leading Margarete Susman’s sister, Ernst Kantorowicz’s mother, and another aged woman. Only one made it across. Susman’s sister was killed, and Gertrud was dragged back to Berlin. Recognized by one of her interrogators as the nurse who had taken care of him in Turkey, he engineered to have her sent to Theresienstadt instead of Auschwitz. There she nursed the sick and the invalid, read Homer in Greek and wrote poems in the Georgian style, until she died a few hours before the camp’s liberation. (Roth, 1986: lix, n.86)<sup>12</sup>

The second aphorism that we want to discuss is perhaps the most perfect aphorism that Simmel ever wrote. It is exemplary to its form as well as in its content. It is extremely short, and it contains a thought that is severely compressed and immediately gives rise to interesting associations. It stands squarely by itself, and is in this sense also ‘unsystematic’ along the lines of Mill.

The aphorism reads:

Thinking hurts.

As to its form, Simmel’s aphorism consist of two words in English and three words in German (*‘Denken tut weh’*; Wolff, 1950: xlv, n.14). Most aphorisms that have been produced are several times longer. The shortest maxim that can be found in Rochefoucauld, for example, is six words long: *‘Peu de gens savent être vieux’* (‘Few people know how to be old’; La Rochefoucauld, 2001[1665]: 78). Simmel’s aphorism, it would appear, is among the shortest aphorisms that exist. And it has a kind of blunt elegance.<sup>13</sup>

Simmel’s aphorism is also exemplary as to its content. Why does thinking hurt? Is it because we usually do not think but act out of habit, making it painful to break the habit and start thinking? Gabriel Tarde argued something similar in a work that Simmel reviewed: ‘It is always more

fatiguing to think for one's self than to think through the mind of others' (Tarde, 1962[1890]: 84).<sup>14</sup>

But other answers are possible to the question why thinking hurts as well. It can, for example, have to do with the way human beings have evolved through history. It has been argued, for example, that human beings have had to be alert and act quickly for most of their history, in order to survive, and not had much time to sit and reflect.

Consider that thinking is time-consuming and generally a great waste of energy, that our predecessors spent more than a hundred million years as nonthinking mammals and that in the blip of our history during which we have used our brains we have used it on subjects too peripheral to matter. (Taleb, 2007: xxii)

If an aphorism is based on an observation, Simmel would presumably have heard other people complain about how hard it is to think, and probably also noticed how hard it was for himself to do the same. Perhaps both are true, but there is no information on either topic in Simmel's work.

What we do know, however, is that Simmel struck people who knew him as being truly passionate about thinking (e.g. Fechter, 1993: 160; Marcuse, 1993: 189). His lecture style, it was often noted, was a kind of exercise in '*thinking aloud*'; Simmel lectured in such a way that each step in his thinking process seemed to be fully visible to the audience (e.g. Susman, 1993: 279; emphasis added). Simmel also saw it as one of his most important tasks as a teacher to make his students think. Towards the end of his life, he once asked Martin Buber what, if anything, his students had learned from him, during his many years as professor in Berlin. 'You taught them how to think', Buber answered (Buber, 1993: 223).

Being taught how to think sounds wonderful, especially if one's teacher is Simmel. But there may be more to this process than just having a good teacher. In the important opening lines of *What is Called Thinking?* Heidegger makes this very clear. 'For the attempt [to learn thinking] to be successful, we must be ready to learn thinking' (Heidegger, 1976[1954]: 3). The key to Simmel's success, perhaps, was that he made the students *want* to learn how to think.

One last point remains to be made about Simmel's aphorism that thinking hurts. We have earlier suggested that it is Simmel's most perfect aphorism, citing its great compression when it comes to its verbal form. What makes it perfect also when it comes to its content, we now want to add, is not only that it invites readers to think – good aphorisms do – but that it invites thinking *about thinking*. This is surely a Simmelian touch.

An exercise of the type that has just been undertaken with the two aphorisms on consolation and 'Thinking hurts' may be justified in that it helps to show why Simmel's aphorisms are of high quality. More generally, Nietzsche was probably justified as well in telling the reader to slow down and savour his aphorisms. Nonetheless, there is also something heavy-handed about the 'exegesis' that Nietzsche demanded; and the

analysis of Simmel's two aphorisms in this article illustrates this as well. Sources are cited, thoughts are carefully spelled out – and the special delight that one feels when reading an aphorism is gone.

