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Georg Simmel, Hans Blumenberg, and Philosophical Anthropology

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Introduction¹

In the last two decades, an increasingly extensive survey of the anthropological propensity of his thought has emerged in the research on the work of Hans Blumenberg (1921–1996).² But, even after the publication of his voluminous dossier on phenomenological anthropology, represented by the posthumous book *Beschreibung des Menschen*, very little attention has been paid to the role that Blumenberg himself reserved for the importance that Georg Simmel could have played and can have in the construction of a philosophical anthropology, different from those that the decades after his death would later have realized.³ The study presented here aims therefore to fill such a gap, at least in broad terms. It thus proceeds to reconstruct the various aspects that Simmel's anthropological penchant contains according to Blumenberg's reading. First of all, through an examination of the key passage *from money to life in the metaphorological analysis* of the dynamics within the thinking of the Berlin philosopher. It then focuses on the *modes of 'description of man'* made possible by him, such as the function of sight, gaze and face in anthropogenesis, the importance of distancing processes from reality, the discovery of indirect paths, of transposing oneself into the other and of imagination, and countermoves aimed at confronting anthropological contingency and producing a tentative and, at the same time, impossible 'consolation'. Thirdly, this study deepens understanding the different genesis of the anthropological condition and the political sphere, as well as the different levels of knowledge presupposed by the Blumenbergian judgment on the *barbaric character* of decisions, based on the central category of the political according to Carl Schmitt, the *friend-enemy distinction*. Subsequently, the analysis also surrounds *the gestures, the mythical occurrences and the explosive metaphors* through which various places in Simmel's work focus on the corporeal relationship between empirical level and theory: on value as a functional specification of significance and on life as a self-affirmation of an unlikely reality, as well as on the possible misunderstandings in the expression of human beings at the limit between expressibility and inexpressibility. Fifthly, the opposition between persuasion and oppression, as a central instance of an *anthropological approach to the actuality of rhetoric*, finds its specificity in the Simmelian category of 'role' and in its passage from a theatrical background to the dimension of personal identity. At the same time the *theory of nonconceptuality* makes use of the impossibility of reducing the figural dimension to a simple

¹ All quotations from texts written in languages other than English, if not referring to a printed translation, are in author's translation.

² See, at least, Borsari (1999), Heidenreich (2005), Klein (2009), Müller (2005), Trierweiler (2010), Moxter (2011).

³ See Blumenberg (2006) and Borsari (2010).

auxiliary and temporary construction in the logical-conceptual definition process, in order to affirm the luxurious constitution of human beings and the role of metaphor as an element uniting within the anthropogenesis the reference to reality and the reference to possibility. Finally, the chapter concludes by retracing the more general *antinomic character* common to the movement of thought both in Blumenberg and in Simmel, starting with the analysis of the *philosophy of life* of the latter and of some samples taken from his *aesthetics*, such as the specifically human performance of joining and separating, style as a synthesis of universal and individual, the coexistence in the work of art of a centripetal thrust and a centrifugal push, and the paradoxical convergence of the individual and the law. And it comes to find the angular point of encounter with the Blumenbergian ‘anthropological antinomy’ in the ‘law of contrast’ (*Gegensatz*), which seems to regulate in its various modulations and prevalences the different phases of the Simmelian thought and, certainly, his contribution to the philosophical anthropology proposed here.

Money or Life

It is thanks to Hans Blumenberg that we can consider Georg Simmel as one of the few authors to be included in the philosophical canon after Nietzsche, thanks to his *Philosophy of Money*⁴ and, although such a judgment undoubtedly remains very controversial, it has certainly increased in the last thirty years the number of those willing to share it, both in the vast sphere of the social sciences as well as in philosophy in the strict sense (Meyer, 2008, p. 399-400). However, the reader who delves into the Blumenbergian laboratory entitled to the ‘description of man’ will be astonished to discover the unprecedented figure of Georg Simmel ‘anthropologist’. Moreover, a Simmel to be read as an unfinished figure of a philosophical anthropology that could have been expected at ‘another level’ with respect to everything that under such a banner would have been produced during the twenties of the last century (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 625).

To Simmel, and to the consistency as well as internal consistency of his work, Blumenberg himself had nevertheless dedicated the extensive metaphorological study on ‘money or life’ in which he proposed to trace the imaginal thread of the immanent dynamics generated by the contrast between the polarities of solidification and liquidity, form and dissolution, institution and freedom, levelling and individualization (Blumenberg, 2012 [1974]). In the plural tension and the multiple transition so modulated between money and life is included a large section of Simmel’s research, following to that reversal of the genetic relationship that hides the metaphorical density as secondary in the exposition where Simmel comes to talk about life having already found the metaphor of money, the replacement

⁴ As Blumenberg explains, the *Philosophy of Money*: ‘is one of the few written after Nietzsche that belongs (or will turn out to belong) in the canon’, Blumenberg, 2012, p. 258.

