

**CEVI Working paper: CEVI-WP 05-01**

## **Georg Simmel on Sex, Money and Personal Worth**

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### **Abstract**

In this paper I will reconstruct and reflect on Simmel's basic insights concerning money, personal worth and sex. He denounces prostitution, sex for money, for it leads to a degradation of the personal value of both participants. He also notices an ominous analogy between prostitution and money: objectification, indifference, lack of attachment. Simmel had a deeply ambiguous attitude towards the new positive sexual possibilities city-life offered to its citizens. So, although Simmel is definitely one of the most stimulating analysts of modernity and is even hailed by some as one of the first postmoderns he himself, however, might never even have been 'modern'—as concerns sex.

**Key Words:** Georg Simmel; Prostitution, 19<sup>th</sup> Century

The project of modernity has entailed the attempt to reconstruct the world—the world of nature and the world of the social—on rational principles, and this process has an element of self-awareness about it, both at the personal and the institutional level, so that the process itself becomes something to be reflected on, learnt from, and thereby furthered. And it has become increasingly clear, over time, that this world-transforming orientation is fraught with paradox and unforeseen results.

John Jervis

## 1. Introduction

According to Marshall Berman, in his highly acclaimed book *All that is Solid Melts into Air*, probably no other social theorist or philosopher of culture has come closer to theorizing the conditions of the transition to modernity than Georg Simmel did (1858-1918).<sup>1</sup> It is with good reasons, therefore, that David Frisby, in his *Fragments of Modernity*, aptly labels Simmel as ‘the first sociologist of modernity.’<sup>2</sup> Probably one of the main reasons for this remarkable feat is Simmel’s ability to thematise and clarify

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<sup>1</sup> M Berman, *That Is Solid Melts Into Air: The Experience of Modernity* Simon and Schuster, New York, 1982, p. 28.

<sup>2</sup> D Frisby, *Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin* (Studies in Contemporary German Social Thought), MIT Press, Cambridge MA, 1988.

the—what we could call—“double nature” of Modernity. On the one hand we have modernity as a *project*. On the other hand we have modernity as the *experience* of this project. In Simmel’s *Philosophy of Money*, published in 1900, both aspects are present, and the book itself marks the transition from a nineteenth century modernising world to the full-blown modernity of the twentieth century. In this book, amongst others, Simmel analyses the driving forces of this modernisation and reflects on what it means for us to live in and experience the modern world.

In this paper, I will reconstruct and comment upon some of Simmel’s basic insights concerning money, personal worth and sex. One of the crucial factors in the process of modernisation, according to Simmel, is money. This money, however, is much more than ‘just’ money. It is an active force transforming society. Money becomes the universal unifier. It reduces all that is qualitatively distinctive to quantitative ratios. Personal values and worth thus become commodities and money-mediated relations become colourless. And all this, of course, influences sex and sexual relationships.

It is in prostitution that we encounter the paradigmatical example of the connection between sex and money. Simmel strongly denounces prostitution, sex for money, as it—according to him—leads to a degradation of the personal value of both parties involved. He also points to an ominous analogy between prostitution and money. Both are characterised by *objectification*, *indifference* and *lack of attachment*. As will become clear, Simmel had a rather troublesome attitude towards the types of sexual practices that became increasingly widespread in the metropolis because, according to

him, they were at odds with genuine personal fulfilment and could not contribute to personal well-being.

The structure of the talk will be as follows. In the *first part* I will round up some relevant aspects of Simmel's theory of *modernity and money*. I will focus on the role money plays in the process of modernisation and in modern life. In the *second part* I will take a closer look at his analysis and evaluation of *prostitution* as the paradigmatic case of money-mediated—and by extension: modern—sexual relations. In this part the focus will be on sex as a consumer good: on what happens when sex is consumed: on how, according to Simmel, it affects those who consume sex, etc. In the *last part* I will briefly reflect on what could be called the 'prostitutionalisation'—at least, so we could call it from Simmel's point of view—of a modern society in which sex and sexual relations become increasingly a question of individual preference and freedom.