Simmel was well aware of the special joy that comes from reading a fine aphorism. Part of this charm, he felt, came from the fact that one could use the aphorism to say something meaningful also about the modern world. While some people thought that the aphorism belonged to the past, Simmel disagreed.

His explanation why the aphorism speaks to modern readers is interesting because it helps to explain why people still enjoy this genre of writing. Simmel makes his argument in two passages which constitute his two most important statements on the aphorism (Simmel, 1968[1896]: 78, 1978[1907]: 474). Since the argument is roughly the same, and since the statements can be found in two writings that were published some ten years apart, there was a consistency to Simmel's ideas on the aphorism.

The type of knowledge that people had in the old days, Simmel argues, was solid, reliable and local. This is much less the case today. We now live in a world, Simmel says, that is ever expanding, in space as well as in time. New windows are constantly opened up to the world around us as well as to the past. We often catch glimpses of things that excite us and tempt us – new countries, new objects, new experiences – and it is precisely because of *this* that we feel close to a genre such as the aphorism. The aphorism is a promise, so to speak, that there is more to life than what we know so far.

Is this also a reason why Simmel himself was attracted to the form of the aphorism? At the beginning of this article, we asked why Simmel chose this particular genre and what it allowed him to say that other genres did not. Did the aphorism perhaps appeal to Simmel precisely because it can express more, by saying less? In particular, did the aphorism allow him better to capture the fact that Life itself is always richer than we will ever know? To get an answer, one may want to take a look at what Simmel says in one of his statements on the aphorism that we earlier appealed to:

It is interesting that contemporary aesthetics strongly emphasizes the difference between subject and object, rather than the intimacy. This special interest in items from a distance seems to be a distinct sign of modern times, which is common to many phenomena. The preference for cultures and styles removed in space and time belongs here. Things from a distance best stimulate many vividly changing imaginations, and thus fulfill our multifarious need for excitement. But these strange and distant things have relatively weak effects on our imagination, because they have no direct relationship to our personal interests. Thus they impose on our weakened nerves only comfortable excitement. This is the impact of all the fragments, suggestions, aphorisms, symbols, and primitive art forms which are evoking such vivid responses now. All of these forms of expression, which are at home in all the arts, separate us from the completeness and fullness of the things themselves. They speak to us as if they were at a distance. They represent reality not with direct certainty, but with a kind of retracted acuity. (Simmel, 1968[1896]: 78)

## Appendix

### *A Selection of Georg Simmel’s Aphorisms (trans. Wendelin Reich and Richard Swedberg)*

The following aphorisms have been translated for this article and come from two sources: ‘Aus dem nachgelassenen Tagebuche’ and ‘Über die Liebe (Fragment)’ (Simmel, 2004a, 2004b).<sup>15</sup> Kurt Wolff, who translated a few aphorisms from the former source, introduced them with the following comment:

Perhaps one could make a good case for the proposition that he [Simmel] was most profound in his aphorisms, in his shots into the unknown – or perhaps it is merely that the distance between the allusion and the uncharted (unchartered at least for Simmel) is so much more striking than between the road and the landscape through which it leads. (Wolff, 1950: xx)<sup>16</sup>

### *Selected Aphorisms*

The wealth of the form is that it can contain an infinity of content; the wealth of the content that it can be made part of an infinite number of forms. The finite object emerges where both the infinities meet – and that is why they are present in every being, which is looked upon as a formed content and renders each a symbol of the infinite.

We expect the philosopher to be the one who says what everyone knows; but sometimes he is the one who *knows* whatever everyone merely says.

All that can be proved, can also be challenged. Only what cannot be proved, cannot be challenged.

That there is something which is inaccessible to belief and that we can truly know – this is something that we can only believe. But that there is also something which is inaccessible to knowledge and which we can only believe – that is something that we can really know.

We believe ourselves to understand things first when we have reduced them to what we do not understand and cannot understand – to causality, axioms, God, character.