of stable and substantial values with the living reciprocal action of elements that in turn are subject to the same ‘dissolution into the infinite’ (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 254). With the vision of the potential objectivity of the subjective that is realized in the world of the totality of human actions as ‘to build a world that may be acquired without conflict and mutual oppression, to possess values whose acquisition and enjoyment by one person does not exclude that of another, but opens the door a thousand times for him to acquire such values as well’ (Simmel, 1978 [1900], p. 291), Simmel arrives early – ten years before the Cassirer of *Substance and Function* – at a functional representation of objectivity itself and at the detachment from every naturalism and the principle of conservation related to it (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 254). Even in normative terms, ‘Simmel retains a crucial schema of *The philosophy of money*, namely the binding of objectivity, whether that of values or of norms, to the idea of totality, whether that of subjective valuations or of individual vital actions’; and he can therefore formulate the ‘individual law’ as ‘a function of the total life of the individual personality’ (Simmel, 1918, quoted in Blumenberg, 2012, p. 255). By virtue of his ability to avoid ‘hard’ theoretical formulations, Simmel proceeds from the descriptive level to the highest degree of universality, always depicting the energy thus invested in the same way as in his concept of life the propensity to formal consolidation and rigidification of forms each time it withdraws again from the ‘resulting sedimentations’ towards the indeterminacy of ‘formless liquidity’ (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 255). It is possible, however, to find ‘profit and loss’ in the transition from the early metaphors of money to the late concept of life, so that the shift from the philosophy of money to the philosophy of life is reflexively a paradigm of the philosophy of life. That which in money can still be grasped in descriptive terms as an intertwining of ‘a gain in possibility with a loss in reality, of entitlement with of renunciation’, as ‘emancipation of the individual at the cost of functionalization of its qualities’, still dissolves at the level of life in the attribution of generic determinations only as ‘the fateful and unpacifiable restlessness of life in each of its realizations, its inclination and its resistance to formal rigidification’ (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 258). On the other hand, money already contains the withdrawal of the disappointing reality in the suspension of pure possibility, since it, as ‘absolute medium, is able to realize ‘the possibility of all values as the value of all possibilities’. As the concept of life brings this metaphor to fulfilment ‘only abstracting from the fact of the finitude of individual lives, it is only elevated to the hypostasis of a substance that expresses itself in them merely superficially’ (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 261). Unlike theological metaphysics, only anthropology ‘can afford to insist on the attraction of pure possibilities and to speak of the disappointment of accomplished reality’ (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 259).⁵

⁵ On Blumenberg’s interpretation, see Krech, 1993, p. 6, 9-12, who identifies the development of an anthropology in Simmel’s passage from money to life.

The Description of Man

At the heart of the anthropological assumption of the Simmelian thought – of the ‘Simmel anthropologist’ from which we have taken the steps – we will find the nucleus identified on the empirical and anthropogenetic level by an equal need to find an escape route when we end up in a blind alley and that – transposed into the sphere of a dynamic essence of the human being centred on the research of *Trost*, of consolation – becomes ‘a form of distancing from reality, in the extreme case, of loss of reality’, through the recourse to the virtues of distance and ‘pure expressiveness’ to elaborate something like the pain one could not escape from at will (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 626–627).⁶ If *Trost* is not intended here as a quieter (*Quietiv*) of the incapacity to modify his own condition, but as a correlative of a being who could not be helped by the quantum of pain to which he or she is destined and consequently finds himself at the limit of the inconsolable, it will have to be reconnected to the structure by digressions and indirect ways (*Umwege*) of culture and to the paradoxical need for compensation of a being who thus obtains the ‘excess of sensitivity of the imaginary’ capable of treating the absent as present and of living in the absence of foundation of contingency (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 630–643). The awareness of the anthropological contingency, of the fact that the same individual could have been or become another, shows the casual or ‘inconvenient’ character of identity and radicalizes the sense of ‘exchange of roles’, the original or primary phenomenon at the base of human capacity to ‘transpose into other’, depict him/her and impersonate him/her, which also the Simmelian philosophy of the actor correctly identifies (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 650 f.). Visibility, the fact of being able to be seen, like a bodily-visible being, comes to constitute the basic relation of the human condition in which the social experience is defined as entering into a relationship with the other through an effect of reciprocity, an interchangeable reciprocal action, symbolized by looking at each other in the eyes (it cannot be taken with the eye without giving at the same time) and elaborated through the notion of *Wechselwirkung* derived from Simmel’s *Sociology* (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 871–872).

The definition of ‘sociology of the eye’ has been used in this regard, but it is even more urgent to underline again, with Hans Blumenberg and against its trivialization, the philosophical and anthropological importance of the Simmelian acquisition for the definition of reality itself. The same discussion of Simmel’s ‘sociology of the senses’ (Simmel, 1908, p. 722–742) and of the differentiation between sight and hearing leads to the enhancement of the inhibitory and indirect way

⁶ Under the title of ‘consolation’, Blumenberg repeats almost literally the Simmelian aphorism of the posthumous *Diary* (‘The human is a being in search of consolation’, Simmel 1923a, p. 272 [*Der Mensch ist ein trostsuchendes Wesen*]): ‘Humans are creatures in need of consolation’ (Blumenberg, [1987] 2010, p. 106 [*Der Mensch ist ein trostbedürftiges Wesen*]).

