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### **Conflict and Peace: Misconceptions and the “Third way”**

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## Conflict and Peace: Misconceptions and the “Third way”

**Tiziano Telleschi\***

With the *Call* “Conflict theories and philosophies of peace. 100 years after Georg Simmel’s *Der Konflikt der modernen Kultur*”, we have aimed at reopening a discussion regarding conflict and peace in a comparison between the Simmelian theory of conflict and other theories of conflict and philosophies of peace, and to, ultimately, establish its heuristic reach in explaining conflicts of various natures, both those that are traditional and well-known and those that are new, from everyday conflicts to those that are social or cultural, and through to armed conflicts.

1. To paraphrase Jean Cocteau, who believed that the masses could love poetry only through their misunderstanding it, we could say that we love peace if, at least initially, we attribute to it connotations which do not in reality belong to it, and then move beyond these by means of a deeper reflection. That is, if it is initially conceived of as either the elimination of conflict or as emancipation through conflict, two alternative concepts which have constituted, the first since antiquity, and the second beginning from the 1960s with the development of the peace research movement, the two conceptual markers within which our civilization has had to move forward along its path. With their failure becoming manifest when actually put to the test, both of these concepts were considered

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as misinterpretations, and this realization finally paved the way for further reflection and more targeted approaches.

The first position, which considers that society and peaceful coexistence progress only because the continual outbreak of conflict acts as the engine of change and, therefore, of history, rests on the idea of conflict as good: conflict must intensify until it explodes openly so that changes are brought about in asymmetrical relations concerning the possession of resources, the means of production, or the possession of power. This thesis holds to a positivistic (and not just a materialistic) concept of mankind's future which has never been completely abandoned: a society with internal contrasts will eventually lead to its becoming a peaceful society, and struggle is the principal means to this end of harmony, with this latter, however, remaining utopistically undefined. A structural determinism that places conflict on the economic or political plane, and leaves little room for the intentionality of the individual, which is instead, ultimately, the sole agent that can decide to transform conflict, to that moment existing only as potential, into a true clash. It is the thesis which inspires, to various degrees, those orthodox conflictive theories that are in agreement with, in particular, the theories of Negative Peace. Here we are talking about conflict (and war) as being good, and for this same reason its continuous outbreak is necessary for a struggle which neutralizes differences in being for reasons of equality and justice; therefore, Peace as an end to be realized, and struggle as an essential means of change: included in this idea are those conflictive theories and philosophies of peace which aim at the creation of a *new order* to come (of couples, unions, intra- and inter-organizations, politics, ethics....), the contents of which, however, being never specified.

The second position, that mankind and society evolve because they have been freed from conflict, rests on the idea of conflict as an automatic generator of violence, a position guided by a lenten vision of human relations, seen as always being at the mercy of dominant negative forces (whether these be the wickedness of man, the alienation inherent in society, the unequal distribution of wealth and power with its consequent forms of inequality and poverty, or the blind oppressiveness of technology). This position considers conflict as an evil – seen variously as being physiological, as a disease, or as a dysfunction of the system – and it consequently proposes means to mitigate, to extirpate, or to repair it. It sees human nature as tending towards good, so much so that the “good” side of man will prevail over the “bad” side, and a completely “healed” or pacified society will evolve from the “diseased” or dysfunctional one: it appears evident that the implicit aim is harmony, intended as the pure and original condition to be restored or recomposed because of its having been corrupted or lacerated. It is the thesis which brings together the various functionalist theories

of conflict, the theories of Positive Peace, and those spiritualist philosophies which consider harmony-order as the original principle to be restored or rediscovered (as if to say that, by fighting against it, in the end evil will be forced to reunite with good: found here is the idea of purification or redemption, as well as of the “just war”...).

The two conceptions turn out to be alternative only in appearance, because they agree on the fact that something is opposed to a state of conflict – Peace – whether already existing, and therefore original, or to be created, and therefore future. In short, they share the same misconception: Peace as harmony, conflict as opposed to Peace. And to reach this aim they implicitly share a second misconception: that there exists a natural hierarchy (between positive and negative, between good and evil: that is, between opposing interests of the two sides...), that they attempt to overcome – through a *Hegelian-Marxist dialectics* - the first with means directed towards eliminating the negative or evil, the “different”, and, finally, war (Negative Peace), and the other with the idea of limiting or attenuating the negative with means directed towards increasing the positive through greater altruism, charity, welfare, empathy, empowerment, international agreements, social justice, etc. (Positive Peace). This brings to mind the Biblical parable describing how at the end of times swords shall be beaten into plowshares and that the wolf shall dwell with the lamb. Our contemporaries seem to have abandoned this hope, though they still strongly cling to its secular version, the idea that there exists a sense to history.

Essentially, this double misconception lends credence to the assumption that Negative Peace is realized through subtraction, and Positive Peace through addition. By so doing, it supports the common notion that sees the two polarities, negative and positive, that is, the opposing sides, as being independent of one another as regards interests, motivations, and objectives, and this reinforces the conviction that, like in Double Entry bookkeeping, it's enough to change the amount in just one column, for example to add to the Credit column, the gains (increasing or spreading the positive: pacific cognitive resources, welfare, rights...), or to reduce the Debit column, the losses (diminishing or diluting the negative: violence, destructive aggressiveness, power, weapons), while leaving intact the other column so that Total Equity “results a larger property” (Peace) (Simmel 1964, 18). These misconceptions have over the centuries led to an infinite series of reflections that have produced topics for a wide-ranging rhetoric. The world, life, man, and society have been thought of as a composite, always divided into two spheres of different values where one is subordinated to the other, or one oscillates towards and against the other, without ever finding a stable position. What is most striking is that that which is dependent or neglected to the point of being excluded is precisely the

principle which allows the transition from one to the other. We will return to this theme later on.

The *Call* has thrown down the challenge of thinking in a way that supersedes the bifurcation which, on one side, strives to pursue the "good" by which every conflict would one day find its solution, and, on the other, would attempt to fight and to eliminate that which, in conflict, is "evil". With Georg Simmel we have a wide-reaching reflection, a "Third Way", which pulls the negative and the positive away from a destiny of separation, as it considers the relationship between them to be two-way, bringing into focus their conjoined genesis and the almost unlimited dynamic arising from this fact. In that sense, the "Third Way" goes beyond the theories of Positive Peace and Negative Peace.

2. The *conflict network* of Simmel holds that there is no natural hierarchy between the two sides in contrast, but an opposition between complementary sides in competition which form a unity. Unity is not the absence of the negative, but includes it in equal measure to the positive. There is a basic "reciprocal relationship" or "effect of reciprocity" (*Wechselwirkung*), by virtue of which the sides – any actor and social phenomenon – are in interdependent interaction; one is the interface of the other, the essence of neither being complete if not through its opposite. The negative is not necessarily the "enemy" of the positive, and one is at the same time both the servant and the master of the other: the negative *is not a gap but the fulfillment of a role reserved for it alone* (*Id.*, 16, Note 4) and this position cancels out *a philistine prejudice that conflicts and problems are dreamt up merely for the sake of their solution* (Simmel 1968, 25).

What Simmel indicates is not the preventative removal of the negative or an emphasis on the positive, but the coexistence of good and evil, of harmony and disharmony; and, at the same time, that conflict is something which is continuous, physiological, and constitutive of man and of every one of his objectifications, and therefore should not be prejudicially resolved or overcome. The "Third Way" conceives a *not conciliatory dialectics* in which a negative polarity (Alter, the different, the excluded, the enemy, the evil...) performs a role reserved only for it, that of being in dialogue with the positive, and the two together form a "contradictory unity" in which *convergent and divergent currents among its members are [...] inseparably interwoven* (Simmel 1964, 15).

This is not a simple relationship between the two sides, but is the carrying out of the principle of reciprocal relationship which institutes those sides. Upon the outbreak of conflict, the components that will form the unity come to light; before, unity doesn't exist, but was latent.