## **2. Modernity, Money & Personal Development**

In his massive oeuvre Simmel analyses, clarifies and—up to a certain point—evaluates modernity and the forces that have brought it into being. His analysis focuses on two distinct but interrelated aspects of modernity, labeled by John Jervis as: modernity as 'project' on the one hand and modernity as 'experience' on the other hand. "Experiencing modernity" and "modernity as a project" are two different, albeit intimately related, aspects of modernity.

A 'modern' society, according to John Jervis, is one "in which *project*'—an orientation to rational purposive control of the environment (both natural and social), thereby both understanding and transforming it—becomes the central dynamic of

society.”<sup>3</sup> An important aspect of this dynamic involves *reconstituting the subject* as one who can carry out this project. But a ‘modern world’ is not only characterised by ‘project.’ ‘Modernity’ itself is a reflexive stance: it involves a kind of self-awareness and a way of experiencing the here and now. Modernity as experience, therefore, according to Jervis, involves “the experience of the world as constantly changing, constantly engendering a past out of the death of the here and now and constantly reproducing that ‘here and now’ as the present, the contemporary, the fashionable.”<sup>4</sup> According to Jervis, modernity “gives us the world as a rich tapestry of transient impressions, bright lights and advertising hoardings, the pleasures and dangers of city life, the instant temptations of consumer excess, and the fashion and foibles of ‘street culture’.”<sup>5</sup>

This last quote might as well have come straight out of one of Simmel’s best known essays, “The Metropolis and Mental Life,” published in 1903. In this article Simmel inquires into what he calls “the inner meaning of specifically modern life and its products, into the soul of the cultural body.”<sup>6</sup> He tries to “answer the question of how the personality accommodates itself to external forces,” namely, to the “structures (...) set up between the individual and the super-individual contents of life.”<sup>7</sup> The experience of modern man, according to Simmel, is marked by the resistance:

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<sup>3</sup> J Jervis, *Exploring the Modern*. Blackwell, Oxford, 1998, p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>5</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>6</sup> G Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life,’ in: Kurt Wolff (Transl. & Ed.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*, The Free Press, New York, 1950 (orig. 1903), p. 409.

<sup>7</sup> Ibidem.

to being levelled down and worn out by social-technological mechanisms, (...) [because] (...) [t]he deepest problems of modern life derive[s] from the claim of the individual to preserve the autonomy and individuality of his existence in the face of the overwhelming social forces, of historical heritage, of external culture, and of the technique of life.<sup>8</sup>

Simmels develops a genotypical and a phenotypical analysis of modernity and the conditions of life in modernity.

His genotypical analysis—roughly coinciding with an analysis of the ‘project-side’ of modernity Jervis was referring to—brings together insights from a wide range of perspectives. *Anthropology*: man possesses only a limited amount of energy. Reacting to and acting in the world puts this energy stock under pressure. Man therefore develops energy-saving mechanisms. *Sociology*: processes of social and individual differentiation—both of them examples of energy-saving mechanisms—, linked to the process of generalisation and individualisation. *Economy*: the emergence of the money economy and the ensuing reorganisation of social and individual life. *Axiology*: the development of a concept of value and of personal value, taken as the creation of a developed/cultured but unified personality. *Philosophy of culture*: culture as a dual process of objectification (the production of cultural goods) and resubjectification of those cultural goods as a means to the development of the cultured personality and

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<sup>8</sup> Ibidem.

personal value. These are the defining forces and givens on which modernity arises in a gradual cultural evolution.

On the second—phenotypical—level, Simmel analyses how this evolution has shaped and structured our lives and the impact of this evolution on the way we experience our life. Here we have an analysis of modernity as experience, or as experiencing the present.

