

# Introduction to *Durkheim, the Durkheimians, and the Arts*

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Not least of the accomplishments of the sociology of art is the fact that the world of literary and art criticism has been influenced, albeit sometimes only indirectly and without proper acknowledgement of sources, for at least a half century now by a vision of the human world that can reasonably be classified as sociological. Most of those who make their professional living talking about works of art now consider it more or less an imperative to at least make mention of the fact that the artist is a human being occupying a particular position in a social world, with a particular history informed by that position, and a view of the world that at least in some vague and imprecise ways is affected by the inevitable sociality of the artist's life and experience. To be sure, in some of these circles one still encounters the vocabulary of mysterious, inexplicable individual creativity, but the virus of the sociological vision has fairly well infected art criticism and history, ultimately to the detriment of explanations of artistic work as the singular genius of the isolated, usually tormented, and emotionally unique figure on whose saintly head is placed a laurel reading "Artist." Sociology can and should be proud of this influence.

Nonetheless, it remains the case that within the ranks of sociologists, and, it seems, especially English-speaking ones, art remains an object only rarely considered, and, when it is, the analysis is frequently inadequate, if not embarrassing. Contemporary sociologists are not typically knowledgeable about art nor are they generally significantly intellectually or personally drawn to it. A colleague in the humanities once told me, with a sly grin, that if one wishes to despair of the victory of philistinism in the contemporary world, one need not even ask the man in the street what he thinks about art: just talk to the sociologists. Insulting literary stereotypes of sociologists as dull-minded statisticians without even the slightest sensitivity to the aesthetic are commonplace, and it is only with

the aid of densely-tinted glasses that one can deny the actual existence of significant numbers of sociologists who neatly fit the literary stereotypes. It is highly recommended that those who believe such accusations baseless should not set foot in an American sociology department lest they come face to face with the proof at the first or second office they pass.

Whence this state of affairs? Some of the explanation might reside in the inevitable reality that a discipline dominated in much of the English-speaking world by positivism and hyperspecialization tends to recruit individuals who are not centrally motivated by humanistic approaches to the study of society and the wide cultural literacy that is their prerequisite. The lab-coat envy of much of American sociology helps produce a state of affairs in which the model type presented to young graduate students is not a scholar well-read in the classics and generally informed about Western cultural history, but one who reads everything in some narrowly defined subfield in the discipline and comparatively little about anything else. Some basic, and true, sociological insights into the nature of cultural production are also distorted and simplified in many sociological circles into an ossified framework for denunciation of all cultural work and workers that would dare to invoke value distinctions. Howard Becker's (Becker 1982; Faulkner and Becker 2009) penetrating insights into the study of art using basically the same sociology-of-work tools that can be used to study the activity and products of automobile mechanics or short-order cooks must be taken seriously by any sociology of art worth its salt, but Becker never intended to suggest that artworks were in every important way indistinguishable from a 1989 Ford Mustang with a cracked head cylinder or a plate of onion rings. While the belief that the distinction of cultural objects and activities into categories of "high" and "low" should be interrogated critically certainly has some laudable intellectual and moral motivations, it is not self-evident that any such distinctions can only be the product of the illegitimate imposition of the cultural values of elites. Nor is it true that knowledge of the social processes that inform the classing and hierarchical ranking of aesthetic work should necessarily lead one to suspicion or even rejection of art as merely another ideological brick in the edifice of class domination. Pierre Bourdieu, who is incorrectly taken by some of his readers as an iconic figure in the movement to dismantle any possibility of distinguishing aesthetic works of high quality from those of lesser quality, actually believed quite firmly that a principle by which one could and should distinguish important works does exist. This is craft, *askesis*, "effort, exercise, suffering" (Bourdieu and Wacquant 1992:87); Delacroix's *La Mort de Sardanapale* or Cezanne's *Le Panier de pommes* are the products of more time and effort than is the case of an issue of *The Amazing Spider-Man* or even more pretentious contemporary graphic novels, and Beethoven labored significantly more intensely over the *Eroica* than Lady Gaga did over her latest album, and these