The prevailing logic in conflict, according to Simmel, is the same that guides its original *Lebensphilosophie* (Simmel 2010). At its center resides an unconditioned principle from which flows forth every manifestation of human activity. This absolute that is Life, of an undefined and amorphous flux, cannot be realized if not through something that is defined and concrete, “Form” (language, art, science, religion, institutions, roles, objects, connections, processes...), which is the essential medium for Life to take on an existence and a reality. For this very reason, Life is destined to transform itself into something concrete and final that will unequivocally always remain *outside* itself, of a different nature, always diverse and, especially, never definitive: Life can never pour forth and condense into anything other than its opposite, Form. A dualism is created (which we can already find in *Philosophie des Geldes*) between the principle of continuity (of Life) and the principle of stability (of Form). This contradiction cannot be eliminated because it represents the particular way that Life expresses itself, needing to place limits on itself in order to then overcome them, limits that are given by Form into which Life can do nothing else but transform itself, and with whose objectified products it can, fatally, do nothing else but enter into contrast with. The oppositional dualism between Life and Form engenders an “action of reciprocity” (*Wechselwirkung*), of dependence/independence, that, transported by Simmel from the transcendental Kantian dimension to the practical level, unites the one-and-the-other, making them co-essential in the *becoming* of a genetically contradictory unity, or “sociation” (*Vergesellschaftung*). In our own terms: the two sides are born together *in* and *from* conflict. From the ontological plane to that of the phenomenological: the dualism and the action of reciprocity that this engenders are reflected over time as an “emergent effect” (Donati, 2014: 13) in the mechanisms that sustain the phenomena, both individual and social, that constitute the oxidising of an incessant game of references between Ego and Alter, inner-group and out-group (the “diverse” in its variegated configurations), among subjects and groups in contrast, activating a network of intersecting relationships that are indefinite and conflictual<sup>1</sup>. Nobody escapes from the experience of conflict:

*conflict is the school in which the ego is formed: the more uniform, we want to shape the ego, the more conflicting it will be* (ist der Konflikt die Schule, in der das Ich sich bildet: je einheitlicher, wir das Ich gestalten wollen, desto konfliktvoller wird es sein) (Simmel 2010, 843; *translation mine*).

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1 For a critical analysis of the concepts forming the foundation of the framework of Simmel's thought, defined as “dimensions” or “a priori” (Form, Life, duality, otherness, not conciliatory dialectics, action of reciprocity, relationship, sociation, time, space, number), consult Alessandro Dal Lago (1994, 178-186). We also know, from Durkheim and Weber or Pareto, that opaque realities such as ideology, consensus, legitimization, education, and religion, constitute concrete *a priori*s of social action.



When the conditions that activate relationships of reciprocity change, then the dynamic of the society changes.

The centrality of conflict in social and individual life forces a rethinking of conflict, not just in view of its resolution or cancellation, but above all in view of what it could mean that conflict is physiological and permanent. Considering this nature to be irrevocable, Benasayag invites us to ask in what way a human being, with his underlying constitutive duality, is able to build the conditions of living together in peace *despite* conflict, and, even more, *through* conflict (Benasayag, Del Rey 2007). Again, it becomes plausible that a brake is put on the romantic dream of a settling of conflict to return to an original harmony (Positive Peace), as well as that a limit is set to the arrogance of those who would like to eliminate whatever gets in the way of an ideal goal (Negative Peace) that is as much longed-for as it is unreachable.

3. The greatness of Simmel lies in his having posited, in all its range, making it the engine of his own reflection as well as of history, the conception that the sides in conflict are interconnected with one another (*Zusammengehörigkeit*) in a single unity, or "sociation" (*Vergesellschaftung*), and because of a universal "reciprocal relationship" (*Wechselwirkung*), what becomes central is that which he masterfully calls "the gaze of the other", Otherness (the relationship between the I and the You, between an internal group and an external group), and which constitutes the entire complex of processes that in common terminology is called "society" or "peaceful coexistence".

Simmel has made us understand that everything is related, and that duality is lived as a correlation among elements in competition with one another. So the parts in opposition are to be read not so much as respectable and federated "differences", but rather, in their articulation, as reciprocal (which, we will see, is also differential).

*[...] dissociating factors – hate, envy, need, desire - are the causes of conflict; it breaks out because of them. Conflict is thus designed to resolve divergent dualisms; it is a way of achieving some kind of unity...Conflict itself resolves the tension between contrasts....conflict contains something positive. Its positive and negative aspects, however, are integrated; they can be separated conceptually, but not empirically....contradiction and conflict not only precede this unity but are operative in it at every moment of its existence. Just so, there are probably exists no social unit in which convergent and divergent currents among its members are not inseparably interwoven. An absolutely centripetal and harmonious group, a pure 'unification' ("Vereinigung"), not only is empirically unreal, it could show no real life process...society does not result only from other social forces which are positive, and only to the extent*



*that negative factors do not hinder them”* (Simmel 1964, 13-15).

Far from appearing as pathological or dysfunctional, conflict is a positive process of social life:

*Opposition is an element in the relation itself; it is intrinsically interwoven with the other reasons for the relation's existence. It is not only a mean for preserving the relation but one of the concrete functions which actually constitute it (Id., 19).*

It is not the opposite of social order; the opposite would instead be indifference or isolation. It does not lead only to a reconciled or utopistic society, nor is it the sign of a lack of integration, but rather the oppositional dynamic ensures the unity of individual life as well as of social life; the “relationships of contrast” unite by dividing and separate by uniting.

As Schermer and Jary write: “It is crucial that Simmel echews dualism. For him, polarities/dualities are not dichotomies but *continua*...A dialectical approach can be summed up as involving ‘a unity of opposites’. Compared with Hegelian dialectics or Marx, where one endpoint constitutes a final synthesis, fusions of polarities are identified in myriad social forms, *without a final synthesis* (Schermer, Jary 2013, 5; *italics mine*).

The duality of life and reality is the key allowing entry to the whole of Simmelian thought. Articulated through not conciliatory dialectics, and as a theory of conflict and peace, it is, so to speak, the commutator through which the entire body of work of Simmel rotates around its own axis, adapting itself to the most disparate problems without ever losing its own barycenter. All human experiences and activities, in their facts rather than in their reason, incorporate an oppositional duality: the individual is altruistic-and-selfish, sociable-and-asocial, money frees him from *in praesentia* exchanges-and-enslaves him to its own universalizing logic that renders him anonymous, the city allows him to realize himself-and-limits him, fashion lets him express his individual personality in the private sphere-and-renders him conformist to the masses in the public sphere, love unites-and-separates, communication reveals-and-conceals, differences in type and style enrich the culture-and-limit the freedom of the single individual, lies-and-truthfulness go hand-in-hand as do emotivity-and-rationality, the stranger is he who traces out borders-and-crosses over them, death is the limit-and-matrix of life, aggressiveness is destructive-and-constructive, society as inclusive-and-exclusive decides equality-and-differences.

*Not conciliatory dialectics* is avowedly without synthesis, with no resorting to that integral circularity that would lead to the perfect union of "the intelligence and the intelligible" (Hegel), to the absolute, Aristotelian, spirit. What is meant by this is that those contradictory aspects of material and spiritual life, to maximize their respective potentialities, do not fuse together in the unity of the identical, rather their relationship remains always open, and by virtue of the maintenance of the *durée* in their reciprocal interaction *in the making*, determine new and possible combinations (communities, interdependencies, intersectings, discardings, reclaimings, superimpositions) among disparate parts which remain dissimilar. This method is based on a theory of knowledge (Rammstedt 2007, 23) whose logic is the logic of being open to the new, of the duration, of the connection of the heterogeneous and not that of homogenization, the mentality for which the parts in contrast with one another irrevocably maintain the nucleus of their own "differences", and not that for which, by virtue of the "third" dialectic moment of the conciliation between opposites, the characteristics of the one adapt themselves and fade to become uniform with those of the other. This duality – which Simmel defines to be as "fluid dualism" (*fließender dualism*) (Simmel 2010; *translation mine*) – as it acts, by *Wechselwirkung*, gives way to a disjunctive synthesis which leads to the establishment of a positive distance between the different elements in the relationship. Applied to sociology, the concepts of *coming into being* and *reciprocity* transcend the arena of the study of well-defined and stable social structures, for moving towards an investigation of all phenomena of social bond, as well as of an analysis of that which is imperceptible within this bond, thereby redefining the task of the sociology itself: "No longer the *study* of society as a 'ready-made object', but a *searching out* of society (or, better, of "association") in every area where it *happens*." (Mele, 2007, pag. 13; *translation mine*): from relations between children, and then between these and their teacher, between staff and management, to those seen around the family kitchen table, or in a meeting at the local pub or an excursion by bicycle, and so on. These relations "from below" give rise to a labyrinthine structure of small, and only apparently superficial, connections which, on the force of the thrust of the conflicts that they engender, produce institutions, rules, and laws; in a word, they create society.