### **3. Living the Modern Life: Living the Metropolis**

Perhaps the best way to understand what it means to *live* and *experience a modern life* is to look at how life and experience are structured in the modern city. The ‘metropolis’ embodies modernity in its most advanced form. It is the place where cultural evolution has reached its zenith—it is the most modern structure set up between the individual and the super-individual contents of life referred to earlier. However, the importance of the city is not confined to its citizens only. The most significant characteristic of the metropolis is its functional extension beyond its physical boundaries. As such it acts as a catalyst, a proactive modernizing force. Malcolm Bradbury, e.g., observes that the modern city “has become culture, or perhaps the chaos that succeeds it.” The city itself is “modernity as social action.”<sup>9</sup>

One of the most crucial factors in the process/project of modernisation is money. Money, according to Simmel, is the perfect example of the—what he calls—‘worldformula’ (*Weltformel*). The philosophical meaning of money is:

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<sup>9</sup> M Bradbury, ‘The Cities of Modernism,’ in: Malcolm Bradbury and James McFarlane (eds.) *Modernism: 1890-1930*, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1976, p. 97.

daß es innerhalb der praktischen Welt die entschiedenste Sichtbarkeit, die deutlichste Wirklichkeit der *Formel des allgemeinen Seins* ist, nach der die Dinge ihrem Sinn aneinander und die Gegenseitigkeit der Verhältnisse, in denen sie schweben, ihr Sein und Sosein ausmacht.

(PhM, 98)

But the importance of money goes beyond this philosophical meaning. Money *as a reality* influences economy, society and psychology. The practical effects of money are the enhancement of the money economy and money-driven society. Money enables the objectification of values and hence the “ermöglichung der zeitlichen kontinuierität der geldwirtschaft”—as Thoma puts it. (Thoma, 2000: 9)

Money, however, is much more than ‘just’ money. According to Simmel, money becomes the universal unifier. It reduces all that is qualitatively distinctive to quantitative ratios. The essence of money is quantification. When money becomes increasingly important in society, the price and interchangeable character of objects and commodities take precedence over the individual qualities of these goods. Personal values and worth become commodities and money-mediated relations become colourless.

According to Simmel, the basic forms of mental life and social relationships in the metropolis are: cynicism, a blasé-attitude, reserve (reticence, aloofness) and aversion. City life is hectic. It is full of ‘transient impressions.’ Some city-dwellers ‘shut down’ their system as a defensive reaction.

The city is the natural habitat of the cynic. The cynic enjoys the debasement of values and distinction. As such he is the natural ally of money, since money does just this: money represents all distinct values on an interchangeable quantitative scale. Everything—or nearly everything—can be had for money. And this stimulates a blasé-attitude towards the world and all it can offer. Cynicism and a blasé-attitude are, according to Simmel:

nur die Antworten zweier verschiedener, manchmal auch gradweise gemischter Naturelle auf die gleiche Tatsache: bei zynischer Disposition erregt die Erfahrung wie vieles für Geld zu haben ist, und der Induktions Schluß, daß schließlich Alles und Alle käuflich sind, ein positives Lustgefühl, während für den zur Blasiertheit Neigenden eben dasselbe Bild der Wirklichkeit ihr die letzten Möglichkeiten raubt, ihm Reize zu werden. (PhG, 1930, (1900), 265-266)

The metropolis is a highly socially and individually differentiated environment. People's lives are increasingly rooted in a wide variety of social circles of their own choosing. A high level of internal, individual differentiation parallels this social differentiation and makes it very difficult to develop and maintain a unified personality. Due to labour division, e.g., we mobilize only one aspect of our being at a time. We do not interact with each other with all our personality. These differentiations and the predominance of money as a universal means increase our freedom, but at the same time generate a mental attitude of reserve and aversion towards our fellow citizens.

All this fundamentally influences the ways in which sex and sexual relationships are structured and experienced in modernity.

#### 4. Consuming Sex: Money, Personal Value, Sex and Prostitution

The *locus classicus* of Simmel's treatment of the relationship between sex, money and personal values is the first part of the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter of his *Philosophy of Money*. The phenomenon of *prostitution* is central to his analysis.

Simmel denounces prostitution on four grounds. The *first backing* is of an *ethical* nature. The *second backing* relies on Simmel's views on what constitutes a cultured, autonomous individuality and personality. The *third backing* is based on Simmel's views on the *differential nature of male and female*. And the *fourth backing* has to do with Simmel's normative view on the *proper place of sex* within personal relationships and one's life. We'll have more on this last backing later, in the third part of the talk. For now I'll focus on the first three backings.