of each culture, which is primarily digression through the others, and to highlight the indirect structure of self-consciousness that captures the stranger through internal experience and the self from the outside, as an ‘artefact of the experience of the stranger’ (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 875–881). In the sociology of the senses – observes Blumenberg in his *Höhlenausgänge* – Simmel is confronted with the ‘nature of cave’ typical of the big city. This is the place of distance, where what is absent is available in the same way as what is present, and abstraction, a diminished substitute for magic, which constitutes a sort of ‘acoustic cavern’, a screen against everything that it does not produce and does not recognize as reality. In addition, it disadvantages everything that in terms of experience and relationship cannot be produced and acquired exclusively through sight. ‘Still before Kafka and Wittgenstein – he writes – in 1908 Simmel uses the metaphor that is found in this noise shielding, in the restriction to the mere sight, without the possibility of listening, in the modern metropolis on all sides surrounded by closed doors’ (Blumenberg 1989, p. 76–81).

Even the face, on the basis of Rembrandt’s late self-portraits analysed by Simmel as the story of the depositing of the depth of a life in the subtlety of colour, thus makes it possible to understand a human being ‘already at his appearance without waiting for his action’, contributing more generally, to a ‘culture of understanding’ against the ‘barbarity of friend-enemy decisions’ (Blumenberg, 2006, p. 873 f.).

The Barbarity of Friend-Enemy Decisions

It therefore seems possible to ascribe to Simmelian ancestry in a philosophical-anthropological key at least a substantial part of Blumenberg’s critical posture with respect to the Schmittian theory of the political, caught in its nucleus of a ‘friend-enemy’ relationship, as has been shown in the dossier published the year after the *Description of man* and entitled to the relations between Blumenberg and Carl Schmitt (*Briefwechsel 1971-1978 und weitere Materialien*, 2007). From it emerges, in fact, the ascertainment of the different genesis, ‘heterogonie’, of ‘friend’ and ‘enemy’, and first possible motivation for the barbarism⁷ cited: ‘enmity is a political category, friendship is an anthropological category’, although both are comparable based on time parameters. To an immortal being, with infinite time available, it would not be difficult to frame all the others ‘on the same categorial level, starting from an indifference as painless as friendly’; lacking, however, such an assumption, ‘it is necessary to decide quickly for the enmity, while for the friendship it can be decided along a much more extended period’ (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 222). The ‘totality of the consequences of

⁷ In his *Die Sorge geht über den Fluß*, Blumenberg had marked as barbarism the lack of consideration of the detour or indirect way (the ‘full use [*Ausschöpfung*] of the world’ is only ‘a side benefit’ of the ‘culture of detours’): ‘In the strictness of its exclusions, the supposed “art of living” that takes the shortest routes, is barbarism’ (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 96).

the immediate decision [*Schnellentscheidung*], with all the preventive aspects and the subsequent burdens [*postoperativen Lasten*]' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 222) will thus constitute the political. Starting, then, from spatial parameters, the 'scene of recognition' develops itself: 'the enemy is presumably anyone approaching' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 222). The mode of 'recognition' (*Erkennung*) takes place according to the meeting of the reciprocity of the gaze after Simmel that has already been seen at work in the *Description of man* and is taken up again here, again in an anthropogenetic key, in the text on visibility (*Sichtbarkeit*, Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 218–222): 'visibility becomes an anthropological category only through the link it establishes with the ambivalence of the friend-enemy relationship. [...] What does not exist outside of humankind is the *uncertainty* that [Ungewißheit *darüber, ob*] the act of being seen as actualization of visibility means danger or help, loss or gain, or if it requires escape or assignment to the other [*Zuwendung*]'. It is therefore on the perceptive level that the act of recognition takes place, precisely 'in the organic perception' (*in organischer Wahrnehmung*), in a univocal way and through 'specific characteristics and information': 'Friend or enemy is, in any case, *a kind of being others* [*eine Gattung der anderen*]; this is always predetermined by pure recognition from the external aspect [*Aussehen*] (or other sensory qualities)' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 218).

The unsustainable character of the Schmittian opposition – and, as Simmel already recalled in his *Sociology*, the 'barbaric' in the Greek sense indicates that with which there is a 'non-relation' [*Nicht-Beziehung*] (Simmel, 1908, p. 770) – derives from the heterogeneity of the genetic plans that it contains and it results from the lack of assumption of the anthropological and perceptive-sensitive dimension in the recognition of the enemy, and of its spatial and temporal conditions, 'so that due to this possible past, which can extend to the scene of recognition, the anthropological category can invalidate [*außer Kraft setzen*] the political one' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 222). Still resorting to a kind of dialectic of the Simmelian foreigner (as he writes in his *Sociology*,: 'the unity of distance and closeness, which every relationship between men involves, is here arrived at a constellation that can be formulated shorter in the following terms: distance in the relationship means that the near subject is far away, while being a foreigner means that the distant subject is near' (Simmel, 2009, p. 765). For the 'Feind' (enemy) assumed as 'jeder, der sich nähert' (everyone who approaches), Blumenberg explains how 'foreigners, in the radical sense of their exotic aspect, they appear in an extremely undifferentiated way' and that 'in order to prevent damage that may occur later, humanity is set to qualify the foreigner as a presumed enemy' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 223). While the fact that this recommendation no longer has any reason to exist does not put these well-established mechanisms out of business as quickly as if it could be done without. Up to the actualizing consequences: 'If Europe dismantles its internal borders, in all probability its external borders become