Other authors from different disciplinary fields also adhere to the not conciliatory conception, some having arrived to it independently, others in agreement with the idea, and still others through filiation. Among these: the ethnologist Claude Lévy-Bruhl, the philosopher and sociologist Walter Benjamin, the psychoanalyst and author of Bi-logic Ignacio Matte Blanco, the Frankfurt-based philosopher Theodor Adorno, the philosopher of the "microphysics of power" Michel Foucault, the sociologist and "guerrilla" Michel Benasayag.

From the principle of original duality we learn that the common isn't given in advance; it is not something that first is divided from something else, and then afterwards, through effort and mediation, is reconstructed: this is to say that, in the end, evil must reunite with good because a human being possesses a single underlying foundation, common and good, which only needs to be rediscovered (herein lies the origin of the claim of the medieval concept of *bellum justum*, as well as of the idea of purification and redemption, or of ideal emancipation). If the common (agreement, peace) were primigenial – but empirical research in evolutionary biology does not support this hypothesis<sup>2</sup> –, it would be enough that the sides in conflict interact with one another and agree upon the rules for communicating and resolving the points of discord that had arisen. But this is not sufficient, because those same rules, in order to be accepted, require the *pre-existence* of a higher code as a matrix and product of all the rules and codes which allow interaction. That is to say, the individual antagonists are unable to interact among themselves based on just individual codes, as it is the social group to which they belong that forges the higher group code, and is therefore primigenial in respect to peace.

For this reason, peace is not generated by a *prior* contract or pact that men agree upon in order to reach common aims and objectives, even though this, in its turn, institutes obligations for the contracting parties; rather, peace arrives *after* the intuitive perception that something prior and overarching unites us-and-the others around objectives carrying obligations: peace is a type of moral choice by which society exalts or depresses *the image* that is given to the relationship with Alter (as friend, enemy, ally, or adversary), and, then, organizes it by means of a regulatory pact. So that, with a change in the dynamic of the society, there is an accompanying change in the “way” in which Alter is conceived, and, so too, the idea of peace and the means for reaching it. [Using “group” in place of “society”, we have noted the principal difference between Simmel and Durkheim. For the latter, society is *necessarily* inherent to the notion of morality itself, that is, society is, in the final analysis, the almost-transcendental source of morality; but in this way, moral values explained in social terms would become contingent and relative to the extent to which there is not a group, but *some* groups which establish common values and objectives. For Simmel, instead, because no given precept emanates *a priori*, moral values are born from the reciprocal interactions between individuals belonging to a given social group: the group accepts, selects, and gives back, spreading the ascending morality to single individuals, and providing an orientation for action (Disselkamp 1998, pp. 255-9)].

2 Somit and Peterson, scholars of biopolitics, have confronted the theme of the influence of biological factors (genetic and other) on political behavior, finding that the great majority of the first human societies of the Paleolithic lived in hierarchies of dominance, which included inequality and lack of harmony (A Somit, S.A. Peterson 1997).

On the other hand, the common as a point of arrival would mean to imagine a peace or a society lacking conflict; such a society, that is completely integrated and, at the same time, predisposed to change, being culturally innovative, cannot be considered realistic. A society devoid of conflict would not necessarily imply stability and integration, but rather predetermined life trajectories, that is, conformism, and implosive static, and would involve the cancellation of any prospects for change, as cultural anthropology has shown: in "simple" or "primitive" societies in which the threshold for the manifestation of tensions was transcribed in cultural models that included drainage rituals and formulas, with what was left over being sent as an appeal to their Divinity; the high degree of internal coherence rendered them totally closed and inelastic, unable to absorb, without divisions appearing, conflicts coming from the outside, nor able to accept aspirations of the new which arose in individual subjects within the group. These societies ended up crumbling or destroying themselves, losing the challenge to posit themselves as *a-conflict model*. A society without conflict would also mean human beings naturally selected to pursue objectives using only pacific means, that is, with the instinct to kill their similars being alien to their nature, a hypothesis found to be false by evolutionary biology<sup>3</sup>.

In the Simmelian perspective, the common exists as soon as one of the contending sides in any situation enters into open tension with others. It is then, upon the outbreak of conflict, that the elements which will form the common emerge, and which were up to that moment only separate: the common, the unity, is constructed, and it is therefore the *coming into being* of the tension between the sides in conflict which produces a common reality, a continuous "unity between diverse subjects", temporarily in balance. Life is characterized by the continuous tension between the two polarities, by the continuous and necessary current running between them. Here we again find an exaltation of the associative or socializing function of conflict: it brings to light that which unites the sides in opposition, it is generating and regenerating, "glue" as well as "solvent". It is only because we tend to judge positively pacific interaction, excluding what is conflictive, that we allow the former to monopolize the term "social order", *conflict contains something positive. Its positive and negative*

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3 An empirical study, by four Spanish researchers, coming from four different universities, brought together in a powerful investigation biological data on a thousand different species of mammal, representing 80% of total families, and biological and historical data of human species, focusing on a particular type of episode of violence, that which leads to the death of at least one individual, so-called "deadly violence". According to the investigation, at the beginning of their cultural evolution, human beings were six times more violent than the average mammal, and the intraspecific "deadly violence" of hunter-gatherers who joined together into groups increased by up to 30%. In our time, instead, the rate of deadly violence of human beings is quite low, a good 200 times lower compared to our paleolithic ancestors (Gomez *et al.* 2016).

*aspects, however, are integrated; they can be separated conceptually, but not empirically (Id., 14).*

If there is no natural hierarchy (between positive and negative, Ego and Alter), but opposition between complementary sides in competition, then cooperation (such as altruism, peace, social integration) rests on its opposite (selfishness, individualism, dissociation): man is simultaneously cooperative and individualistic, social and asocial, and society is at the same time both harmonious and in disharmony<sup>4</sup>. So, the common (unity, peace, integration) is constructed *by making compatible* elements and forces that are both associative and dissociative, cooperative and selfish. Do not deny nor remove the negative, but rather force the emergence of the contrasts, the divergence of ideas, discrepancies in interests and values, the depth of differences; at the same time discover the tie which unites the diversities, and thereby “remain within” the conflict, negotiate it using nonviolent means, and not means which are destructive or reactive, or even solely cooperative. This renders peace a *moment* in the conflictive process, not a gift acquired indefinitely; it must rather be thought of as a real game of life, an unceasing struggle, like a “necessary utopia” (in the sense intended by Th. Adorno): the insuperability of conflict and its perennial transformation towards new and temporary forms and typologies – being only transformable, the “forms” being only trans-formations – creates the always evolving equilibrium that is peace. That this equilibrium, Peace, is a *moment* manifesting itself in the process, means that there is no sense in looking for the “solution” of the conflict, but that there is a sense in individuating the conditions capable of transforming it into other forms having an always lesser degree of conflictuality, and therefore a greater degree of peace. Those who, in contrast to Simmel, identify conflict as a moment of equilibrium, sustain the misconception that sees peace as the original order to be restored.