Prostitution, according to Simmel—and this is the first backing—, amounts to 'treating the other as a means solely.' (cfr. Kant) Furthermore, it is degrading for women, because it denies them their dignity. However, it also lowers the moral status of her client because he—and in most cases the client of course is a he—he does not respect her as a human being. In his *Philosophy of Money*, Simmel states that prostitution is "of all human relationships (...) the most striking instance of mutual degradation to a mere means." (PhM, 1978: 377) And in his *Einleitung in die Moralwissenschaft*, Simmel even calls prostitution a "Moralische Verderbniss." (1892/93: I: 212)

This, of course, is an *ethical* stance, based on Kantian premises concerning the moral status of human interactions. As such, this critique of prostitution is not directly linked to money, to modernity or to the process of modernisation and the impact of money. Even when the payment made would be material goods instead of money, this critique could be maintained. The next two backings, however, are closely linked to money and the process of modernisation—more precisely to the processes of individual and social differentiation that are endemic in modernity and the modernity-enhancing effects of money.

The second backing relies on Simmel's views on what constitutes a cultured, autonomous individuality and personality. In a well-developed personality, i.e., a cultured spirit, all relevant and human potentialities are, according to Simmel, harmoniously developed towards a higher goal. Prostitution, however, is the antithesis of personal value and of the ideal of personal distinction that is the end goal of this development of personality. Prostitution debases and reduces one of the most intimate elements in our personality, i.e. our sexual relationships, because it places sex and sexual relationships on an equal footing with so-called lesser aspects of our life.

And here the enhancing effects of money kick in. Simmel, of course, realizes that prostitution as such is widespread and of all times. But according to Simmel, its deleterious effects become intensified when the type of payment used is money as we find it in a developed money economy. The quality of money is by then completely reduced to its quantity. Money reduces all values to a common denominator, thereby emptying them of all quality/qualities. Money, says Simmel:

ist das unpersönliche, qualitätsloseste Ding im ganzen Bereich unserer praktische Interessen; indem es das Äquivalent für die allerverschiedensten und entgegengesetzten Dinge ist, verliert es selbst jeden spezifischen Charakter; es ist ein Durchgangspunkt, der keinem wie immer beschaffenen Werte den Durchgang verweigern und deshalb keine eigene Individualität besitzen darf, und, im Gegensatz zum Sachbesitz, nicht einmal die Möglichkeit einer persönlichen Beziehung zu den Individuen aufweist, von denen es kommt und zu denen es geht. (1882/83: I 208)

Since money, by its very nature, is 'pure quantity,' it is also the antithesis of 'quality' and 'distinction.' Money is therefore "never an adequate mediator of personal relationships." (1978: 377) Money and prostitution are, however, easy bedfellows, because it is precisely money that

best serves, both objectively and symbolically, that purchasable satisfaction which rejects any relationship that continues beyond the momentary sexual impulse, because it is absolutely detached from the person and completely cuts off from the outset any further consequences. In as far as one pays with money, one is completely finished with any object just as fundamentally as when one has paid for satisfaction from a prostitute. (1978: 377)

The third backing is based on Simmel's views on the *differential nature of male and female*. Sex is common to all people, but for women it becomes a defining feature, because

this completely general act that is identical for people of all strata is experienced, at the same time—at least for the woman—as an extremely personal and intimate one. (...) If, in fact, women are more closely and more deeply rooted in the dark primitive forces of nature than are men, then their most essential and personal qualities must also be rooted in those natural, universal functions that guarantee the uniformity of the genus. (...) Women (...) live under the sign of all or nothing (...) [and therefore] there is a certain justification in the supposition that a woman gives herself up more completely and unreservedly by surrendering this one part of her self than does the more differentiated man under the same circumstances. (1978: 377-379)