even more impermeable' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 223). And, still in connection with the spatial dimension, the narrowing of the field produced by the distant neighbour: 'The world has certainly become smaller, but this only strengthens the disruptive force [*Brisanz*] of the non-recognition micro-decisions [*Mikroentscheidungen der Nichterkennung*] that occur within it. Undefined anguish in front of others has grown, and this means that this narrow world is virtually more racist than before' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 223 f.). The landscape that opens up to modernity is therefore the one 'stiffened in unsolvable elements', in 'dilemmas that must be maintained', or rather we are faced with an 'anthropological situation' whereby, even in the case of trust, far from being the result of 'measures' adopted, it 'is all the more reliable the less we know how it was created' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 224). On the other hand, the adoption of the universal quantifier 'everything is ...' incurs in a nihilistic fallacy, even in the case of the assumption of the sciences of the spirit (*Geisteswissenschaften*) 'everything is language' (then 'everything is nothing'), or in the 'limit case' of 'rhetorical intensification' with anthropological value of the 'we want everything' (*wir wollen alles* or *vogliamo tutto*) on which the anthropology *in nuce* condensed in *Die Sorge geht über den Fluß* (cf. Blumenberg, 2010, p. 13–15) has insisted (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 225). Once the fog of uniformation has thinned out, the Goethean *farbige Abglanz* [refracted colour or coloured reflection] does not take over, but 'the product of the decay of all monisms' and of 'all the last units', a 'dualism': 'the recurrence of reason when it seems having come very close to its purpose: the One – and here, almost as if we could not keep it, there is already the Other. At the peak of the success of his system, Platonism generates gnosis, while the monotheism of salvation produces the dualism of predestination and reprobation' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 225–226). The critical consequences for political theology therefore flow into the impossibility of turning to politics or anthropology: 'What theology deals with is the project of an instance that can *neither* be anthropologized *nor* politicized: God is not friend of anyone, nor an enemy of anyone. And yet it is precisely for this reason that you pull it, to pull it to one side or the other, to occupy the artefact of precarious balance' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 226). At its peak, the dualism instigated by the absolute makes visible the 'asymmetry of the products: the enemy is not the antagonist of the friend, the political is not, in complete disjunction, the negation of the anthropological' (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 226). Neglecting to consider the anthropogenetic dimension of kinship, to which friendship refers – in linguistic terms, the friend is equated with the relative (*Blutsverwandten*) and therefore chosen in a 'very narrow context' – one ends up losing sight of the public dimension to which instead the 'political' refers and to which the 'private' is opposed. And this conflation will be subjected to a critique analogous to the contemporary – 'not by chance' – Heideggerian 'analytic-existential dualism of the single life, articulated in authenticity-inauthenticity'; as in that, in fact, in

the ‘friend-enemy dualism of which Carl Schmitt speaks in the *Concept of the Political* [*Begriff des Politischen*] [...], one is existentially something other than the other’ (Blumenberg & Schmitt, 2007, p. 226).

Gestures, Myths, Explosive Metaphors

Bringing them together under the common denominator of ‘gestures of the loss of reality [*Wirklichkeitsverlust*]’ to the gesture of Edmund Husserl noted by Helmuth Plessner, who in extending his walking stick ‘in an unsurpassable vivid manner, [...] represented the intentional act’, (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 35), Blumenberg captures the aporias of the philosophy of life in stylized form in Simmel’s gestures described by his student Ludwig Marcuse. The gestures ‘accompanied what was said and almost unnoticeably marked the secret wish to communicate something not yet expressed’ (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 33). Specifically, the philosopher is remembered as he holds lectures, as if from that situation we could see revealed something of the tension that is already implicit in the concept of such a philosophy, through two gestures ‘that should be imagined in relation to each other’. The first consists of ‘how he, bobbing up and down on the exposed side of the lectern, drilled the sharpened pencil into the air – into an invisible matter, as it were’, interpreted by Marcuse as ‘the gesture of the passionate analytical thinker’. The second gesture, which is considered most important, is thus outlined: ‘he left the exposed edge of the lectern; the outstretched pencil pointed sunk between his fingers; and with his head lowered he silently crossed back to the other side of the lectern – until he got a grip on himself and was able to continue the lecture’. Moreover, commented by Marcuse, observing that: ‘In this silent second of forgetting himself, he inwardly annulled what he had just investigated’ (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 33). In turn, Blumenberg comments squarely: ‘Simmel’s many readers all recognize this turning point in so many of his arguments, when he goes beyond the supposedly last attainable formulation, observes the results he just produced on the counter-pole of possibilities and relativizes it. It was the same in the live performance of the teacher: he left behind what has just been but could only silently promise how to go beyond’ (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 34). We are also faced with ‘the “immeasurable tragedy” of philosophical thinking’ which invests both the philosopher and the philosophical enterprise that crosses it, questioning the relationship between theory and empirical reality and at the same time exposing its generative oscillation:

he appears to be condemned to ‘fall into his own arms’ in order to prevent himself from exhausting his logical consistency. Simmel’s thought process seems to be able to become optically perceptible: one saw his pleasure in analysis even in the thin air of the most subtle reality [*subtilster Realität*] or of what is no longer reality [*Nicht-mehr-Realität*], a reality that therefore could be cruelly and

inconsiderately yanked back to the ground of empirical facts. Therefore, before he became a ‘*Lebensphilosoph* [life philosopher]’, Simmel has tested himself with the philosophy of a topic that offers some of the greatest resistance to thought: the philosophy of money (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 34).⁸