Not what lies behind the scientific image of things – what is obscure, what is in itself and what is incomprehensible – lies beyond all knowledge; but conversely it is the immediate, the sensual image, the surface of things that face us that eludes us.

We wander and reach the goal – but, given the relativity of all movement, who knows if we are not standing still and the goal is coming to us. This would presuppose a movement of the objective world of ideas. But on this ambiguity rests a lot of religious faith.

I place myself within the concept of life as in the centre, from where there is a road to the soul and the ego, on the one hand, and to the idea, the cosmos, the absolute, on the other hand.

I feel in me a life that is destined to die; in every moment and every subject matter I feel that it will die. And another that is not destined to die.

The natural sciences deal with possible necessities; religion with necessary possibilities.

Natural science wants to reduce unclear facts to clear facts, while metaphysics wants to reduce clear facts to unclear facts.

The artist is capable of doing what the logician is not: to extend a concept without it losing content.

Music and love are the only accomplishments of humanity which do not, in an absolute sense, have to be called attempts with unsuitable means.

Art is our thanks to the world and to life. After both have created the sensuous and spiritual forms of cognition of our consciousness, we thank them by, once again with their help, creating a world and a life.

Perhaps it is not just due to the stage of humanity we are in, that it comes up with the highest problems, but not the highest solutions. Perhaps it is humanity's inner necessity, the essence of man. The apple from the tree of knowledge was unripe.

That man is a being who can reach the ultimate problems but not the ultimate solutions has to do with the fact that he has to act as if he knew the future – although he does not know even one step of it for sure.

When man describes himself as a fragment, not only does he mean that he has no *whole* life, but more profoundly, that he has no whole *life*.

Only the whole of world and life, as we can know it, live it, and as it is given to us, is a fragment. But the individual piece of destiny and effort is often rounded off in itself, something harmonical and unbroken. Only the whole is a piece; the piece can be a whole.

How deep is mankind's destiny embedded in the fact that its two highest ideas – infinity and freedom – are literally only negations, only the removal of obstacles!

Man is in himself an inadequate, lost, restless being. As a being of reason he has too much nature, as a being of nature, too much reason – what could become of that?

In a high position is only he who has something higher above him. Absolute, in the sense of not having anything higher above him, is he who is in a low position.

Man is the quintessential searching being.

Man is the quintessential hungry being. The animal is satisfied when it has eaten.

Perhaps the most horrible symptoms of life are those things – forms of behaviour, joys, faiths – with which human beings make their lives bearable. Nothing shows so much the depth of human levels as what man uses in order to endure life.

What is decisive and characteristic of man is what he is desperate about.

The meaninglessness and confinedness of life strikes you often as so radical and inescapable that you totally despair about it. The only thing that elevates you above this is to grasp this and to despair about it.

For deeper human beings there is only one way to make life bearable: a certain amount of superficiality.

Seen from a biological perspective, pain seems exclusively to be a warning signal, something teleological. That we can feel spiritual pain, which is purely causal and does not have any teleological meaning, seems to me to be one of the most decisive characteristics of man, a side effect of 'purposeless' thinking.

The concept of consolation has a much broader, deeper meaning than we usually attribute to it. Man is a being who seeks to be consoled. Consolation is something other than help – even the animal seeks the latter; but consolation is the strange experience which lets suffering remain but, so to speak, abolishes the suffering from suffering. It does not concern the evil cause but its reflex in the deepest part of the soul. On the whole, man cannot be helped. That is why he has invented the wonderful category of consolation – which comes to him not only through words spoken by others for this purpose, but also from hundreds of circumstances in the world.

It is inexpressible happiness to be at home somewhere abroad – because this is the synthesis of our two longings: for being on the road and being at home – a synthesis of becoming and being.

We should treat life as if each moment was an end in itself – and, at the same time, as if none was an end in itself, but each one a means to something higher, the highest.

The last, highest objective values can be asserted but not proved. One's own value has to be proved, but not asserted.

You can elevate man to the idea, but you cannot lower the idea to man.

You only need to make a few great ideas into your own; they cast light on many stretches, which one never thought could be enlightened.