distinctions can be seen and appreciated in the products themselves by readers who have put in the difficult ascetic work in learning the conventions required for approaching these works. Bourdieu points specifically to the effort of the reader, viewer, or listener as the key to understanding why his vision of the sociology of culture does not require the adoption of an aesthetic relativism: "Thus if we can say that avant-garde paintings are superior to the lithographs of the suburban shopping malls, it is because the latter are a product without history . . . whereas the former are accessible only on condition of mastering the relatively cumulative history of previous artistic production . . . It is in this sense that we can say that 'high' art is more universal" (ibid.). If too few sociologists recognize what Bourdieu's actual position here was, it is perhaps not only because they have read him with insufficient care but also because they have invested the entirety of their professional identities in the patently absurd idea that any and all attempts to make decisions based on categories of distinction are offensive by definition.

Lest readers take the present writer for an idiosyncratic curmudgeon, let me hasten to note that it is not merely my opinion that contemporary sociology has, by and large, failed to take the task of the intellectual analysis of art seriously enough. Two others whose stride far exceeds my own arrived at the same conclusion, and expressed it still more caustically. One of the most penetrating observers of the social life of art, Cesar Graña, once described the failings of sociology, specifically in its American incarnation, with respect to the study of art in a footnote that I cannot resist citing at length:

None of the "classic" figures of American Sociology have addressed themselves to aesthetic questions. And it is typical for widely read classroom primers . . . to spend several hundred pages on every aspect of the "value system," including religious behavior and educational institutions, without once mentioning art or literature. Such indifference (or distrust) can be explained in part by the professional history of sociology in the United States. In Europe, until quite recently, sociologists dwelled within the traditional company of the man of letters . . . and sociology itself could be regarded as a widening, through new visions, of the historical, philosophical, artistic, and literary scholarship in which these men had been bred. The spirit of American sociology, on the other hand, possibly because its beginnings were so largely tied to the field of "social problems," has been "secular," brisk, immediate, unapologetically factual, devoted to the exhaustive accounting of human relations and every conceivable or at least describable aspect of the social environment . . . A discipline which claims to provide a systematic accounting of human culture cannot ignore as much as it has what in the eyes of tradition, if nothing else, are regarded as the articulate monuments of that culture. (Graña 1971:65-66)

Another astute and respected cultural theorist, Jean Duvignaud, described the sociology of art as "entangled in the wrong kind

of problems." Why and how? Again, let us give him some space to eloquently speak for himself:

The most obvious reason for this is that those studying the subject are totally ignorant of the problems associated with artistic creation in all its manifestations, and more important, are unaware of the kind of experience which artistic creation involves [he specifically attacks Charles Lalo ("who established the practical and theoretical relations between art and social life") and Pitirim Sorokin here] . . . Not being artists, not even amateurs, it is hardly surprising that they discuss works of art with the incompetence of philistines and remain victims of the prejudices implanted by their teachers. Their understanding of artistic creativity is limited to an academic viewpoint, prisoners as they are of an outdated ideal of "the beautiful" . . . they are incapable of properly understanding the enduring creative force of imaginary experience . . . In most cases, they have been concerned to isolate artistic expression to a milieu or else to study the environment of art (the public, the indirect but so-called "positive" influences), as if this could possibly lead to any serious understanding of the exact nature of artistic creation! (Duvignaud 1972[1967]:35-36)

A serious challenge to these charges is difficult to imagine. Sociology and art have not spoken well to, or of, one another over the years, and sociological efforts to speak of art have frequently fallen into banality, and worse. Yet, however abject the failings of later generations, one cannot avoid recognizing that there were adept and profound efforts among those giants of European social philosophy who invented the intellectual perspective on the world that came to be called "sociology" in the generation framing the turn of nineteenth century into the twentieth to inspect art from this new intellectual perspective. The Germans in this generation reflected particularly deeply on art and aesthetics as social ideas and practices. One need only point to Weber's lengthy manuscript on rationalization in music (Weber 1969), or Simmel's essays on Rembrandt, Goethe, and the philosophy of art (Simmel 2005[1916] and 1906), or his considerable attention to aesthetic matters elsewhere in the bulk of his work, for example, in his consideration of the philosophical perspectives of Nietzsche and Schopenhauer (Simmel 1991[1907]), both centrally and even obsessively focused on aesthetic and artistic matters. And though Marx himself did not systematically take on aesthetic and artistic questions, the burgeoning body of work in the Marxist sociology of art that emerged after his death, culminating in the writing on this topic of twentieth-century disciples of the caliber of Lukacs (e.g., 1971[1920]), certainly did.