In the analysis of the mythical figure of Sisyphus, from the point of view of the elaboration of myth, Blumenberg evokes the Simmelian definition of ‘significance’ (*Bedeutsamkeit*) in connection with the dimension of value in the *Philosophy of money*: ‘Objects are not difficult to acquire because they are valuable, but we call those objects valuable that resist our desire to possess them. Since the desire encounters resistance and frustration, the objects gain a significance that would never been attributed to them by an unchecked will’ (Simmel, 1978, p. 67). Thus, Blumenberg comments, the value is ‘a specific functional form of significance’, as it tends to the ‘objectification of the comparison’ and thus of the ‘possibility of exchange’, without ever entirely giving up ‘the subjective element that is contained in the “felt” value of something that is desired’ (Blumenberg, 1985 [1979], p. 76). Therefore Sisyphus is read in *Work on Myth* as a ‘mythical figure of futility [or uselessness: *Vergeblichkeit*]’ in which we could grasp even at a late date, ‘and perhaps only then’, ‘the importance of not being occupied and possessed by reality only, and only by a single reality at that’ (Blumenberg, 1985, p. 76). Still in the analysis of the myth, Blumenberg notes that significance is ‘a defence against indifference’ and becomes ‘a resistance to the tendency toward a condition of higher probability – of diffusion, of erosion, of entropy’. And from this comes the role that it acquires in the philosophy of life, or ‘it portrays life as the self-assertion of reality that resists probability’ (Blumenberg, 1985, p. 109). As well as the possibility of defining it as ‘the form in which the background of nothing [*des Nichts*], as that which produces anxiety, has been put at a distance, whereby, without this “prehistory”, the function of what is significant remains uncomprehended, though present’ (Blumenberg, 1985, p. 110).

The use of ‘explosive metaphors’ (*Sprengmetaphorik*) in Simmel is also placed at the boundary between ‘expressibility and inexpressibility’. Where, for example, in an annotation of his posthumous *Diary* he takes up the *via negationis* of Cusano to connote the Nietzschean concept of ‘eternal return of the same’: ‘the world process seems to me like the turning of an enormous wheel – in the way, to be sure, that is presupposed by the eternal return. Not however with the same result – that at some point the same thing really repeats itself; for the wheel has an infinitely large radius’ (Blumenberg,

⁸ See Jürgen Habermas for whom Blumenberg’s propensity for anecdotes reveals a literary model that includes the rooting of the theory in the lifeworld and in a contextualizing way tries to discover the truth in the metaphorical nature of the story, and who suggests that ‘Blumenberg’s inclination to the anecdotal betrays a literary model, perhaps Georg Simmel’ (Habermas, [1988] 1992, p. 225). On the close link between the interest in the anthropological dimension and its anecdotal interpretation, see Zill, 2014, p. 39 et seq. On gestures in Simmel, see Weizbort, 2000, p. 582-588.

1996 [1979], p. 91).⁹ Or, in the form of a misunderstanding, in the case of the Kantian conception of freedom ‘as a necessary presupposition of reason’, in which one can recognize the ‘danger of using an absolute metaphoric’ and nothing has been gained by learning that ‘the synthesis of the representations itself is “already” an action of the understanding’: ‘this misunderstanding (...) already plays a role in the Simmel’s much-admired interpretation of Kant and subsequently in his attempt, in his philosophy of history, to derive arguments against deterministic historicism from it’ (Blumenberg, 1996, p. 101 f.). However, observes Blumenberg, the ‘human beings’ would make their history freely, or more freely, because the synthesis of their representations is an ‘action of their understanding’: ‘this is just the misleading effect of an absolute metaphor that has been taken literally’ (Blumenberg, 1996, p. 102).