Freedom of the spirit is being bound by the spirit; for any freedom is at the same time domination.

What better can man wish for than big tasks to carry out with courage, which do not depend on hope for their fulfilment?

In the end all our roads are determined by whether they take us away from home or lead us there.

Not only to treat each human but also each object as a goal in itself – that would be a cosmic ethic.

The really great tragedy of morality: when you do not have the right to do what your duty is.

Atonement by pain is something rather external and mechanical, that lets two rather incomprehensible elements cancel each other out, a superficial self-deception.

It is nonsense that life should be turned into a work of art. Life has its own norms and ideal demands that can only be realized toward and in the form of life, and which cannot be borrowed from art, which has its own norms and demands.

Only in that which we call creative does life come to its self. Everything reproductive, combinatorial, and that which works with an overweight of historical objective content makes life less alive; solid crystals begin to swim in its stream, obstruct its course and increasingly block it.

In practice the worst errors are those which come very close to the truth. Just where our imagination is almost correct, where our knowledge lacks only a last, often minimal step – there the actions which build on this lead us into the worst aberrations.

Among the people who work on their opus, there are few who are worked on by their opus.

Education tends to be imperfect, because it has to serve two opposite tendencies with each of its acts: to liberate and to bind.

Happiness is the state in which the higher spheres of the soul are not disturbed by the lower ones. Comfort is the state in which the lower ones are not disturbed by the higher ones.

One is never as seduced (in each sense of this word) as by the possibility of seduction.

This is what is astonishing: everybody knows himself a thousand times better, knows a thousand times more of himself than of any other person, including those next to him. And yet the other never seems to us so fragmentary, so incomplete, so little a whole and united in itself, as we appear to ourselves.

Longing for happiness contains the contradiction of making the self the centre of life, of relating the value of the world entirely to the subjective reaction – and still to declare itself dependent on the object, to demand more, than this self can accomplish alone.

The high point of lust is already surpassed when you become aware of it, while suffering only reaches its high point with it.

In the erotic nature, love is its own end – it cares neither about reproduction nor about satisfaction.

Is the erotic nature to the common lover as the beautiful soul to what is the merely moral?

The erotic nature is perhaps the one for which taking and giving is one; it gives by taking, it takes by giving.

The erotic nature is at least one that knows at each movement why it is living – also when this why is not realized.

The Don Juan of the opera is only driven by his physiology, with the nuance that he can satisfy the drive only with ever-changing women, becoming immediately tired of each. Only seemingly individualism, only seemingly a contradiction to the purely general of the drive, for it means precisely that he is not attracted by the individuality of the woman – which just unfolds itself after the first sensual and also general satisfaction – but that he is attracted only by the formal fact of variation. It is understandable that the latter is needed as a stimulus whenever the motivation is purely general.

However, the principal question is: does all erotics have sexuality as its source and lasting substance, or is erotics a primary, independent substance of the soul? Already the simple fact that there exists love, which is related to sexuality neither by content nor genetically, speaks for the latter.

The erotic nature is simply erotic also when it does not love anyone, just as the strong person is strong also when no tasks are given to him.

To see love already in the sexual act is of course a very noble form of optimism, an ideal striving to ennoble that which is low – but totally wrong. Life does not come from love, but love from life. That is why love is infertile as soon as it has become independent. It cannot reach life by itself, the latter must be in it from the outset.

There are two cases in which the kiss is symbolic: in friendship and in pure sensuality. In the first case it symbolizes the spiritual and wholesome relationship, in the other the definiteness of sexuality.

Love is searching, trying. We search for the other in ourselves, in our own feeling. This search is called love. It is not that we love the other first and then search for him.

Metaphysical erotics: loving the woman through the world, and the world through the woman.

Precisely when you are a twosome, you are alone: for then you are divided, you are 'opposite', you are the other. And when you have become a unit, you

are alone again: for now there is nothing there that could overcome the loneliness of being but one.

This is why love is the purest tragedy: it kindles only on individuality and is shattered by unsurmountability of individuality.