Among the French sociological founders too, there was some important engagement with art. Durkheim's main competitor in his lifetime for the title of inventor of French sociology, Gabriel Tarde, discussed art at some length in his *The Laws of Imitation* (1900), which should be

better known by English-speaking sociologists. Even August Comte, who began as a staunch opponent of art and literary influences (in the *Cours de philosophie positive*), had turned by the end of his life to writing a *Synthèse subjective* wherein he argued that a proper sociology must turn to purely poetic means to express its highest laws (1975, 2000).

But what of the founder of the first and strongest French school of sociology, Durkheim, and the school he created? What, if anything, did they contribute in the way of a sociological understanding of art? And in what other ways might Durkheimian thought be brought to bear on consideration of the aesthetic and the artistic? Is it even perhaps possible to conceive of Durkheimian sociology itself, in at least some of its incarnations, as an essentially aesthetic, artistic endeavor?

Here, the prelude ends, and we turn steadfastly to the volume now before you. The claim I make to you, which can only be insufficiently defended in this introduction, as the true proof to sustain it must reside in the exacting and detailed arguments to follow in the subsequent chapters, is that, the “common understanding” of the Durkheimian tradition’s failure to address art in any substantive way notwithstanding, it is precisely in the Durkheimian tradition, in its varied incarnations over the years, that we find one of the most compelling intersections between sociological thought and art to date.

As several contributors to this volume make clear, there is considerable evidence of Durkheim’s neglect of the question of art, along with looming intellectual and historical explanations for it. The very first chapter of his first major work, the study of the division of labor in society, contains a statement about art that places it in a clearly inferior position relative to science: “. . . art . . . is a luxury and an acquirement which it is perhaps lovely to possess, but which is not obligatory . . . [It] responds to our need of pursuing an activity without end, for the pleasure of the pursuit . . . [whereas] . . . science . . . presents a moral character . . . we do not have to be artists, but everyone is now forced not to be ignorant” (1933[1893]:51, 52). An important fact about art that combined with Durkheim’s central intellectual interests and contributed to his broad suspicion of art has to do with the profound differences between primitive art and art in the modern world. In the primitive world, art (or, rather, the activity to which we apply that name, as primitives certainly did not have such a concept) represents the beliefs and values of an entire society, in a relatively unproblematic way related to the deep unity of thought in such societies, and these beliefs are directly joined to practical action in the form of rituals and ceremonies seen as crucial to the very life of the society, while in modernity art has become a realm of representations produced and consumed only by a small minority, and a deviant, rebellious, individualist minority at that, and these beliefs no longer have any tangle connection to collective ritual and

action except perhaps on the rare occasions of the emergence of coherent and cohesive artistic movements such as Parisian Surrealism of the early twentieth century. Perhaps if in modernity one could hope to find an art that recaptured the ethos of the whole people and was morally centered in the life of the community, Durkheim might have treated it with more explicit attention, and earlier, than he did. It is precisely insofar as art leads not to integration and social solidarity, which were guiding principles in his life and thought, but to alienation and individualism that Durkheim was something less than an obvious partisan of this variety of human action.

That said, though, it would still be a grave mistake to presume that Durkheim and the tradition in social thought bearing his name present nothing in the way of a consideration of the place of art in the human world. Even in the seeming silences of the master, there are backhanded statements about the value (or lack thereof) of the artist and his work. And there are more than just these telling silences, especially once we enlarge our frame of vision to include not only the founder of the school, but also the several colleagues who proved invaluable in that founding, and the later writers who invoked the legacy of this thought with more or less interest in faithful translation, in the process of producing their own reflections on the social world.