Anthropological Rhetoric and Nonconceptuality

Blumenberg had also referred to Simmel’s thought to clarify, in his *Anthropological approach to the actuality of rhetoric* (1987 [1971]), the characteristics of the persuasion in opposition to the oppression, given that the former presupposes that ‘one shares a horizon’ (which is not given in the relationship with the barbarians, where the use of force prevails), as well as the ‘allusions to prototypical material, and the orientation to the metaphor, to the similitude [*an der Metapher, am Gleichnis*]’ (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 436). In particular, according to Simmel, the metaphor of ‘roles’ is so productive because ‘life is “an early form of the dramatic art”’ and these metaphors ‘no longer having to do with the implication that it is a question of illusion, of a theatrical double life, with and without a masks, with and without costume, so that one would only need to expose the stage and the actors in order to catch sight of the reality and put an end with the theatrical intermezzo’ (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 442). In fact, Blumenberg comments: ‘the “life” of which Simmel speaks is not only incidentally and episodically an “early form” of the dramatic art; rather, “being able to live” and “define a role for oneself” are identical’ (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 442). And he adds, in the first person: ‘I assert that not only is this discourse of “roles” metaphorical, but the process of definition that goes with the role concept – a process upon which the consciousness of identity depends, and which it can be damaged – is itself rooted in metaphor and is asserted and defended, both internally and externally by metaphor’ (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 442). He argues this way that: ‘the “agreement” that has to be the goal of all “persuasion” [...] is the congruence – which is endangered in all situation and always has to be secured afresh – between one’s role consciousness and the role expectations that others have of one’ (Blumenberg, 1987, p. 442).

⁹ Here Blumenberg is quoting Simmel, 1923a, p. 263.

It can be noticed that Simmel converges in Blumenberg's reading also on the reflection that identifies an autonomous space for nonconceptuality (*Unbegrifflichkeit*) and leads to the impossibility of reducing the figural and metaphorical dimension to a simple auxiliary and temporary construction on the path of logical-conceptual reduction. Already with money 'the generality and lack of content' become a 'real power', 'whose relation to all the contrary qualities of the objects transacted and to their psychological constellations can be equally interpreted as service and as domination', thus unfolding a lucid analysis of the power of abstraction, as the 'tragedy of human concept formation', or the process by which 'the higher concept, which through its breadth embraces a growing number of details, must count upon an increasing loss of content' (Simmel 1978, p. 220). The metaphor is then brought to completion in the concept of life, as has been mentioned, through abstraction from the 'fact of finitude of individual lives' and its assumption as a hypostasis of a 'substance', which in such lives manifests itself only on the surface (Blumenberg, 2012, p. 261). Until the crudeness of the disenchantment with which Simmel compares the fruit of his life, his spiritual heritage, to the cash money divided among his many heirs, 'of which each invests his own part in a manner consistent with his nature, without being interested in the origin of that inheritance' (Simmel 1923a, p. 261). It will be precisely the elaboration of a 'theory of nonconceptuality' – which became accessible only in relatively recent times but was composed by Blumenberg in the same years as the essay on Simmel – to point out as the 'ancient unspeakable', the 'individuum ineffabile', does not coincide at all with 'the linguistically indescribable or with the unnameable', but to be identified, 'precisely because it is readable in the individuum', with 'the unattainable through the concept as correlate of the substance' (Blumenberg, 2007, p. 134), not without returning to the 'abstract conjunction of the concept and the negation' operated by Simmel and on the 'union of the functions of the concept and of the metaphor where there is an overflowing increase of the negation in the metaphor' connected to it (Blumenberg, 2007, p. 103). Compared to Schopenhauer, a general reference term for Simmel's conception of abstraction itself, it will also be pointed out that the concept is not a 'surrogate' nor a 'fulfilment' of reason, understood as 'reduced, abstract, colourless, mathematical plant of the whole world', but it is a 'gap open' for the intentions of reason itself and, *anthropogenetically*, its origin will be sought in human being as 'the being that orients, abandons the surrounding environment of perception and goes beyond the horizon of his senses, being characterized by the *actio per distans*' (Blumenberg, 2007, p. 9). It is referring to the 'luxurious' constitution of human beings, however, that operates the metaphor, removing the lack of 'being lacking' from the 'bottom of a surplus', from the 'exaggeration beyond the horizon of the necessities of life', as this horizon, 'separates possibility and reality':

the metaphor joins the primary habit of referring to reality and the secondary one of referring to possibility: said even more formally, the metaphor is the instrument of a world of expanding relationships that has abandoned the not necessary regulations to the language and the biological mechanisms of the environment, and that in the meantime has become accustomed to the obvious and usual institutions of the lifeworld (Blumenberg, 2007, p. 116).

Antinomicity, Philosophy of Life and Aesthetics

Moreover, in Blumenberg's book on *Care crosses the river* (*Die Sorge geht über den Fluß*, 2010 [1987]) Simmel is still evoked with regard to the nautical metaphor, with which, in 1912 responding to the letter of Marianne Weber to whom he dedicated his book on Goethe, he defines the new horizon of his own work and, with it, the relationship between the individual life and the stream or current of the life. The book represents, in fact, the conclusion of an entire phase of his work and it is now time to orientate elsewhere: 'Here a gesture of great self-confidence commences: "Now I tack my sail and seek untrodden land" [...]. "Admittedly, the journey will certainly come to an end before it reaches the coast" ' (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 85). This is followed by Blumenberg's comment: 'Life offers life no other chance than that of the fragment one possibility to life, that of the fragment. Life's contingency reveals shows what the individual and its finitude are all about: a life ends, life goes on – there are no arrival on the shores of the *terra incognita*' (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 85). And Blumenberg adds: 'Simmel oriented himself by means of the metaphor of flowing life developed by Bergson. He doesn't put to sea, he doesn't arrive; he only changes the direction of the sail – he has always been on the high seas. [...] There will be no harbour, but also no island where one could shipwreck before reaching the goal' (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 86). Misfortune mates 'comrades' who believe they can 'make themselves at home on the ship so that they ultimately think that the ship itself is the new land' are wrong, because in this way they misunderstand the situation and while making claims to a system, they always want a totality (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 86). The alternative, 'if the ship does not have to become a house', can only be death – 'there is no doubt that Simmel is thinking about death' – as an 'indispensable complement to the philosophy of life': 'life can only preserve itself through the death of each of its "delegates", none of whom have a claim *to be* it, only to take part in it – the final *methexis* [participation] in the remnant of all ideas, the end of Platonism in the nonconcept of "life". One has to die on board' (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 86). It must be clear, Blumenberg specifies, that this 'imply neither a longing for death desire nor a death drive', as it represents instead 'an unwillingness towards every new totality, uneasiness with unities of the type that Gestalt-theory or the systematics of symbolic forms had to offer or intended to offer'. Therefore,