The idea of conflict which trans-forms itself and trans-forms the sides involved is intended to mean that conflict is in itself already a multiple and composite phenomenology, with which Simmel has opened the door to a multidimensional theory of conflict (or “network of conflict”). In particular, he has individuated various types and degrees of conflict and density of social contact (alliance, social stability, variance, change): one side can be opposed to the central interest of another while sharing with this group other interests, or it may even break up into many groups, some of which finding agreement on certain interests with still other groups; such convergences and dissociations change according to the type of interest in question, to alliances, to the power of

4 See also the sociological proposal of Georges Gurvitch (1962 I, 173-74), for whom sociability, the “Us”, is formed through *fusión parcial* together with paths of *opposition partielle* with the other, and it always manifests itself as a “*foyer d’attraction ou de répulsion*” that is not grounded in identity or identification, but rather in differentiation and affinity.

persuasion, and, finally, they can change by virtue of the historical moment or of the situational context. Moreover, for its own coming into being as a “network”, it can extend itself to new actors that were initially not involved. As an example, in an environmental conflict – the installation of a chemical plant for the recycling of toxic waste – the “conflict network” might be, broadly, thus configured: a group of citizens from the neighborhood join together in an “ad hoc” movement to fight the company which makes and installs the plant, another side takes up the interests of the land owners, still another agrees with an alternative project promoted by the local Public Administration, while the State opposes it, and so on. In play, in this conflict – of an unprecedented type – we find as interdependent health concerns, prestige, economic interests, the power of decision, the sense of belonging to a community, political ideology, and the idea of the common good. Because of the very character of interdependence, every change in the factors within the “network” (new actors which enter and others that exit, new interests and alliances...) produces multiple effects of feedback on the causes and evolution of the “network” as a whole: with this, Simmel cautions the supporters of the holistic principle, for whom knowledge of something in its entirety requires not only knowledge of all of the factors which comprise it, but also knowledge of the almost infinite actions and feedback that continually intervene between the individual parts and the whole.

On the other hand, the equilibrium itself, which in the Simmelian sense is always precarious and contingent, ensures that destructive conflict, violence and war, do not have an ineluctable dimension. In the words of Simmel:

*There is probably nobody who does not know the formal attraction of war and of peace. Because each of them exists in a certain measure, out of them grows the additional attraction of change between them. [...]. The motive for ending a conflict – longing for peace – is something much richer than mere tiredness of fighting. It is the rhythm which at a given moment causes us to ask for peace as a very concrete state – something much more than the absence of conflict (Id., 110).*

Presenting this irreducible double tendency of the human spirit towards conflict-and-peace, Simmel subtracts from evil the intangibility of a sacred space, destiny, and contemporaneously, declaring that *evil exists*, furnishes mankind with a moral guarantee that he can be on the side of *good*, and that he can transform what is given to him, destiny, into a choice of direction or destination.

The oxymoronic reasoning of the “Third Way”, dictated by the natural need to combat a state of conflict and to overturn it into the form of peace, reverberates within the mechanisms that sustain those phenomena, individual as well as



social, which bring about effects both of inclusion and exclusion, and of identification and differentiation. We find this double dynamic perfectly corroborated by cross-cultural studies. Simon Harrison (2006), points out that a “healthy” intercultural relationship is that in which, from the beginning, similarities are identified between the sides, in such a way that each side, even though “combatting” the other, absorbs some of their convictions and beliefs, and vice versa; then, that chain is interrupted so that each culture actively conserves, as a result of the meeting-contrast, some of the traits of its own diversity and identity, as, otherwise, the similarities would lead to conformism and assimilation. Identity thus reinforced, just as individuality so confirmed, constitutes a solid platform for the exchange of cultural models and religious beliefs. It sounds almost like a slogan: “first multiculturalism, then interculturality” (Giménez Romero 2008). This means that cooperation, which, like peace, is not original nor pure, but intrinsically dual, must, in order to maintain this character, be fueled and supported continuously both by external incentives, of a material and symbolic nature (for example, welfare services, the judicial system, international agreements), and by internal disincentives that reduce the level of destructive aggressiveness (for example, strengthening peaceful tendencies through education).

The ‘quid’ that sets into motion interaction or social ties, which then will become cooperation, is trust: see Simmel (2004).

Drawing from this lesson of Simmel, Robert Axelrod (1997) individuates in *Tit for tat* the strategy aimed at resolving the problem of the prisoner’s dilemma repeated in game theory, a mechanism for containing conflict which leads, generally, to cooperation. An actor, using this strategy, has to “believe”, without any preliminary proof, that Alter will comport himself with him (in the future) in a way that corresponds to how he has done (now), and will therefore be initially cooperative; if his adversary responds with similar “moves”, then an agreement for cooperation is set in motion, while, in the opposite case, it is not.

4. The consequences of not recognizing that the negative and positive polarities are in an indissoluble dual relationship are well documented. We will now report some of these. In the area of rights, intended in the sense of a unity – social solidarity - we have witnessed over the last few decades an unspoken opposition in which one side, that of civil rights (favoring disability, mental illness, assisted motherhood, civil unions, euthanasia, etc.), has been made to prevail over the other, which regards social rights (protections in the workplace, adequate salaries, decent pensions, fighting poverty and injustice, etc.) (Magris 2018, chap. 1). Politics privileges civil rights because, on these, it is relatively easy to reach agreement, given the force of an intense effort of cultural and



intellectual mobilization, but also, and especially, because the costs are not particularly high and there is repayment in the form of a greater return of electoral consensus, while social rights are quite costly as well as being obsolete, and so, because there is an excessive public debt, and under the aegis of neoliberalist thinking, they are the object of deflationistic actions, and also the reason why efforts in favor of these rights are seen to be always weaker. The consequence is the reduction in interventions of Welfare and cracks in the social solidarity that supports communal living. An exemplary case of a neglected negative polarity is represented by those "excluded/discarded" individuals that are international migrants, the homeless, the inhabitants of the slums in South America or of the shantytowns in Africa and Asia, the "campesinos sin tierra", in short, the variously "diverse" actors. If we recognize that the excluded are the opposite and complementary part of the included, with whom they form a single unity, then we firmly attribute to them certain qualities (to be looked for among anthropologic constants: a sense of belonging, a perception of health and of disease, the sense of time and pauses in its routine, a sense of authenticity, a feeling about death or about the transcendent, a conception of relations between genders and of social norms, etc.); in this way, both of the polarities would be enriched, and society would evolve towards new forms of living and of living together, towards *possible new worlds*. If, on the other hand, society considers affirmatively only the positive polarity, and therefore sees the excluded as not being part of the unity, as if they were "bereft" of something that the included possess, and offer the correspondent remedy (empathy, charity, economic subsidies...), and not, instead, chances for improvement and the capacity for negotiation and autonomy - the capabilities of Amartya Sen - , then it does nothing other than deny complementarity, and, in the best of cases, through those remedies, it smooths over conflict in the immediate term, obtaining, however, in the long term, the result that the boundaries between the sides are reinforced.

Many are the fields, in the history of ideas, in which conflict has been considered predominantly from the perspective of its resolution. A prime example is democracy, intended as the civil elaboration of conflict. This consists of the constant attempt by all parties in the system to reach, through regimens of public negotiation which are effectively shared, rational compromises on decisions that are "collectively binding" between representatives of legitimate interests within the society (Sartori 1957). In the field of science, we find psychoanalysis. This regulates contradictoriness, as it considers human conflictuality, at least in its most fundamental form, to be the fruit of a personal and remediable imperfection, one to be overcome: the therapist, safely shielded from any consequent mishaps, pieces back together into a unity the contradictory shards of life, instilling the illusory conviction that it all has a

hidden meaning, harmonious and true, reachable (Benasayag, Del Rey 2007).

Among the consequences of conferring pre-eminence to the negative, Roberto Esposito (2018) expounds in exemplary fashion on juridical reasoning. This always proceeds from a negative register, deriving every positive category (balance, social stability, integration, peace) from its opposite. In order to determine the quality of an act, it delimits behavior by means of constraints, impediments, prohibitions: order (peace) is all that remains once the legal code has impeded through sanctions everything that is forbidden. Rather than favor an increase in positive forces and generate useful behavior, it is interested in controlling them. With the pre-eminence of the negative, juridical reasoning envisages not a proactive model of society, but a model of living together in peace formed by what remains once everything that threatens stability is prohibited: it is by subtraction, by overcoming the negative, that the positive opposite arises, the lawful (peace).