It must also be said that the possibility of finding an approach to art in Durkheimian thought, while ultimately defensible only by reference to the work they produced, has something important to do with the intellectual context in which we are today reading and making sense of Durkheimian thought. It is not too much to say that this volume only became imaginable in roughly the last two decades or so, for reasons having to do with recent developments in the state of sociology in both the English- and French-speaking worlds. Without doubt, one of the leading factors involved in the movement to reconsider how the Durkheimian tradition of thought might shed light on artistic production and phenomena is the rise of "the cultural turn" in the social sciences. Cultural sociology, which is to be distinguished from the sociology of culture, wherein culture attains no intellectual significance or causal power of any greater quantity than any other item that might be inserted at the end of the phrase, "the sociology of" (Alexander 2003), has been reminding the discipline for several decades now that Durkheim's final work, the one that has the strongest claim to represent the fruit of his most mature intellectual effort, is not *Suicide* or the *Division of Labor*, which still receive the lion's share of the attention in the orthodoxy of the discipline, but rather *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*. This is a sprawling book of tremendous ambition, in which Durkheim aims to respond to some of the very biggest of the big questions: What are the roots of religious belief? What is the future of religion? How are science and religion related as forms of knowledge? Somewhat hidden among these questions is another, less frequently

noted but certainly equally important: *How is art as a knowledge system related to religion and ultimately to deeper processes of social organization and the production of meaning?*

As is suggested by a number of the contributors to this book, the third, fourth, and fifth chapters (on “The Positive Cult” in the form of mimetic and representative rites, and “Piacular Rites and the Ambiguity of the Notion of the Sacred”) of the third book (on “The Principal Ritual Attitudes”) of Durkheim’s masterwork are where much of the obvious action is to be found in the exegetical effort to find a theory of art in his writing. In the mimetic rites discussed in chapter 3, Durkheim gives what might be read, perhaps only a bit too simplistically, as an account of the origin of much of the performative arts. As Australian totemic groups imitate the totem in, for example, leaping like kangaroos or emerging from a chrysalis like a witchetty grub, they perhaps provide us with a precursor to the theater and dance. The representative or commemorative rites described in the following chapter reveal still stronger roots to the birth of the arts; unlike in the mimetic rites, here the performative, aesthetic element is foregrounded. Durkheim recounts Spencer and Gillen’s summary of the Intichiuma of the Black Snake in vivid detail as an “histoire mythique” (1991[1912]:623) of the ancestors of the Warramunga tribe. In this chapter, Durkheim does not leave the connection between primitive religious rite and nascent art to inference:

It is well known that the games and the principal forms of art seem to have been born in religion and that they long maintained their religious character. We can see why: while pursuing other goals directly, the cult has at the same time been a form of recreation. Religion has not played this role by chance or a happy coincidence but as a result of its inherent logic. Indeed, as I have shown, although religious thought is something other than a system of fictions, the realities to which it corresponds can gain religious expression only if imagination transfigures them. Great is the distance between society, as it is objectively, and the sacred things that represent it symbolically. The impressions really felt by men—the raw material for this construction—had to be interpreted, elaborated, and transformed to the point of becoming unrecognizable. So the world of religious things is partly an imaginary world (albeit only in its outward form) and, for this reason, one that lends itself more readily to the free creations of the mind. Moreover, because the intellectual forces that serve in making it are intense and tumultuous, the mere task of expressing the real with the help of proper symbols is insufficient to occupy them. A surplus remains generally available that seeks to busy itself with supplementary and superfluous works of luxury—that is, with works of art. (Durkheim 1995[1912]:385)

If religious rite and the genesis and nature of art are closely intertwined, then certainly we are not out of the realm of plausibility in considering a massive tome on the nature of the former as a text that might have something important to tell us about the latter as well.

So Durkheim was certainly a sociologist of art, at least in the limited sense that he had things to say about its origins and its position in contemporary European society. Some have considered him also an artist in his own right. In Robert Nisbet's *Sociology as an Art Form*, an effort is made to cast sociological thought in its nineteenth-century roots as an essentially artistic endeavor, insofar as it relies on imagination for its conceptual creative work, produces landscapes (the masses, the metropolis) and portraits (the worker, the bourgeois, the intellectual) in its account of social reality, and manifests itself in its different incarnations quite in the manner of musical compositions, that is, as variations on a few standard themes (order, change, progress).<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Weber, Marx, Tocqueville, and even Auguste Comte are given more attention by Nisbet than Durkheim, but the latter too is presented as an artist at bottom, working toward theoretical discovery without prescriptive rules but only imaginative insight at his disposal, painting complex and aesthetically intriguing tableaux of the new industrial order of Western capitalism, and composing intellectual symphonies on the development and contour of organic solidarity, anomie, and collective effervescence.