‘life’ gives itself form and shape [*Form und Gestalt*] but not without the proviso of taking it back, of melting it down [*Vorbehalt der Zurücknahme, der Einschmelzung*], as if the supply of substance is too meagre to be able to leave it at what already exists. As the author of the *Philosophy of Money* knows, death is an economy of life, of the substance that is always and essentially in too short a supply (Blumenberg, 2010, p. 86).

When he investigates the indefiniteness of the concept of life in the genesis of the theory of the lifeworld (*Theorie der Lebenswelt*, 2010b) and through the passage that, as the Simmelian formulation at the conclusion of his *Rembrandt* indicates, leads from the philosophy of life to the philosophy of existence, it appears clear to Blumenberg that at stake here is a sort of ‘reoccupation’ (*Umbesetzung*) of positions from ‘metaphoric’ to ‘metaphysical’ and therefore that the concept of ‘life in an absolute sense’ already in Simmel’s *Rembrandt* appears as ‘no more in some kind of contrast with the form, but it arises as itself, with its own form linked only to itself and inseparable from itself’ (Blumenberg, 2010b, p. 20 f.).¹⁰

If we assume a conception of the aesthetics that includes both the philosophical reflection on art and the wider perceptive-sensitive relationship with the world, that it is precisely the work of Georg Simmel that may have first authorized to think in its entirety, it becomes possible to choose some samples of the Simmelian work as an illustration and specification of his anthropological approach in the aesthetic field, in accordance with Blumenberg’s reading.¹¹

Starting from the human performance of joining and separating on which the powerful Simmelian metaphorical field of the bridge and the door is concentrated, one can examine them in the light of their congruence with those that are defined as specifically human performances: ‘Only the human being in front of nature has the ability to unite and divide, thanks to this way of proceeding on the basis of which everything is always the presupposition of the other’ (Simmel, 1909, p. 55). In the anthropological perspective of the genesis of the specifically human (‘the human performance *as* human performance’), in fact, we get to circumscribe the gradient of an ‘image of the border point [*Bilde des Grenzpunktes*] of man’, superior to the indifference of direction contained in the conjunction of two points of the bridge, as ‘the richest and most vital meaning’ of the door, ‘life outside of the limitations of a being per se isolated towards the unlimited’ and ‘complete difference of intention’ between entering and going out (Simmel, 1909, p. 58). What it ‘makes sensible’, which confers a sensitive configuration without reducing it to a conceptual abstraction, is the character of the human being (*Mensch*) as a ‘boundary being that has no boundaries’ (Simmel, 1909, p. 60). With

¹⁰ Here Blumenberg is quoting Simmel, 1916, p. 510. See also Blumenberg, 2010b, p. 124-125.

¹¹ For a recapitulation of the studies on Simmel’s aesthetic, see Meyer (2017).

the twofold rejection of the *actor's* task as a mere actualization of a text and as an imitative mechanical transposition of reality, we then grasp an 'actorial aptitude' (*schauspielerische Attitude*) which accompanies human beings in their unitary 'being-so' world 'and makes the 'role' a Goethean 'original or primary phenomenon' (*Urphänomen*) that offers a sensitive configuration – visible and audible – to the elements of life through performing (Simmel, 1912, p. 314) and approximates the 'essence of art' as an elaboration in a form of the 'contents of the existence' to reach the single unit (Simmel, 1912, p. 309). In this approach to the relationship between actor and reality, the underlying motif of the Simmelian critique of the *naturalistic* posture in the theory of art is also highlighted, which makes the work entirely dependent on its '*terminus a quo*' in the reality and neglects the creative efficacy of the artist capable of building worlds and objectifying an autonomous 'third' between contents and people (Simmel, 1923, p. 229, 240).