Essentially, we are heir to a culture and an education that aspire to the concrete possibility of putting an end, one day, to every form of conflict (Negative Peace), or at least to their attenuation (Positive Peace), in demonstration of the fact that in Western thinking resistant ambiguities co-exist that portend unforeseen effects, including potentially perverse ones. The negative, Simmel underlines, if not adequately balanced with the positive, creates an ambiguous relationship with this latter, contaminating it, with the inevitable effect of a dissolution of the reciprocal boundaries, an identification between the opposites in which the negative risks gaining the upper hand over the positive, or, at least, of depriving, in some cases, the positive of certain of its qualities. Simmel's considerations appear, still today, usefully referenceable. In the first case, in which the negative asserts itself, we see correspond political strategies that are securitarian, fundamentalist, and neo-hygienist which support those being carried out that divide the world, according to a binary and Manichaeian reasoning, into friends and enemies, and in this way inhibit the capacity of inclusion – or social cohesion – which is, ultimately, the goal of democracy. In the second, with the coming of the *Internet of Things*, of biotechnology and robotics, there seems to be looming the corrosion of the positive: the more that technical objects incorporate (not intentionally, but due to empirical progress), through the know-how used to build them (cognitive computing, machine learning), a type of subjective life, the more cracks appear in the dual model that sustains both individual and collective experience. From this wedge a few expressions already seemed to have passed from political discourse into everyday language: to present a united front, to call on the carpet the people responsible, a useful vote, etc., are eloquent signs of a potentially totalitarian mystique of the union of opposites.

Being aware that to act on only one of the opposing polarities does not help to advance in the search for peace, Galtung, already many years ago (1992), had come up with the proposal of combining positive peace and negative peace through eight different pathways (on the military, economic, political, and cultural levels) to benefit the inter-state system, and applicable also to inter-gender, inter-generation, inter-class, and inter-nation systems, which, in turn, are capable of being completed in further strategies of peace, and adaptable to specific local conditions.

To the effects of the imbalance between the positive and negative polarities, Simmel reserved some brief attention which deserves to be taken up again and developed. The loss of balance does not necessarily provoke an open conflict because, Simmel points out (1964: 18), conflict itself possesses brakes and internal mechanisms of self-limitation. He does not provide a detailed explanation, but, using an analogous procedure all of his own, he presents a political-historical example, the Hindu caste system, through which he opens the way for further analysis. The Hindu caste system is a structure resting on a rigid hierarchy, but also, in a direct manner, on the "mutual repulsion" between members of the various groups; this repulsion, though not impeding the disappearance of the oppositional distinctions between the castes, allows each one to tolerate the others and to contain conflict; at the same time, it confers to each group a sense of boundaries and of identity. In addition, Simmel suggests that this limitation of the conflictive dualism, as long as it does not precipitate into violence and destruction, does not come solely from the outside, in the name of abstract and universal values according to which the destructive event *must not be*, but comes also from the inside, in the name of preserving the principle itself of discord. Among the species mechanisms of humans, Simmel thinks that

*It seems impossible to deny an a priori fighting instinct.....hat there indeed a formal hostility drive as the counterpart of the need of sympathy (Id., 29,32)*

That is, he individuates in contradictory human being the coexistence of an aggressive-destructive instinct together with an aggressive-proactive instinct. Ethologists term this latter "adversivity", with which they mean the uniquely human capacity for the affirmation of self, which aims to overcome the other as an adversary, and not to annihilate him as an enemy. This natural capacity is seen in all assertive behavior, such as "debates" and "games", during the course of which each actor wants to get the better of the other, but within the agreed upon rules and "moves", and with the sole objective of affirming one's own opinions and points of view. The adversivity of the ethologists (in another register called "competition") produces affiliative ends. On a more general level,

maintaining while also containing discord means that

*Society, in order to attain a determinate shape, needs some quantitative ratio of harmony and disharmony, of association and competition, of favorable and unfavorable tendencies (Id., 15).*

This means that societies, to maintain themselves, have developed over their historical-evolutionary journey a nonviolent rationality aimed at a “limited quantity of conflictuality” or of intolerance, so as to preserve a relatively “sufficient” degree of peace or social integration in which the ideological exaltation of integration is in part substituted by the awareness of the value of differences.

In reality, with Simmel we have to think that conflict is in itself a very strong form of order in both the structural and the behavioral sense, and, consequently, peace and conflict appear less antagonistic than is commonly supposed.

5. Taking stock of everything that has so far been discussed, we observe that conflict carries with it the seed of peace, and that to attain this last it is necessary to know and act upon the *itinerary* which runs from conflict to peace, being that peace depends on the way in which society conceives the conflictive relationship Ego-Alter, in group-out group. It is decisive to *think of conflict and peace as together*. Once established this co-linkage, with a change in the way of perceiving Alter comes a change in the idea of conflict and in the strategy for confronting it. This implies that there are no “laws” for the construction of peace, but hermeneutics, interpretations of the relationship with Alter and approaches for living together that are always changing, never finalized nor perfect. Declining conflict is not a nominalistic operation, in that acting on the conflictive context – for example, in an intercultural situation, in relations between staff and management within an organization, in relations between States – we have to think about the depth of the result, that is, the type of relationship with Alter, we want to obtain. The highest aim of an intervention on conflict is not solely that of facilitating in some way its end, but rather is that of contributing to a higher degree of social coexistence. It is necessary to be aware that, depending on the objective pursued and the means utilized, an intervention on conflict will have a different degree of incisiveness on the actors as well as on the cultural and social system. Consequently, according to how we conceive the ambivalent relationship Ego-Alter, internal group-external group, but also based on the correspondent typology of the conflict - including what resources, such as power, prestige, strength, etc., each of the sides has available to it and what the pre-established objective is - , different strategies will be activated for confronting the conflict with a view to obtaining a plurality of different forms of

Peace, each having a different efficacy, duration, and depth, keeping in mind the warning that *absolute peace ... remains an eternal (göttlich) secret to us* (Simmel 1968, 25).

Fitting here is the typically Simmelian assumption that man is not given to know what the truth is, as this belongs only to God, and it can only be glimpsed in concrete acts, so that the impossibility of reaching peace once and for all – being but a *moment* in a conflictive process – does not deny that peace exists, but rather recognizes that it is man's task to seek it out, to approach as near to it as possible, but without, however, ever completely reaching it.

Let us pause on one point. There exist as many different strategies of intervention on conflict as there are different objectives (distinct forms of peace) to be reached. If we try to smooth over the differences so that the consequences are not destructive, leaving virtually intact the position of the actors involved, we are aiming at the "management" of conflict. This is the case in which the interests involved appear verifiable and it is considered that that conflict has a beginning and an end (for example, a conflict between partners, a trade-union conflict, an organizational conflict, a financial conflict...). Here the Mediator facilitates relations of cooperation which are eminently pragmatic and intransitive, and that do not aspire to bring about important changes in the relationship, even if that relationship is asymmetric: for example, this may concern a linguistic mediation or a civil mediation (in a violent conflict it also concerns peacekeeping as a way of containing the same). When the objective is to intervene on an imbalance of power, giving rise to *new* relationships on a personal or group level, or between organizations and institutions, we are attempting a "transformation" of the conflict, that is, to effect an evolution of the objective and subjective conditions towards new and more sustainable forms of conflict. In this case, the work of the Mediator is aimed at increasing the capacity of reciprocal understanding and at disempowerment of the situation, so that a *negotiation* is opened between the sides regarding their interests, aimed at reaching an equivalence in decisional opportunities (here we are in the area of relational power in the Foucaultian sense, and of peacemaking in the Galtungian sense): that action results in contributing to a higher level of social coexistence. With "resolution" of conflict we mean that the conflict, once it has been trans-formed, does not return under another guise or in another context (form), but rather brings a benefit which goes beyond that which is obtainable by the sides involved in that given situation, a benefit that extends to other actors, so that it spreads to the community. In such a case, the Mediator has the strategic task of impacting the structural causes of the conflict, attempting to uproot inequality and to activate a morality of reciprocity that imbues everyday life (that is, stabilizes the passage of relational power to circular power). This is

the highest level, that of peacebuilding, to which correspond projects regarding peace and living together for an ideal society that *we would like*, to which to relate the relationships that would therein be born as a *hoped-for ideal* of personal and communal life.

Simmel looks to these modalities of ending conflict with no moral misgivings. Not being interested in the causes of the origin of conflicts, but solely in the “pure” forms of association, he tends to exclude those elements which determine or influence the actions of individuals or communities, such as power, differences in social class, and the regulatory dimension which concerns social and cultural institutions.