Yet Nisbet's effort to understand the artistic dimensions of Durkheim's work remains limited because he does not pursue any concentrated sociology of knowledge or social history of intellectuals and intellectual movements to give his characterizations empirical teeth. Edward Tiryakian, on the other hand, does, and his work on this theme therefore extends to a greater depth. In a revised version of an essay originally published in 1979 that is well known to students of Durkheimian thought (it is subjected to a critical reading by Marcel Fournier in the present volume), Tiryakian posits a "notable affinity between avant-garde art and the Durkheimian School" (2009:153). Both Durkheimian social theory and Impressionist painting "were contrary to what one could call 'the natural attitude,' as Husserl put it" (ibid.:158). Both purported to use rational methodologies and concepts (the social fact and pointillism, respectively) in order to represent aspects of reality that underlay the surface and were of much greater import in determining human action and possibility. In a later essay (which, like the 1979 essay, was revised and presented in his 2009 book), Tiryakian compares Durkheim and the Durkheimians to Picasso and the Cubists in their mobilizations of primitivism in order to reflect on realities of modernity: "By drawing on the primitive as an ingress on the modern, *The Elementary Forms* opened up in advance of its times the 'cultural turn' in sociology. It qualifies Durkheim as a creative avant-garde artist" (ibid.:186). There is even some stirring historical speculation on the fact that Stravinsky's *Rite of Spring* had its scandalous début in Paris in May of 1913, almost exactly a year after the publication of *The Elementary Forms*, and on the points of commonality of the two works: "I would suggest . . . an enhanced reading anew of *The Elementary Forms* might profitably be done listening



to Stravinsky's score and imaging [sic] the performance of Nijinsky and his troupe" (ibid.:182).

Tiryakian does not stop at the argument that Durkheimian sociology constitutes an endeavor to describe reality that shared characteristics with artistic movements of the day. He also points to what we should recognize as at least the fragile beginnings of an effort in the first series of *L'Année sociologique* to produce a characteristically Durkheimian view on "sociologie esthétique." Here, we begin to move beyond Durkheim himself to consider the Durkheimian *tradition*, and the argument that Durkheimian concepts provide handy tools for the analysis of artistic production gains considerable strength as we widen our lens to consider those who worked with Durkheim during his lifetime to build French sociology and others who were deeply influenced by the school in subsequent generations.

There is a range of positions on the substance of Durkheim's thought on art and the applicability of his more general cultural theory to the understanding of artistic production and meaning, and the first section of this book endeavors to capture something of this range.

William Watts Miller has been carefully reading and rereading *The Elementary Forms* for many years, and his chapter in our book is an interpretive gem. Watts Miller reads Durkheim's argument in his great final book as, at least in part, an effort to theorize art as a kind of *Gesamtkunstwerk* or, literally, total artwork. But this is not Richard Wagner's synthesis of the fragmented arts into one unified theatrico-musical spectacle so much as it is an attempt to whittle the core of all art down to a process of production of collective energy and power. Following on ground previously carved out by Tiryakian (1981), who compared *The Elementary Forms* in structure and rhetorical force to the Book of Revelations in the Old Testament, Watts Miller describes how Durkheim's work not only analyzes the work of art in its aesthetic totality, but is itself also just such a work. Art-objects, he argues, are always parts of art-events, and art-events can be fruitfully understood in the terms Durkheim uses to describe the "tumult" of collective effervescence. Watts Miller's chapter constitutes a concerted effort to read all art as inevitably collective and therefore to present a critique of most orthodox theories of "high" art.