According to Simmel, prostitution is degrading to both parties involved, but is far more problematical for the prostitute since, as a woman, she gives “das Persönlichste, was jemand geben kann, der Man das Unpersönlichste, was jemand geben kann; dieser das in höherem Sinne Wertloseste, jene das Wertvollste.” (1892/93: I: 209) The man pays for his pleasures with something that is completely detached from his being, while the woman offers her body and sex in return, both of which are according to Simmel deeply personal. Simmel again:

It certainly signifies the nadir of human dignity if a woman surrenders her most intimate and most personal quality, which should be offered only on the basis of a genuine personal impulse and only with equal personal devotion on the part of the male—in so far as this might have a different importance for the man compared with the woman—for a totally impersonal, purely extraneous and objective compensation. (1978: 377)

Simmel believes that prostitution totally destroys and debases women, because by their very nature women give themselves totally whenever they enter a sexual relation. A woman prostitute is a total prostitute. It permeates her total being. For Simmel, to put it bluntly, a woman who sells sex is nothing more than a whore, and nothing other than a whore.<sup>10</sup>

Men, however, by their very nature, are—according to Simmel—far better able to ‘manage’ this kind of detached sexual relations. The totality of their personality is less afflicted by it because men are more capable than women in dealing with the positive as well as with the negative effects of social and individual differentiation.

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<sup>10</sup> “From nine to five, lawyers are sleazy, politicians are liars, and doctors are Good Samaritans. However, when they leave the office many assume roles as husbands or wives, mothers or fathers, and members of the community. Prostitutes, on the other hand, are viewed as whores, drug addicts, and victims no matter where they are or what they are doing. Sex work is not just one of a number of jobs a person may hold. Rather, it is a way of life--an identity that a person can never escape.” (Johnson, 1999: 840)

#### **4. Consumed by Sex: The pleasures and abominations of urban sexuality**

From all this, it is clear that Simmel had a very negative attitude towards prostitution and towards the effects of prostitution on both the prostitute as well as on the client. However, something even more fundamentally dangerous seems to be happening if we follow Simmel's lead, because if it is true that "we experience in the nature of money itself something of the essence of prostitution" (1978: 377-378), then the converse might also be true, i.e., that the *nature of prostitution mirrors something of the essence of a society that is thoroughly permeated and modelled on the basis of money*.

According to Simmel, sexual culture in the city is on the decline. He is—in a way—a cultural pessimist. Although city life offers on the one hand unknown possibilities for personal development and enrichment, the same forces that create these possibilities counteract, on the other hand, the realization of these possibilities.

At this point we can appreciate the double meaning of the title of the paper. We can consume sex and be consumed by it. The title refers both to what happens when sex is consumed as well as to what happens when sex consumes. The first rendition focuses attention on the impact of sex as a consumer good, i.e., sex as a commodity. When sex can be bought and sold it becomes detached from those who sell and buy. The second way of reading the title draws attention to sex as a commodifying force. Sex as a commodity is probably as old as the economy itself. But when sex enters the money-driven market place of modernity it takes on another dimension. Money-mediated sexual interactions become the paradigmatic type of all social interactions in modernity and one of the strongest motors of modernisation. If this is the case, then Dumas was

truly right in proclaiming that we are all on our way to universal prostitution. And Simmel's pessimism, at least from his point of view, may well be justified.

Here, the *fourth backing* of Simmel's rejection of prostitution is important. This backing relies on Simmel's normative view on the *proper place of sex* within personal relationships and one's life. Prostitution, money-sex, is fundamentally at odds with this. In his *Der Konflikt der Kultur*, e.g., we read that prostitution "debases the love life of young people," turning this love life into a caricature which "transgresses against its inmost nature." (1918)

Simmel distinguishes between two types of sexual practices according to the type of relationship the sex is situated in. On the one hand we have sex that is firmly located within (fulfilling) personal relationships "such as the genuine love affair (...) that are intended to be permanent and based on the sincerity of the binding forces." (1978: 376) This type of sex we could label as 'love-sex'. The second type of sex is located outside this loving relationship. It occurs within what he calls a "completely fleeting inconsequential relationship" in which the sexual appetite in question is based on a "momentary sexual impulse" (1978: 378) which is "fleetingly intensified and just as fleetingly extinguished" (1978: 376) Simmel immediately presents prostitution-sex, or perhaps more aptly labelled 'money-sex'—as an example of this second type of sex. This, of course, is what the discussion at hand is about. But in my opinion something more is at stake. Prostitution-sex is but the most distorted form sex can take on when it is enacted against what Simmel calls its 'inmost nature.' (cfr. *Supra*) Every other type of sex is, for Simmel, problematical sex. Conspicuously absent from his discussion here and elsewhere is what we nowadays would label 'casual sex'—citysex *par exemple*.