On the other hand, it shows all the limits of abstraction and rationalism calculating the purism of the *art pour l'art* which escapes the organic connection between the elements and the whole of life, with respect to which the work of art constitutes an indirect way towards and through the whole, while the artistic point of view is constantly stimulated by the contradiction between the need to consider this work 'a world of its own' and the need to see it as 'a wave in the current of life' (Simmel, 1914, p. 15). To the polarity between individual and universal, between the common and generalizing power, on the one hand, and the capacity of singular concretion in image, on the other hand, it is also possible to bring back the notion of style, in the midst of the first world war also bent on servicing a clash of cultures, which reflects this opposition to the outside, where it fully embodies the pole of the universal in the double sense of 'typical-abstract' and 'social being' (Simmel, 1918, p. 318), and to its own interior, as a unifying individual style, a 'particular and individual expression of life', since, as Simmel had written in the capital text on the subject, 'style is a principle of generality, with which the principle of individuality or is mixed, or removes or represents it' (Simmel, 1908a, p. 376). The less the work of art draws on the 'timeless compactness of the life result of the in itself satisfied phenomenal form', and instead leads to expression 'the progress of life itself as it continually regenerates itself on the impulse of its own drive forces' (Simmel, 1918, p. 319), the more it moves away from the polarity of the style and ends up asserting itself 'beyond beauty', as in the exemplary case of Rembrandt, where we do not find any abstractable [*abstrahierbares*] scheme that transcends individual entities' and 'every image has only its form' (Simmel, 1918, p. 315). Finally, an analogous law of contrast with relative 'dialectics without conciliation' (Landmann, 1968, p. 16) is the sphere of normativity, declined as an 'individual law' of no less normative force and rigor than the universal and composed starting from a parallel of ethics and aesthetics, according to which 'only the individual unitary whole of my life can determine how I should behave', just as 'only the work of art can be a

law unto itself' (Simmel, 1917–18, p. 387, 386). While the general concepts are able to grasp only 'isolated *contents*' (Simmel, 1917–18, p. 386), from the reciprocal normative efficacy that the parts of a work of art exercise on each other results in the objectification of an individual configuration in which idea and law tend to coincide in actual reality, still in connection with the Goethean sense of the primary or original phenomenon (*Urphänomen*) as the convergence of theory and phenomenon and with the sensible rendering of something otherwise abstract.

In conclusion, it is possible to focus through the essays here considered on some of the main points that mark, also in the aesthetic-anthropological field, an insistent preference for aporetic solutions and against 'the prejudice according to which all conflicts and problems are there to be resolved' (Simmel, 1918b, p. 207). It also becomes possible to bring them back to that inclination to let the 'antinomies' subsist, in accordance with the everyday attitude of the life world (Ritter, 1974, p. 16), precisely to a sort of 'law of contrast', which is itself taken as a constitutive element of the Simmelian cognitive enterprise.¹² An antinomic propensity that in turn ends up bringing us back to the long-term *instance* that animated Hans Blumenberg's research as an 'anthropological antinomy' and that in the form of a reconstructive hypothesis of Georg Simmel's thought on philosophical anthropology provided the perspective from which to carry out this reappraisal.

Still conclusively, it also becomes possible to ask whether the reconstruction proposed here of the various tangential points to the recognition of a Simmel anthropologist in the work of Hans Blumenberg has arrived at a definition that justifies the attribution of having contained the nucleus of a philosophical anthropology that could have been better than those that would later be followed with this denomination. If Blumenberg has taken up the acquisitions of Alsberg, Gehlen and Plessner at various points (see Fischer, 2008, p. 435-441), there is no doubt that the emphasis he places on the Simmelian anthropological elements circumscribed here is aimed at delineating and tends to coincide with at least a part of the contribution by Blumenberg himself to an innovative philosophical anthropology. Summing up, in fact, he insists on the relation between elementary tropisms and life forms in metaphorology, on the possible redescriptions of anthropogenesis by virtue of the distancing through sight, gaze, face and the ability to transpose into another through the imagination, like anthropological countermoves to cope contingency. He also insists on the bodily relationship between the empirical level and the theoretical level with its articulations in the gestural sphere of the connection with reality, in mythical occurrences and explosive metaphors, on the critique of the conflating – and therefore barbaric – genesis of the anthropological and historical plans of the distinction friend-enemy, as well as on the relationship between persuasion and apprehension that arises from an anthropological approach to rhetoric and from the revaluation of the figural dimension

¹² For the development of this perspective, see Borsari 2018.

of nonconceptuality. If, more generally, this vision leads to the overthrow of the usual conception of a lacking being in a wealthy one, i.e. in a luxurious constitution, and to the construction of anthropology starting from the permanence of force fields produced by the tension of antinomic terms, it seems possible to affirm, finally, that this second level and relational dimension, full of possibilities and that emphasizes the possible, represents the original way to remove anthropology from any essentialism and, at the same time, the distinctive and peculiar legacy of the Simmelian lesson for Blumenberg in view of an anthropology that could have been and that he tried on his own.

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Abstract

In the last two decades, increasing attention to the anthropological propensity of his thought has emerged in the research on the work of Hans Blumenberg, but very little attention has been paid to

the role that Blumenberg reserved for the importance that Georg Simmel might have had in the construction of a philosophical anthropology. This study aims to fill such a gap, reconstructing the various aspects that Simmel's anthropological penchant contains according to Blumenberg's reading: metaphors from money to life; a critique of enemy-friend distinction; gestures and myths; rhetoric and theory of non-conceptuality; the antinomic character of both philosophers.

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