W.S.F. Pickering offers something of a counterpoint to this argument. In Pickering's account, we find much to illustrate Durkheim's antagonism to art. Drawing strongly from Durkheim's course on moral education, which was given regularly between 1889 and 1912, he reveals a stark contrast between Durkheim's moral seriousness, rooted in the deeply Jewish call to embrace reality, and hedonistic Bohemianism, in Durkheim's time illustrated by Impressionism's escape from reality into the imaginative. So strong is Pickering's argument here that one might well finish the chapter with serious doubts as to the necessity, or even the possibility, of

a book on Durkheimianism and art, although he does allude to the existence of others in the *Année* school (including Mauss, Hubert, and Lalo) who did not precisely share Durkheim's views on this matter. But could it perhaps be that Durkheim rejects art not because of art per se but because of the pressing need in his day to establish the scientific credentials of the new way of seeing things that was sociology? Philosophy, from which Durkheim desired to separate the new discipline, was marked by spiritualist, literary style and pretention, and one of the most basic ways of creating sociology's own intellectual space was to build up its scientific pretensions in opposition to the literary and artistic worlds. As Jean-Louis Fabiani argues, the model of the scientific ascetic fit Durkheim's personality snugly. But despite this, Fabiani demonstrates, there is conceptual advance to be had in utilizing Durkheim's sociological ideas to understand artistic phenomenon such as the two major French festivals that take place every year at Cannes and Avignon.

Armed with an impressive textual set of armaments, Pierre-Michel Menger takes a more radical stance. He undertakes the primary exegetical work toward the establishment of a connection that is explored in a number of the chapters in the second section of the book. The problem of excess, a term of great significance in the work of a lineage in French social thought stretching from Georges Bataille to Jacques Derrida, is demonstrated to be at the very heart of Durkheim's position on art. Menger culls material from a wide range of Durkheim's work, from *Suicide*, where the "excess [that] haunts individual behavior" is the engine behind many suicidal impulses, to the 1911 essay on "Value Judgments and Judgments of Reality," where he finds Durkheim articulating startling thoughts on the "free, spontaneous . . . [and] utterly unnecessary sacrifices" that are constituted by virtuous acts. In a move of considerable exegetical daring and brilliance, Menger finds in Durkheim an effort to treat art as a "supplement" in just the complex sense in which Derrida famously uses the term. It is both something in excess of what is needed and something that fills a lack. Supplementarity, or "the development of an initial state [that] both degrades that state and provides the principle that will compensate for and correct the degradation," is ultimately the key to understanding Durkheim's view here.

Donald Nielsen describes Durkheim's attempt to construct a narrative to explain the causes and effects of excessive individualism as comparable to the literary effort to do the same in the novels of Fyodor Dostoevsky. In this chapter, instead of an exegetical approach to the explication of what Durkheim said about art, the reader will find a stimulating display of some of the ways in which Durkheim can be considered an intellectual fellow traveler of the social novelists of the European nineteenth century. Dostoevsky and Durkheim created works in which egoism produces nihilism and anomie respectively, with a heightened propensity to suicide as a corollary effect. Nielsen also looks at the discussions of socialism as a

solution to the problem of social disintegration and fragmentation in the two writers, and again finds remarkable points of similarity. The upshot is a spur to us to read other literary works in this way. Whether Durkheim was or was not a social thinker interested in art, he clearly was one who trod the same research ground of the realist novelists of his century.

We begin the journey away from Durkheim himself to a consideration of the *Durkheimians* with the chapter by Marcel Fournier. Here we find a meticulous description of the Sociology of Aesthetics (*sociologie esthétique*) section of the *Année sociologique*, which, though it was not considered by Durkheim as of primary importance in the new discipline, certainly did attract intellectual energy from within the developing Durkheimian school and touch on intriguing questions. Fournier shows that the foundation of a Durkheimian sociology of art can be exhumed from the small rubric of *sociologie esthétique*, quoting, among others, Henri Hubert's description of literature as a social institution. Michèle Richman then provides a masterful examination of the great array and number of sources in Marcel Mauss's work wherein the aesthetic is at issue in order to reveal his complicated position on the topic. Things such as artworks, Mauss told his students, are no more divided than is a living being, and we are beings who constitute wholes, collectively and individually. Richman looks with piercing exactitude at the chapter on aesthetics in Mauss's *Manuel d'ethnographie* for the most compelling elements of her effort to reinterpret the meaning of his work. The *Manuel* attacks many of the distinctions and categories considered basic to our Western way of looking at things. Art, for the West, is distinct from technology and from "mere" cosmetic body work, but Mauss argues they must all be reconnected as cultural artifacts. Richman reveals that Mauss's guidebook for ethnographers endeavored to teach them, quite appropriately, that these distinctions mean nothing empirically; they are only applied by specific cultures, and they certainly cannot determine the work of the social theorist. Sociology and anthropology are necessarily aesthetic, literary projects. Mauss's frequent use of personal anecdotes and experiences to illustrate cultural facts, as in his discussion of the use of spades in the trench warfare of the Great War in which he himself was a combatant, is indicative of his refusal of some of the categories the Western mind takes as essential to the production of good social science. The revolution of Mauss's work, Richman argues, involves the fundamental remaking of our understanding of the social world.