Logically speaking, prostitution-sex does not exhaust the 'loveless-sex' category.

However, it is condemned by default, because of Simmel's normative views on proper sex. Good sex, proper sex, is at home in a marriage based on personal affection (1978: 380) and it is ideally had by 'well-formed' or cultured individuals.

However, what constitutes a deep cultural problem from one perspective, might signify new and exciting possibilities from another. A few decades later in New York, Mondriaan told Claire Goll: "here, nobody bothers with his deepest inner problems; here there are no dramas, nobody feels sombre. That's the way we all should live: on the surface of existence, on the outside of things. (...) The world will be as Jazz-music: noise, and after this noise..., nothing, or yet again, another sound. But no more nostalgia, no looking back with resentment." (Goll, 1978: 228, my translation) Mondriaan voices another appreciation and experience of the changes due to modernity, one that already was foreshadowed at the end of the nineteenth century, but that Simmel could not approve of, appreciate, or perhaps, even see.

It seems that, for Simmel, the category of 'non-love-sex,' or 'loveless sex,' is paradigmatically defined by 'prostitution-sex' and its cognates. The prostitute and prostitution-sex incarnate and symbolize the threatening new alternative forms and experiences of sex. This reduction and Simmel's inability to appreciate the new sexual possibilities of the city places him squarely within, as one could label it, a pre-modern frame of mind. The identification and evaluation of the 'sexual adventurous woman' by means of the category of 'the prostitute' was, of course, commonplace during the second half of the nineteenth century.

In his brilliant work *The Painting of Modern Life*, T.J. Clark even argues that the category of the prostitute is a necessary classification for (early) modernity. It is the point where the social, the sexual, and the modern are mapped most neatly onto one another by the bourgeois society. The prostitute represents the limiting case of all three. According to Clark, the prostitute represented the danger and the price of modernity and “by showing sexuality succumbing to the social *in the wrong way* (if completely), it might seem to aid the understanding of the right ones.” (Clark, 1984: 103)

During the second half of the nineteenth century, the prostitute and the practice of prostitution represented to many people all that went wrong in modernity. Prostitution generated not only moral indignation but also fear. This fear manifested itself on two levels. Prostitution seemed to be taking over the city. It therefore needed to be controlled, supervised and kept in check. (Cfr. Hunt, 1999) But it also seemed to be expropriating the city in another sense as well, transcending the mere fact that it became more frequent and criminalising the city. It was, according to some, tearing apart at the seams the very moral and cultural fabric of society. By the end of the nineteenth century, prostitution was no longer the mere hygienic act of immediate sexual gratification, carried out behind closed doors and in secluded brothels. Prostitution became a public phenomenon and it started to remodel the city and city life itself—“the prostitutes seemed to be making the city over in their image.” (Clark, 1984: 79) City life itself became more and more sexualised. According to Clark,

the bourgeoisie believed in Desire. The papers and the streets were supposed to be full of it, and its force was imagined as working and changing the whole social body—breaking down the old distinctions between urbanity, sexual tolerance, *galanterie*, adultery, debauchery, and prostitution proper. These things appeared to becoming aspects of one another... (Clark, 1984: 107)

This generated a next level of fear: not so much the fear of the prostitutes and of the practice of prostitution and its effects, but the fear that society itself might become ‘prostitutionalized’ and that the essence of prostitution might become—or even already had become—the essence of society. In the words of Dumas: “we are all on our way to universal prostitution.” (Clark, 1984: 104; cfr. Jervis, 1988: 82ff)