Nevertheless, the Simmelian syntax of conflict, proposing to capture its universal structure, the underlying factors and mechanisms of conflict, distances itself from those theories that organize the case study of conflict according to the size of the sides involved (micro, meso, or macro conflict), or that subdivide conflict according to a scale of “fields”, depending on its intensity (the conflict is interpersonal, inter- or intra-organizational, political or social, environmental, gender-based, between States, armed, etc.). Individuating instead universal factors and mechanisms, Simmel speculates about a virtually infinite typology of conflicts: a conflict can be realistic or unrealistic, traditional or new, negotiable or non-negotiable, external or internal (in respect to the group to which the actor belongs), integral or instrumental-pragmatic (in respect to values or to means and techniques), and so on.

Everything so far laid out reveals a deep affinity between the Simmelian theory of conflict and the *Transcend Method* of Johan Galtung (2008). With *positive transcendence*, the Norwegian sociologist proposes a win/win perspective, of a purely dialogical nature, oriented simultaneously towards the disjunction of the phenomena and to their synthesis (not conciliatory dialectic), in all of those situations where a contradiction exists. Here there is no victory or renunciation, or even a 50/50 compromise, but the creation of a new reality beyond the explicit or latent objectives that the opposing sides express, making possible a path towards higher goals involving the common good, the community, while at the same time safeguarding the identity of each side as well as the needs of the single individual. It therefore considers conflict prevention to be without sense, because conflict, which he sees as being at the root of every contradiction and ineradicable, cannot be definitively resolved, but only transformed, or, to put it in its more proper terms, when the transformation is accepted, and is moreover sustainable, only then can we speak of “resolution” (conflict is transcended), that is to say basically when the transformation is able to give rise to nonviolent ties that are tighter and more wide-reaching. This is the typology of



peacemaking, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding. (Note, in this regard, the parallelism with the Simmelian concepts of contradiction, not conciliatory dialectics, socializing conflict, peace as a conflictive moment, management/transformation/resolution of conflict, combination of negative peace and positive peace). For such a relational and dialogical philosophy of mankind, the Norwegian sociologist draws inspiration from Martin Buber, who, in turn, was a student of Simmel and who has edited his *Die Religion* on 1906. To a large extent Galtung owes to Simmel more than he might be prepared to admit.

6. In the passage from conflict to peace, Simmel warns that

*the transition from war to peace constitutes a more serious problem than does the reverse.....Peace does not follow conflict with the same directness. The ending of conflict is a specific enterprise. It belongs neither to war nor to peace, just as a bridge is different from either bank it connects (Id., 109-110).*

The sides involved find an agreement, even if only a temporary one

*if conflict is ended in one of the ordinary manners - victory and defeat, reconciliation or compromise, this psychological structure [that moved it] forms itself back into that of the state of peace (Id., 112).*

Different is the situation likely to arise *in case the object of the conflict is suddenly eliminated ... the whole movement, so to speak, swing into the void (Ibidem).*

From the sudden sunseting of hostilities, long shadows remain:

*there is confusion and harm [...] If some circumstances rob a conflict of its object an empty continuation of the quarrel, a steril mutual accusing, a revival of earlier, long-buried differences often takes place nevertheless. This is the swinning-on of the movement of conflict, which must fight itself out in some fashion- here a whilly senseless and tumultuous fashion – before it can come to rest (Id., 111-2).*

We are here in a case of the transition from post-conflict to peace following events which are by their very nature obstinately refractory to pacification, such as a civil war or exiting from a dictatorship. Simmel is aware that

*The sociology of conflict requires, therefore, at least as an appendix, an analysis of the forms in which a fight terminates. These forms constitute interactions not to be observed under any other other circumstances (Id., 110).*



Here the concepts and axioms of the Simmelian theory of conflict offer valid elements for a road map, a direction for searching for transitionality.

The first element on which Simmel focuses his attention is the particular psychic structure of the factions resulting from a lengthy armed conflict: this is such that *something has been killed which cannot be revived, not even with the most passionate effort* (Id., 122).

Although reconciliation is not unworkable, it will have to endure limits and costs. Likened to forgiveness, Simmel sees that *"in both lies something irrational, something like a denial of what one still was a moment before"* (Id., 117) when in souls resided still vivid *"the feeling of antagonism, hatred, separateness"* (Id., 118). Both sociological processes, forgiveness and reconciliation, *"contain a mystically religious element"* (Ibidem) in front of which it should be a question not of burying the past (which would go unpunished), but neither of simply removing the deep-seated causes which set off the conflict. Here Simmel adds an important consideration, which updates the previous draft of the article on *Am. Journal of Sociology* (Simmel 1904). He had just said that an *"important relation"* does not dissolve in a nutshell; there is *the tempo of the conciliation, of 'forgiving and forgetting* (Id., 119-120) of great significance for the further structural development of the relationship. Now he now specify that *we must not forget too fast if to unfold its sociological significance to the fullest extent"* (Id., 120).

Simmel now invokes the critical memory of the past, and therefore the responsibility of the horrors perpetrated, thereby foreseeing a conditional forgiveness. Forgiveness on a personal level is always to be hoped for, but reconciliation regards the community, and consequently it presupposes a relationship of symmetry between the factions that would be undermined if the reconciliation consisted of allowing the offenders to go unpunished. In this unfortunate case the floodgates would be opened to *a revival of earlier, long-buried differences often takes place nevertheless* (Id., 112), which would block the continuance of any process of reconciliation: the path that Simmel suggests leads to an agreement with the least possible amnesty (negotiated forgiveness, as the second element of the road map).

The theme of memory is introduced by Simmel from two perspectives. The second refers to the nature of the past. Reconciliation is effective if the now-disarmed factions shared, in a time preceding the fractured relations, habits, beliefs, and values; that is, if – and this is the third element of transitionality – *"ab initio were part of the same community"* (Coser 1967, 156. Note 22, reformulating a thesis of George Simpson; *translation mine*). In a case in which

they do not feel to have shared a common past, any conciliatory spirit will be lacking.

From the effect of reciprocity, which requires biunivocal correspondence and influence between negative and positive, we draw the fourth step of the road map: free both the victims and the offenders. That is, avoid punishment (acts of reparation) being inflicted on the offenders, and compensation (juridical, moral, or material) destined for the victims, being calculated using a double standard. In other words, a reconciliation that delivers as much justice as possible.

The conciliatory spirit has to rely on an 'imperfect' idea of Alter - the fifth factor of transitionality - , with its areas of clarity and of obscurity. Only if the memories of those horrors, of lives cut short and material disasters "*are incorporated into the image of the other*", on that condition "*they don't figure as losses*", they are not omitted nor set aside, are *localized, as it were...taken, as one factor, into the total relationship, whose central intensity does not necessarily suffer therefrom*.

It is in this way that

*by contrast, the psychological precipitate of the conflict is, as it were, isolated. It remains a specific element which can be taken into the image of the other, to be included in the over-all relation to him* (Simmel 1964, 122-23).

There will appear a relationship with Alter in a new "form" – analogously, says Simmel, with his own original montage-like style, capable of discovering in the details the totality that they make up – just as we think of the good qualities and defects of a loved one, whom we love despite the defects because we consider them to be only a portion, tiny and unimportant, of their overall personality.

The philosophy and the praxis of experiments in the transition to peace in the post-conflict period, called restorative justice, are close to each other regarding the points forming the foundation of the model of reconciliation that we have taken from the framework of Simmelian thought. The emphasis on one or another element may change, varying according to the cultural reality, the historical context, and the traditions of a given country, but overall – the count is at least 40 countries, among which South Africa and, more recently, Colombia stand out – "restorative justice" is distinguished by the fact that it attributes, for the first time in history, a foundational role for establishing peace to the relationship with Alter, whoever it is, recognizing him as community in his totality, or recognizing him in his multi-faceted components (victims, offenders, the military, guerrillas, paramilitary groups, the institutions among which 'in

primis' the State, the courts), whatever role each had had in the armed conflict. In consideration of this, the impartial *Tertius* makes emerge that which unites the groups in contrast, the past, with their differences and commonalities in interests and ideals, as well as their respective burden of mistakes and horrors; the distinct groups are then called to build on the platform of this common memory an image of a future peaceful co-existence that is long-term: the common is something to be constructed (following the criterion, to the extent possible, of shared expectations for the future). The tools adopted for this pact, variable from one experiment to another, are, principally, recourse to dialogical ethics and recognition – for example, public assemblies, televised debates with contradicting views, etc. – , as well as to objective organisms of mediation, such as the legal instrument of the referendum and hybrid courts (ordinary, internal, flanking those that are international, external. Essentially this pact, which draw inspiration from an interlacing of justice, reconciliation, and living together in peace, aims at interrupting the spiral of hate and at instilling trust in the forging, through the active participation of civil society, a new society.