Sarah Daynes explores a facet of the post-Durkheim Durkheimian work on art too little known in the English-speaking world: Maurice Halbwachs's sociology of music. Halbwachs is celebrated for his work on collective memory, but the essay on the collective memory of musicians, which is the focal point of Daynes's chapter, is much less widely read. Much of the theoretical action in Halbwachs's essay has to do with his effort to define *how* music can mean, i.e., its nature as a communicative

system. He privileges the idea of music as a rational, structural language driven by a semiotic system in which individual elements (tones, chords, rhythms) stand in a structured relation with certain meaningful units, and communication depends on the participants in a musical conversation (audiences as well as performers) having attained a formal competence in the system. Music can communicate, to those who know the language at least, even when it is not performed but exists only as a score. The assumed model is the Western high art music tradition. Daynes briefly invokes the powerful criticism made of Halbwachs's view of musical communication by Alfred Schutz, whose concept of "making music together" pointed to the experiential, lived social exchange of musicians in which music communicates outside the formal text of music, i.e., in the gestures and signs the musicians give one another during the performance. She also pits one Halbwachs (he of the work on the social frameworks of memory) against another (the author of the musical essay), demonstrating that the earlier Halbwachs pointed to the ways in which participation in a shared social life and trajectory enabled a common set of memories. Through a close reading of the world of group improvisation in Kansas City jazz of the 1930s, Daynes shows that the early Halbwachs actually provides a good working theory for understanding how this jazz world produced meaningful communication in the absence of musical scores, indeed, in the absence of the semiotic competence in the language that the Halbwachs of the musical essay posits as a requirement for musical communication.

From Mauss and Halbwachs, both of whom worked personally with Durkheim on the *Année sociologique* team, we move to a subsequent generation of thinkers who came of age after Durkheim's death but imbibed the teachings of the great master and injected their meanings into their own discussions of art. Claude Lévi-Strauss explicitly invoked a Durkheimian predecessor, Mauss, as one of the originators of the structuralist thinking of which Lévi-Strauss was one of the major proponents in the mid twentieth century. Nonetheless, Lévi-Strauss's relationship to Durkheimian thought is generally thought of as complex, close on some points and distant on others. Stephan Moebius and Frithjof Nungesser make the case that some of Lévi-Strauss's work before his "discovery" of the structuralist method reveals him already thinking in Durkheimian terms. In attempting to understand the meanings of Brazilian masks and other facial markings, he rejects an approach that would reduce this material culture to a question of aesthetics and instead looks to Durkheim and Mauss on classification to show that this primitive art is a site wherein "religious, legal, moral, political, and aesthetic intersect inseparably." Art is, per Lévi-Strauss, a Mausean social fact.

The final three chapters of the book (my own on Michel Leiris and two on Georges Bataille by Romi Mukherjee and Claudine Frank) are illustrations of how broad "Durkheimian thought" had become in France by the Second World War. Unlike any of the other Durkheimian