There is a subjective reflex that gives marriage a eudaemonistic success, which free love cannot possess: that each moment contains in itself the whole future, that no event is isolated but a thoroughfare in the life of this twosome, the further developments of which lie latently in it, are being decided by it. This anticipation of an unpredictably certain future, that is present in every moment of a monogamous marriage, causes an incomparable extension, heightening and deepening of the feelings.

Suggestions for replacing marriage with free love correspond to the tendency of futurism, the current religious mysticism, etc. in the change of cultural forms. The old form is used up, the new one has not yet been created, and so one believes one has found an adequate expression for the urgencies of life in the formless. But there remains the same contradiction as in expressionism.

Undeniably there is contradiction between erotics and the fixedness of monogamy which can only be reconciled by a happy coincidence.

Erroneous identification of 'happy love' with reciprocated love. Being lucky is not the same as being happy.

The fact that Christian love is mainly directed towards the will to help and realized through the suffering of others drags it into the sphere of the general. No third person can end the deepest, most individual suffering, only general suffering can be helped: poverty, sickness, desertion can all be helped. The content of this form of love is as general as its religious foundation.

Just as the divine reception of the world is a continuous creation, so is the reception of the love of another a continuous conquest – the preservation of one's own love is its continuous re-creation.

#### *Notes*

For helpful comments and/or information, we thank Mabel Berezin, Mike Featherstone, Donald Levine, Heino Nau, Otthein Rammstedt and anonymous reviewers at *TCS*.

1. We include the following items in this count: 'Aus dem nachgelassenen Tagebuche' (2004a: 166); 'Bruckstücke und Aphorismen' in 'Über die Liebe (Fragment)' (2004b: 60); 'Aus einer Aphorismensammlung [June 1915]' (2004[1915]: 16); 'Zehn Einzelheiten' (2004[1897]: 10); 'Weniges': 5; 'Strandgut [5.4.1906]': 8; 'Strandgut [3.5.1906]': 4; 'Zur Philosophie des Schauspielers' (2004[1923a]: 13; 'Zum Problem des Naturalismus' (2004[1923b]: 19); 'Aus der nachgelassenen Mappe "Metaphysik" – Philosophie des Lebens': 7; Miscellaneous: 3 (Simmel, 2004c: 137, 144, 147). Together this makes 311 aphorisms, all of which

can be found in Vols. 17 and 18 of Simmel's *Collected Works* (Rammstedt, 2006). At least a dozen of these aphorisms, however (and probably a few more), are repeated and can be found in two of Simmel's writings. It is likely that some other aphorisms exist as well, not least since Simmel sometimes published anonymously. New material – say in the form of letters and manuscripts by Simmel – may appear. There is also the category of aphorisms by Simmel that can be found in the work of other people; these come from conversations with Simmel, by listening to his lectures and the like (e.g. Bloch, 1993). One example of the latter is the following: 'Today we have nicotine-free cigarettes and caffeine-free coffee – what I now only wait for are feminine-free women' (Landsmann, 1993: 33). Finally, for Simmel as an aphoristic writer, in the sense of an author whose formulations in books also read like aphorisms, see the next note.

2. More precisely, these two articles contain 226 aphorisms (166 from the diary and 60 from the love fragment). It should be noted that it is sometimes hard to decide if something should be called an aphorism or not. Following Kurt Wolff, we have for example counted the fragments at the end of Simmel's unfinished essays on the actor and on naturalism as aphorisms (Wolff, 1950: xliii, n. 11; Simmel, 2004[1923a], 2004[1923b]). Simmel was also what is called an aphoristic thinker, which means that his style was such that one can easily pull aphorisms from his writings. Habermas comes close to saying this when he notes that Simmel's work contains many 'single sharp sentences' (Habermas, 1996: 403–4). One such aphoristic statement can be found in *The Problems of the Philosophy of History*: 'One does not need to be a Caesar in order to understand Caesar, nor does one have to be another Luther in order to comprehend Luther' (Simmel, 1977[1905]: 94; similarly in Simmel, 1984[1911]: 79). Robert K. Merton has commented on this 'aphorism' as follows:

The ancient epistemological problem of subject and object was taken up in the discussion of historical *Verstehen*. Thus, first Simmel, and then, repeatedly, Max Weber adopted the memorable aphorism 'one need not be Caesar in order to understand Caesar'. In making this claim, they rejected the extreme Insider thesis that one *must* be Caesar in order to understand him just as they rejected the extreme outsider thesis that one must *not* be Caesar in order to understand him. (1973: 123)

Merton, it can be added, himself devoted a whole book to the history of an aphorism-like statement: 'If I have seen farther, it is by standing on the shoulders of giants' (Merton, 1965).

