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| Simmel, Georg (1858–1918) |
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| A foundational figure in sociology and social theory, Georg Simmel developed a methodology for analysing modernity by tracing capitalism’s disorienting effects in social relations, aesthetics, perception and marginal minutia, influencing Walter Benjamin, Georg Lukács and others. Born in Berlin, Simmel is best remembered by his important 1903 essay, ‘Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben’ (‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’), which explores the noncommittal, ‘blasé’ postures city-dwellers adopt to cope with their bewildering urban environments. This essay works well as an introduction to Simmel’s formal approach and to some of his perennial topics, including fragmentation, fashion and identity formation. His magnum opus, *Philosophie des Geldes* (1900, revised 1907; *The Philosophy of Money*) resists brief summary, but its premise is simply stated: modernity is a product of money. That is, as mature industrial economies assign a fluctuating cash value to virtually everything, experiences and relationships feel unmoored, constantly in motion—like money itself. Here and in other writings, Simmel ranges over many issues vital to understanding modernity, including gender, fantasy, the philosophy of art and religious cultures. Such a breath-taking array of topics allows the prolific author to approach modernity as the dialectic between capitalism’s grand, impersonal forces and the private experiences and desires of individuals. |
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| Further reading:  (Frisby, Fragments of Modernity: Theories of Modernity in the Work of Simmel, Kracauer, and Benjamin)  (D. Frisby)  (Poggi) |