thinkers examined in the earlier chapters, Leiris and Bataille had their feet solidly planted as producers in both social theoretical/ethnographic and artistic worlds. Leiris studied with Mauss, was handpicked by him and Marcel Griaule as the official field note taker of the famed Dakar–Djibouti expedition of 1931–33, and published a number of ethnographic research monographs on African and Caribbean societies. Bataille was closely intellectually associated with Leiris, Roger Caillois (a student of the mythologist Georges Dumézil, himself Mauss’s student), and Alfred Métraux, an ethnologist who studied under Mauss. Both men were at one time part of the fascinating band of writers, poets, painters, filmmakers, and musicians loosely organized around André Breton in Parisian Surrealism. I argue that the writerly trajectory of Leiris, from at least the mid- to late 1930s until the end of his life in 1990, was determined by his encounter with the Durkheimian concept of the sacred and the way it shaped his personal inquiries into the nature of writing, biography, and the Other. From his ethnographic and philosophical study of the *corrida* to his autobiographical *chef d’oeuvre*, *La Règle du jeu*, one of his central concerns was an inquiry into the deepest meaning of artworks in modernity, and he consistently carried out this study from a framework that can fairly be classified as Durkheimian; indeed, to call him the only Durkheimian poet would not be an offense to the meaning of either term or his work.

Frank and Mukherjee present complementary but quite different perspectives on Bataille’s view of art and the way in which the influence Durkheimian categories had on him affected it. Mukherjee’s reading of Bataille on art finds him looking on in horror at the thing and seeking to annihilate it through a cultivation of dark eros, which is the core of the human experience distorted in bourgeois societies into the thing known as “art.” Though Bataille perhaps begins with an absorption of some of the key Durkheimian materials regarding sacrifice, myth, and the sacred, Mukherjee argues that in the end he moves completely beyond the Durkheimian opposition of sacred and profane into a new binary system opposing the everyday world in which art and politics take place to the purely mythical world of ecstasy “glimpsed in the metaphor of lovers.” Bataille also surpasses, in Mukherjee’s reading, Durkheim’s framing of effervescence, which closes it within the boundaries of the needs of productive society and refuses it any justification in its own terms. The Bataillean end of erotic unity cannot be collapsed into Durkheimian solidarity, as it points to something imaginary and infinitely darker. Frank brings new material to the discussion of Bataille’s perspective on art and his relationship to the renegade Durkheimian perspective on the transgressive sacred (described in Riley 2010). She has obtained access to materials produced by two artist participants in the Bataille-organized secret society *Acéphale* and uses these new data to show how and what Bataille appropriated from artistic traditions and frames in his effort to

create a politico-aesthetic counter-movement to fascism that nonetheless drew from some of the same sources. The figure of Acteon, the hero who represents tragic eroticism in the fate he suffered for having witnessed the goddess Diana naked in her bath, looms large in the Acéphale myth, and he is opposed by Bataille to the Christian mythic figure of Parsifal in the Wagnerian imagination. The deeply anti-Wagnerian aesthetic of Bataille's efforts in the "lunatic knighthood" of Acéphale is at the core of the chapter, and Frank provides a wealth of detail regarding the particular figures and symbols picked from their mythologies of origin and inserted into Acéphale's transgressive, erotic, anti-ascetic, and anti-idealist aesthetics.

From Durkheim to Bataille may seem quite a long journey, with relatively little of the original substance left at its end, but the one point is not so distant from the other. A profound consensus holds together these two ends of a familial approach to art: their mutual insistence on theorizing the role of art in human experience with respect to myth, the sacred, ritual, and collective effervescence, and their thorough rejection of considerations of art that would remain in the rarefied atmosphere of the aesthetic and ignore the moral ground below. Every thinker examined in this book is resolute about seeing art as a human project inextricably tied to the most basic human business of distinguishing moral values. Contemporary art critics experience an involuntary twinge when they hear such things, accustomed as they are to seeing right-wing opponents of art attack it on these grounds, but they would do well to pick up any of these Durkheimian thinkers in order to open their eyes to the moral basis of their own objections to the conservative critics. Art is always about sacredness in its two binary incarnations, and by implication as well (if not more practically) about the profane. It matters relatively little that Leiris, Bataille and some other later Durkheimian thinkers<sup>2</sup> position themselves as partisans on the side of the sacred in art, the impure, from which Durkheim preferred to maintain a guarded distance. That they all recognize the same field of play makes them members of the same family.

## Notes

1. The themes are basically a larger group of his unit-ideas from *The Sociological Tradition*, written a decade earlier than *Sociology as an Art Form*.
2. We might well have included a chapter on Roger Caillois in this volume.

## References

- Alexander, Jeffrey. 2003. *The Meanings of Social Life: A Cultural Sociology*. New York: Oxford University Press.
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