3. The information in this section draws heavily on the work of Otthein Rammstedt (Rammstedt, 2004; Karlsruhe and Rammstedt, 2004). For comments and information about the aphorisms in Volume 17 of Simmel's *Collected Works*, see the editorial account in this volume as well as comments on each item (Simmel, 2004c: 446–513, 540–97). For Gertrud Kantorowicz, see e.g. Landmann (1961, 1983, 1993); Rammstedt (1996); Zudell (1999); Lerner (2003); Hahn (2005: 85–98).

4. The daughter of Georg Simmel (1858–1918) and Gertrud Kantorowicz (1876–1945) was born in Bologna and baptized Angela ('Angi') Bolzano (1907–1944). Simmel made clear that he never wanted to meet his daughter. In 1922 she was adopted by her mother Gertrud Kantorowicz and in April 1933 she converted to Judaism and took the name Channah Kantorowicz. She died in

Palestine in 1944 as a result of a painful accident (Ledermann, 1994; Lerner, 2003; Rammstedt, 2004: 94, n.2; 120, n.47; Susman, 1993: 282). In 1930 or later Gertrud Simmel (1864–1938; married to Simmel in 1890) asked Gertrud Kantorowicz if her husband was the father of Kantorowicz's child, and was told that this was the case. She then destroyed the correspondence between herself and Simmel and asked Hans Simmel to totally re-evaluate his father. According to Guenther Roth: 'Gertrud Simmel later [also] turned with unrestrained fury on Simmel in a *roman à clef* unpublished to this day' (Roth, 1986: xlii).

5. Only two letters between Gertrud Kantorowicz and Simmel have been preserved; and what we know about their relationship (except that it resulted in a child) comes from other people. The belongings of Gertrud Kantorowicz were destroyed in an air bomb attack on Berlin in 1944; she was also 'notorious for her indifference for personal belongings' (Lerner, 2003: 425).

6. That the diary was large and bound in brown leather comes from a person who had not seen the diary himself but who presumably was given the information by someone who had (Rammstedt, 2004: 135–36).

7. We base this statement on a rough content analysis made of the bulk of Simmel's production, that is, on the 226 aphorisms that come from his diary and 'On Love (A Fragment)' (Simmel, 2004a, 2004b). The analysis of the aphorisms on love can be found in note 9. Our analysis of the 166 aphorisms in Simmel's diary gave the following result. If you assign one point to the main theme of an aphorism, and half a point when a theme can be found together with one or several other themes, a rough count gives the following result: 1. *Man*:  $35 + (34 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 52$  (in this category, we have also included 'wisdom' and 'ages'); 2. *Philosophy*:  $27 + (29 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 41.5$ ; 3. *Philosophy of Life*:  $10 + (8 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 14$ ; 4. *Art* (including Creativity, Beauty):  $6 + (7 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 9$ ; 5. *Others*:  $23 + (12 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 29$ . The category 'others' includes aphorisms on such topics as fragments, religion, science, secrecy and more. For an attempt to use conversational analysis to analyse aphorisms, see Morrell (2006).

8. In this context a mention should also be made of an attempt by Murray Davis to produce what may be called 'sociological aphorisms'. He does this in one of the few articles that have been devoted to the sociology of aphorisms (Davis, 1999). The article contains several references to Simmel and his writings, but none to his aphorisms. The article ends with a number of sociological aphorisms, one of which reads as follows:

*Ideal Synthesis*: Simmel looked for the spiritual in the earthly, finding meta-physical principles in seemingly trivial pot handles, whereas Goffman looked for the earthly in the spiritual, finding the fabrication behind the sincere. It is this dialectic between highest and lowest, and not that between mere opposites, that also accounts for the power and appeal of Freud's work (which connects the highest cultural achievements with the lowest, most disparaged biological urge) and Marx's work (which connects the highest hope for a utopian social organization with the lowest, most disdained social class). (Davis, 1999: 263)