All this, in my opinion, hints to the fact that something more was at stake than just the ‘managing of the social problem of prostitution.’ The changing nature of prostitution itself and the ‘sexing of the city’, so to speak, testify to the changing attitudes towards sexuality in late nineteenth century modernity. By the end of the nineteenth century there was already a change in sexual culture well underway in which women played a key role and which discarded the traditional paradigms of good-sex vs. prostitution-sex. It would not be long before the unsuitability of the traditional categories would become clear: “The way women dress today—a early 20<sup>th</sup> century observer remarked—they all look like prostitutes...” (Cited in Peiss, 1983: 78). A new type of woman came on the scene; In New York, for instance, there were the so called

‘charity girls.’ The term ‘charity girls’ differentiated them from prostitutes. These girls would “offer themselves to strangers, not for money, but for presents, attention, and pleasure, and most important, a yielding to sex desire.” (Cited in Peiss, 1983: 81)

With this, we witness the birth of what Bech so aptly labels ‘citysex.’ According to Bech the city is fundamentally sexualised and modern sexuality is essentially urban. (1998: 219ff) In his view, citysex is characterized by factors such as the excitement of the amount of supply and abundance, opportunity and freedom, combined with the possibility of ‘being oneself’ connected to the anonymity and non-committedness of urban relations. Citysex is consumersex: one can freely choose partners without the necessity of dealing with the other person as a whole human being. Urban sexuality is organised around the careful observation of and the possibility of the provocative transgression of the norms of urban behaviour. Sex in the city means making an opportunity out of the situation that one has ended up in. Citysex is highly visual and tactile—but the right ways of seeing, being seen, touching and being touched are defined by the norms of urban behaviour. Citysex becomes a public art and its pleasures “*are* indeed the pleasures of what throughout modernity has been so eloquently denounced by the invectives of alienation and objectification, instrumentalization and fetishization.” (1998: 220). To some, citysex is a sign of greater moral and social problems. Others welcome the new liberating and sensual possibilities and opportunities.

The history and genesis of ‘modern sexuality’ is intricately linked to the genesis of this ‘modern city’—the metropolis. The nineteenth century can rightly be called the century of urbanization. At the end of the nineteenth century the metropolis had

materialized. (Cfr. Lees, 1985) Life in the metropolis differs from life outside the metropolis and during the pre-metropolis era on many counts, but perhaps one of the most striking differences is the way sex and sexuality become structured and experienced in the city.

## **5. Conclusion**

Simmel brilliantly captures aspects of the changing nature of sex and of the personal and societal meanings sex and sexual relationships acquire during the late nineteenth century when modernity comes in full bloom with the advent of the full-blown money-economy and society. Simmel's attitude towards this modern society is ambivalent—to say the least. On the one hand, according to Simmel, modern society has given us hitherto unavailable possibilities for personal development and cultivation. On the other hand, the same processes that enable these new possibilities threaten to undermine the very possibility of building a successfully integrated and cultivated individual personality. When money structures interpersonal relations there are both gains and losses. One of the gains is greater freedom from restrictive social bonds. One of the losses is lesser intimacy in these social bonds. Money-mediated personal relations are depersonalised personal relations. Nowhere else are the losses as great as when sexual relations become money-mediated.

Simmel defended a normative view on what constitutes 'good' or 'proper' sex. Modern, or—better put—urban sex clearly fall short from this ideal. He therefore could not but denounce some of the developments concerning sex that were clearly

crystallising during the late nineteenth century and early modern century—labelled by some as the ‘first sexual revolution.’ (Kevin White).

Georg Simmel is one of the most interesting theorists of the metropolis. However, Simmel had a deeply ambiguous attitude towards the new positive sexual possibilities city-life offered to its citizens. So, although Simmel is definitely one of the most stimulating analysts of modernity and is even hailed by some as one of the first postmoderns—cr. Weinstein and Weinstein, 1993—he himself, however, might never even have been ‘modern’—as concerns sex.

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A large collection of online texts can be found on the Simmel Homepage:

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