



**Olli Pyyhtinen, *The Simmelian Legacy. A Science of Relations*,  
London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 209 pages**

**Davide Ruggieri**

Volume 21, numéro 2, 2017

URI : <https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1043794ar>

DOI : <https://doi.org/10.7202/1043794ar>

[Aller au sommaire du numéro](#)

Éditeur(s)

Georg Simmel Gesellschaft

ISSN

1616-2552 (imprimé)

2512-1022 (numérique)

[Découvrir la revue](#)

Citer ce compte rendu

Ruggieri, D. (2017). Compte rendu de [Olli Pyyhtinen, *The Simmelian Legacy. A Science of Relations*, London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 209 pages]. *Simmel Studies*, 21(2), 136–138. <https://doi.org/10.7202/1043794ar>

conflicts between contrasting temporalities is, in fact, the aim of Urban Time Policies, which since the Eighties in Europe have tried to intervene on the temporal well-being of the populations dwelling, working, having fun and moving in the city. These policies are nevertheless limited not only by the scarce chances to act on the pacemakers which *time* the urban space but also by the lack of rigorous methodologies and evaluation tools. Hopefully, the scientific relevance of the contributions collected in this volume will serve as an input for research also in this neglected direction.

DAVIDE RUGGIERI

**Olli Pyyhtinen, *The Simmelian Legacy. A Science of Relations*, , London : Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, 209 pages.**

In the frame of the international sociological debate, a quite large part of sociologists focuses for years on the “relational” issue: the social relations have become *the Mecca* for most of them, and that means not simply new subjects to inquiry or to discover, but a new viewpoint to experience and describe the social realm. In 2013 Dépelteau and Powell edited a well-structured book in two volumes (*Conceptualizing relational sociology. Ontological and theoretical Issues* and *Applying relational sociology. Relations, Networks, and Society*), offering a wide perspective on this theme and on these topical studies. The relational approach is a very frequently recurring topic in the history of sociology: the first author who speaks in explicit terms on the “social relations” is certainly Georg Simmel, who can be considered as the founder of the relational sociology as well as sociology *sensu strictissimo*.

The first aim of Pyyhtinen’s book is to broaden the understanding of Simmel’s work and stress his relevance for many contemporary debates, since his influence does not concern exclusively on the relational debate. What we have inherited, in fact, from Simmel is firstly a certain “mode of thought, a method of

approach, or a form of questioning”, as Pyyhtinen rightly says, also in his former studies on Simmel. The fact that the core of modernity is given by the “functionalization of any substance”, as Simmel shows, means: the way to understand reality must be coherent to its matter. Since we have always to deal with “relations” because of the intrinsic relational ontology of modernity (due to the more and more incisive “differentiation” factor on the social and cultural), also any epistemological foundation must be considered under “relational” terms. This volume strongly supports Simmel’s core ideas and it decides neither to *exclusively* treat theoretical aspects, nor to *exclusively* reconstruct a history of effects (influence) of Simmel’s thought. *Tertium datur*, as once Ernst Bloch said about Simmel’s typical approach: Pyyhtinen does not renounce to keep attention on both of aspects just above mentioned.

The book is very exhaustive introduction to Simmel’s thought and it is canonically divided in two main parts: (1) “main ideas” and (2) “influence”. (1) In the first part the author provides a full and wide explanation of Simmel’s essential concepts and methodology. He particularly focuses on “areas of interest” (Chapter 2), on the relational basis of his sociology (Chapter 3) and on more specific themes (Chapters 4–6): in some passages it really looks like to a wide and deep Simmel’s *lexicon*. (2) In the second part Pyyhtinen aims to uncover the distribution and circulation of the legacy of Simmel’s sociology, inquiring his influence on the contemporaries in Germany as well as his fortune in North America in the first decades of the XXth century.

The first very stimulating challenge of this book is the way to intend the social facts as “relations” and turn them into abstractions: this is the main heritage left by Simmel and this would be a theoretical premise for the contemporary research. Society is a *procedural abstraction*: for Simmel, it consists in interactive processes (“reciprocal relations”, *Wechselwirkungen*) among individuals and, thus, in emerging “forms” of those connections and processes. The sociology cannot observe any “anti-categorical imperative” (Emirbayer and Goodwin); on the contrary, following Simmel, the

point is to let the social emerge in transactions, grasp and isolate their “forms”.

One might wonder why we find the word “legacy” in the title. The second fundamental challenge of this volume consists in considering Simmel’s legacy “not so much in formulating answers to well-established sociological questions – as Pyyhtinen writes – as in transforming the whole landscape of sociological problems by offering altogether different abstractions”. Simmel always sustained that sociology had not to discover any new object of inquiry: the social science is a new perspective on the modern life of individuals as well as collective entities. This should be the task of sociology as the science inquiring on social *forms*, not simply a science of social facts: this is the challenge for contemporary social scientists who call themselves “relationists” and must proceed, looking at Simmel’s work, like dwarfs on a giant’s shoulders.

PAULINA SABUGAL

**Swen Seebach, *Love and Society. Special Social Forms and the Master of Emotion*, New York: Routledge, 2017, 214 pages.**

In “What’s love but a second hand emotion” sang Tina Turner in 1984 when she released the song *What’s love got to do with it?*, which later became her most successful single. In 2010, Thomas Scheff dedicated a book to the topic of love with the same title *What’s love got to do with it?*, in which he concluded that love as a multifaceted concept, is difficult to define.

In 2017, Swen Seebach, a Juan de la Cierva postdoctoral researcher looked for a definition of love from a sociological approach. In his book *Love and Society: Special Social Forms and the Master of Emotion*, published by Routledge, he purposes an intense dialogue with different authors in order to see what love is, what has been its social importance and how it actually has a fundamental