The outcome of these experiences (Portinaro 2011) has appeared to many to be so positive that it has been pointed to as a “third” form of justice, one that mends rather than sanctions and punishes, that looks at the past but envisages a negotiated future, that restores the rights of victims while not pardoning or giving amnesty to the offenders, who are made responsible through acts of reparation in public settings (accountable amnesty, or amnesty under that particular variation which demands a preliminary assumption of guilt).

In other terms, the project of restorative justice finds in the simmelian network of conflict the conceptual architecture of theoretical support for the experiments of transitionality from conflict to peace.

In these formulations, as much of the Simmelian *road map* as of *restorative justice*, next to elements of strength we find elements of weakness, summarizable in the yet-to-be-given response to fundamental sociological questions: Who guarantees the *objectivity* of the pact? What *type of check* will verify that the pact is moving ahead? Are *objective organisms of mediation* enough? What *compromises* must be endured for a fecund interweaving of justice, impunity, and restoration of rights of victims in view of a *hoped-for* peaceful coexistence?

6. In the body of work constituted by Simmel's essays, we see discussed and analyzed, with an originality unequaled by any other author, many of the themes which still today continue to fuel discussion of various *maîtres à penser* as well as being the basis of questions of anyone living concrete, everyday life.

The articles which comprise this dossier describe reflections and proposals which are aimed at offering a partial and tentative contribution in the spirit and direction that we have already indicated and opened with the *Call*. There is present, obviously, a certain degree of repetition of the topics, even though the articles, subdivided into three sections, offer original paths and indications for anyone wanting to delve more deeply into the crucial problem of conflict and peace.

The first section, **The Persistence of Conflict, Why?** open with con ***Simmel e il conflitto nell'ontologia dell'umano (Simmel and the Conflict in the Ontology of Mankind)*** by *Antonio De Simone*. The author presents a well-reasoned picture of the metaphysical, philosophical, and sociological dimensions of the idea of conflict in Simmel. *Taking lessons* from Simmel, we learn about the impossibility of putting an end to every form of conflict, because conflict is something which is anthropologically pervasive of the *human condition*, and therefore immanent to the social structure. Asking how individual and collective experience is possible *notwithstanding* conflict, but rather *through* conflict, De Simone removes farseeing considerations from the labyrinthine work of Simmel, putting to the test the original concept of duality life/form in many different questions; among these are the space-time dialectic and the meaning of death. In postmodernism, contracting the experience of space – as a grid that develops over time – and every relation becoming within reach, the experience of time undergoes a twisting: this detaches experiences from a fluid continuity, ringing them together horizontally in unrelated and almost equal pieces, inflamed by an emotionality as intense as it is brief, and therefore volatile, stretching them out over an infinite present (here the implicit reference to the Hegelian “bad infinity” alludes to the disastrous fallout of the digital experience). Death is not the “sickle” that, suddenly, arriving from the outside, interrupts and dissolves the flow of life; it is not antithetical to life, but a complementary side of a selfsame “contradictory unity”, so that life needs death (the negative) to lend a full sense to the products that it itself objectifies: this is not about finding a moment of synthesis and asking ourselves when one begins and the other ends, but rather of discovering the unity of the antithesis. And in the moment in which we “choose” to not consider as accidental events that occur, but rather as being complementary of a single development, it is then that we insert them into a conscious existential framework, such that they become our singular destiny (or destination).

*Francesco Mora*, in ***Senso del vivere e conflitto. Georg Simmel interprete inattuale della contemporaneità (Sense of Living and Conflict. Georg Simmel Outdated Interpreter of Contemporaneity)***, looks back to the idea of conflict in Simmel in light of his *Lebensphilosophie*. Through Simmel, he shows

that every manifestation of social, material, and spiritual existence springs from an unconditioned principle: the original dualism, never reconcilable (*Aufhebung*), between the character of continuity (of Life) and that of stability (of Form), which makes the reciprocal interaction, while placing the parts in conflict with one another, produce a unity that includes both; this is the mentality of being open to the new, of the *not conciliatory dialectic*, and not that in which, by virtue of a “third” dialectical moment of the synthesis between opposites, the characteristics of one integrate into those of the other, thereby fading away. Because it is potentially creative, conflict is not the tragedy of the Modern, but, rather, tragedy is conflict which is unable to produce the potentiality of new forms capable of establishing themselves in a historical sense, that is to say, creeds, models, and values capable of having value. Here we encounter a point of sociology: the task of the social sciences is that of individuating the “rules” based upon which the individual activates “forms of living together”, forms of reciprocal behavior towards Alter (individual, group, institutions, etc.).

The second section gathers together **Variances and Gradients of Conflict**. Returning to the theme of the opposition of life to the principle of form, *Andrea Millefiorini*, in ***Georg Simmel e il problema della forma nella società di massa (Georg Simmel and the Question of Form in Mass Society)*** explores the hypothesis that modernization (from the rise of the bourgeoisie in the final decades of the 19th century to the early 1900s) is linked to the struggle between processes of simplification and complexification which have appeared in the area of forms of production, organization, urban development, and communication in daily life. A process not so much of supersession as of transformation, triggered by artistic movements – that do not exhaust their innovative drive in their sector of origin (architecture, painting, etc.) – and by the rise of the need for individual affirmation driven by egalitarian demands inherent in mass society. *Anna Wozniac*, following along the path of the central theme of Simmel’s thought – life/form dualism – attempts to show that this contradictoriness is not absolute, but that, under certain conditions, a moral type of conflict can create the stability of the group itself, and, as an added value, a social order.

To this end, ***Georg Simmel on Communal Lie, Purpose and Faithfulness to Reality*** presents several observations on the lie within group-based dynamics, and on discretion/secretcy in social life. The author sheds a bit of light by drawing implicitly upon Plato’s *Phaedrus*. Just as the wise man is he who is capable of putting into close correspondence – the term is “congruency” – ways of feeling with ways of thinking and speaking, and then behaves faithfully in respect to these (thereby gaining integrity, authenticity, transparency, and a conjoining of duty with pleasure), in short, he becomes *one* with his own

objectifications and, for this very reason, he wants never to detach himself from or to betray them, in this same way man has, for Simmel, been granted the possibility of achieving (absolute) peace when he resolves, that is, cancels out, the distance between himself and his objective projections (the opposite, for Simmel, is alienation). At the same time, the factor that reconciles dualism is adherence to reality, that is to say, behaving in a manner that is congruent to truth, the keystone through which peace is not an "eternal secret". The author corroborates these theoretical considerations with some well-chosen examples taken from literature, cinema, and investigative journalism, and from here going on to suggest a framework for the explanation of wider sociological phenomena in which conflict regarding truth is in play.

In ***Simmel, il conflitto e le sue molteplici forme. Un'analisi critica (Simmel, Conflict and its Multiple Forms. A Critical Analysis)***, Angelo Zotti, following the paradigm of Simmelian formal sociology, individuates in the interactions that fill the smallest spaces of daily life two ideal types of conflictive relations: "subjectified" conflicts and "objectified" conflicts, of which he shows the sliding from the first to the second. The first, characterized by a meagre presence of the social, divide into two subtypes: conflicts of values, originating from an ideal commandment of pronouncing/imposing one's own values (here the urge to self-affirmation can lead to deleterious effects or to closure towards the other); and conflicts of feeling, those in which conflict is almost an instrument of pleasure (those who initiate conflict for the sake of conflict, such as bullies, polemicists at any cost, pedants), and for this very reason it can turn into a "passionate" resource for an ideological clash. "Objectified" conflicts are those in which the social is present, even if as an invisible *Tertius*. These, too, fall into two subtypes: utilitarian conflicts, originating from the mere possession of a role (economic, as in commerce, or psychological, as might regard, for example, jealousy felt towards a partner); and normative conflicts, which find their motivation in allegiance to a group, and are directed towards defending or combatting the purposes of a system of norms and customs (for example, a social conflict, or even between the fan bases of competing sports teams).