9. Again, on the assumption that one point is given when an aphorism is centred around one theme, while a theme that can be found together with one or several other themes is given half a point, a rough count gives the following result for the 60 aphorisms in 'Über die Liebe (Fragment)' (Simmel, 2004b): 1. *Eroticism*:  $19 +$

$(4 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 21$ ; 2. *Love*:  $12 + (11 \times \frac{1}{2}) = 17.5$ . A very small number of aphorisms also deal with the following topics: sex, marriage, male/female, free love, reproduction and philosophy of life.

10. For studies of the aphorism in German literature, see e.g. Neumann (1976); Fricke (1984); Spicker (1997, 2007); and for studies of the aphorism in international literature, see e.g. Cantarutti (2000); Ruoizzi (2004). Several pages of Simmel’s aphorisms can be found in the anthology by Hindermann and Heinser (1987).

11. ‘Being a stranger . . . is a specific form of interaction’, to cite ‘The Stranger’ (Simmel, 1971[1908b]: 143).

12. The elaborate ruse refers to the following incident:

When in the winter of 1938–39 Ernst Gundolf, the brother of Friedrich Gundolf, was taken to a concentration camp at Buchenwald, she [Gertrud Kantorowicz] traveled to the camp bearing a fictitious letter which stated that his immigration papers were now in order, and gained the commandant’s cooperation, by saying with feigned confidentiality, ‘Here, of course, people are treated correctly.’ If he had asked her to show her pass, she would not have departed from there herself. (Michael Landmann, cited in Kantorowicz, 1992: 6)

‘If a hundred roads are blocked, there’s always the one hundred and first’, Gertrud Kantorowicz used to say (Kantorowicz, 1992: 5).

13. Another three-word-long aphorism, with a similar content and expressed in a similar blunt manner, is Stanislaw Jerzy Lec’s ‘Reflect before thinking!’ (in Polish: ‘*pomyśl, zanim pomyślisz!*’). According to Umberto Eco (2002: 71), this is a so-called transposable aphorism, which means that its meaning can be reversed (into ‘Think before reflecting!’).

14. We are grateful to one anonymous reviewer for the reference to this quote by Tarde.

15. After we had made our translation of the aphorisms in the appendix and sent off the first version of this article to *TCS*, we were told that a full translation of one of these two texts is in the process of being published: ‘Aus dem nachgelassenen Tagebuche’. This translation has been made by John A.Y. Andrews under the title of ‘Fragments from Simmel’s Lost Journal’ and will appear as the appendix to Georg Simmel (eds. Donald Levine and John A.Y. Andrews), *The View of Life: Four Metaphysical Essays* (forthcoming in 2010, University of Chicago Press).

16. Besides the six aphorisms from Simmel’s diary that Wolff presents in translation in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, the reader can find three more in one of his later articles on Simmel (Wolff, 1950: xx–xxi, xliii, n.14, 1996: 81). There also exists a translation into English of one of the aphorisms in ‘Zehn Einzelheiten’ (Simmel, 2004[1897]). The translator is Mark Ritter, and the aphorism reads as follows: ‘Skepticism, which now appears as the great liberator and guide to life, acts something like magic bullets. Nine out of ten times we can hit whatever we want, but the Devil directs the tenth one where he wants, often enough into the heart of our beloved’ (Rammstedt, 1996: 141, n.17).

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**Richard Swedberg** is Professor of Sociology at Cornell University. His main interests are economic sociology and social theory, especially classical sociological theory. His most recent book is entitled *Tocqueville's Political Economy* (Princeton University Press, 2009). He is currently doing work on the financial crisis. [email: rs328@cornell.edu]

**Wendelin Reich** is an associate professor in sociology and researcher in social psychology at Uppsala University. His main interest is in theories of communicative interaction. His applied research focuses on the notion of respect: together with Werner Schirmer and Linda Hamann, he is currently developing and testing a new conception of respect as an interactional phenomenon. [email: wendelin.reich@soc.uu.se]