Jorge Arzate Salgado, in ***Georg Simmel y el festín de la socialidad (Georg Simmel and the feast of sociality)***, takes up and carries forward the Simmelian idea regarding sociability. Its various forms (coquetry, tact, good manners, polite conversation, fashion, courtship), as playful-empathic and sensual components of everyday behavior, flanked by, but not subordinated to, the purposeful search for goals, give rise to a labyrinthine circuit of minute relationships, only apparently superficial, which, condensing, produce institutions, rules, laws; in a word, they create society. The conflicts that unfold in these social "games" (to which can be added all those "games" which fill daily



life, such as meeting others at the pub, or small talk around the family kitchen table or between friends while travelling by bicycle, and so on) are those that reinforce the interlacing of the social fabric. *Claudius Härpfer* explores the concept of competition in Simmel, hypothesizing that events in his life influenced his choice and scientific treatment of some topics. Just as it was hardly a fortuitous coincidence that Simmel wrote on the psychology of women in the year in which he married, or his reflections on metropolis after having spent a large part of his life in Berlin, similarly, for Härpfer, the concept of competition seems to have been forged following an important competitive academic situation in Berlin in the years before which had seen him a loser.

The paper ***Georg Simmel and the Synthesizing Effects of Competition. Some Reflections on the Connection of Life and Work*** demonstrates that, if as in the personal story that involved Simmel, competition is animated by a higher common objective (a furthering of knowledge in a scientific field), and not against an adversary, then competition has a socializing effect: it does not make of the competitors enemies, but rather draws them closer over time, obliging the rivals to devote themselves to a greater extent to their social circles, to attenuate the conflicts of the initial competitors towards the members of the other social circle, reinforcing this latter, and, finally, having a society-forming effect. Continuing in the analysis of the different facets of conflict, *Horst J. Helle* wonders not if there must be peace or conflict, but, rather, which type of conflict we should encourage.

As in the title of the paper ***Simmel's Multi-level Approach to Conflict***, he inflects it on three levels. On the first is that conflict between the visions of the world constructed by religion, on one side, and, on the other, art and culture, because neither of these is substitutable by the other nor irrevocably in opposition with the other, but can, on the contrary, develop their own models of life, maintaining themselves in a peaceful competition. The second regards the world of business: if here conflict is not carried to its extreme consequences, but governed by prescriptions emanating from legal and moral sources, it is transformed into a competition which is advantageous for the single individual and for the evolution of the entire society. On the third level, conflict is provoked by a massive and sudden wave of immigration, pouring into the society of destination, having as its emblem the stranger. The stranger brings with him new ways of life not seen before: to have a wide geographic mobility, to be flexible, to seek out success, and to be open to adapting oneself to new challenges, is the precursor of individualization, that is, to become the bearer of those characteristics demanded by the job market and by science; the stranger, making himself the promoter of the idea that there is a prize to be gained by cultivating his own uniqueness, shifts the conflict with the natives from the



terrain of competition onto that of individualization, thereby forcing both sides to emphasize their respective originality, and undermining, to an ever greater extent, that which the stranger has in common with the original group, while at the same time substituting requests for conformity with a modern type of solidarity based on an individual uniqueness shared by everybody. In synthesis, Helle shows that the conflict in its nonviolent *facies* of competition is the beginning of that cohesion desired by society, and is advantageous for the single individual.

The third section includes articles that track the path from conflict to peace. Through the figure of the Mediator, *Annalisa Tonarelli*, in ***Rileggere "il Mediatore" di Simmel nella prospettiva di uno sviluppo delle tecniche di risoluzione alternativa dei conflitti (Rereading "the Mediator" of Simmel)***, puts to work the concept that conflict is *coming into being*. The task of the mediator is already implicit in his being called upon: by turning to him, the sides project outside themselves, in the "person of the arbiter", that they believe in peace. Invested of this "belief", the mediator guides the sides in order that they can initiate a process of reciprocal understanding; in this way, the *coming into being* of conflict remains in the hands of the two sides, and this is independent of whether a resolution is reached: the aim of reconciliation is that of transforming conflict, that is, to establish trust in the relational experience, to instill an attitude towards the recognition of Alter. Understood in this way, mediation, the author underlines, represents a context of socialization in which are prefigured and comprehended – as an added value - ways and possibilities of producing ethical relations, that which corresponds to that precise functioning of democratic systems which allows them to overcome the mentality of contraposition for arriving at the discovery of common values.

*Francisco Jiménez Bautista*, in ***Pensar el conflicto. Lecturas de Georg Simmel para una Paz neutra (Rethinking Conflict: From Georg Simmel to the concept of Neutral Peace)*** compares the theory of conflicts of Simmel and that of Neutral Peace, following the methodological principle by which reality (good, evil, violence, peace...) is a social construction that takes form from the reciprocal interactions between sides in conflict. His aim is that of making fecund this original dual energy, such that, following in the footsteps of Simmel, conflict is the seed of peace. Jiménez traces out an itinerary that goes from a sociology of antagonism to an anthropology of neutrality: moving from the analysis of important differences between not violence, no violence, and no-violence, he reaches a new idea of Peace which allows him to draw up a *Cartography of peace* (noting at least 12 types). Along this path he encounters and analyzes some of the tensions of contemporary life (the poor man, the migrant...), as well as some impasses owing to post-conflict situations,

especially in Columbia, regarding which, finding support in Galtung, he coins the concept of “hybrid peace”, with which he hypothesizes future alternatives.

***Conflitto e Pace nella società globalizzata. I contributi di Georg Simmel (Conflict and Peace in the Globalized Society. The Contributions of Georg Simmel)*** by Raimondo Strassoldo lays out a rich historical panorama that weaves together the studies on peace, war, international relations, and the influence of Simmel on the study of conflicts within the American academic environment at the beginning of the 1900s, and, from there, its fallout in that of Europe, starting in the 1960s. In Europe a number of centers of Peace Research are born (soon united together in the International Peace Research Association - Ipra), around which various currents of pacifism start to circulate; in Italy, at Gorizia, the pioneering *Istituto di Sociologia Internazionale-Isig*, is founded in 1968. Institutions and movements that are characterized by their interest not in conflict, but in peace, which in subsequent years will see an animated competition between the American approach to conflict resolution and international relations, and that of the “Positive Peace” of Europe. The paper, in its final paragraphs, dealing with the “spatial differentiations” of Simmel, presents readings opposed to the global society (globalization) and regarding the ethical problems arising from it.

H. A. Botía Merchán and E. Mosquera Acevedo in ***Desacuerdos en el Acuerdo (Disagreements on the Agreement)*** undertake the analysis of the precarious process of the transition from an armed conflict to peace between the ex-guerrillas of the FARC and the government of Columbia. Here we find the theme of immanence of conflict, for which to imagine a future society is equivalent to imagining a different scenario which, in any case, is not free of conflict, and the theme of change, where the forms of sociation in a transformation over time put to the test, due to their complexity, the social sciences.

The peace agreement was rebuffed by the majority of civil society when called upon to express its opinion in a referendum held on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of October, 2016. In order to comprehend the reasons for this fact, and to look to the future, the authors attempt, firstly, to understand the image of the transition that the population of Columbia had formed, and then they look at the scenario that officials had disseminated within the public sphere, utilizing Simmel’s “theory of conflict” and the method of “imagining the future”. Concerning the first, they individuate the reason for the referendum’s failure in the misapprehensions and ignorance of the population regarding the deep-seated causes of the armed conflict, which, they maintain, is the lack of understanding of the past which blocked all movement towards a future of reconciliation. For the second, they find that the proposals put forward by the candidates in the presidential

campaign, which closed on 17 June 2018, were not sufficiently thought out regarding *what type* of society to build. These results lead the authors to suggest that any post-conflict project has to make compatible the traumatic collective past, the project for a new society, and the conditions in which that project can be realized, and then move ahead in an environment of restorative justice.

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