

Introduction

THE DURKHEIM SCHOOL'S “CATEGORY PROJECT”

A COLLABORATIVE EXPERIMENT UNFOLDS

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The study of the categories of collective thought is our originality.

—Henri Hubert, “Texte autobiographique de Henri Hubert,”
[1915] 1979

In his “Intellectual Self-Portrait” written around 1930, Marcel Mauss mentions a topic that he considers of “utmost importance”: the question of the social origins of the categories of thought. This issue had preoccupied himself, Émile Durkheim, Henri Hubert, and other members of the Durkheim School since the second volume of the *Année sociologique* published in 1899 (Mauss [1930] 1998: 40).¹ Several scholars, some of whom have contributed to this volume, have published extensive monographs on how the social origin of the categories is treated and analyzed in the thought of Émile Durkheim or Marcel Mauss. Nick Allen (1998; 2000), in particular, but also Iris Därmann (2005), Marcel Fournier (2006), Bruno Karsenti (1994; 2011), Anne Rawls (2005), Warren Schmaus (1994; 2004), and Susan Stedman Jones (2000; 2001; 2006) have reconstructed the project’s argumentative structure and how it was embedded in the sociological, anthropological, and philosophical context of its time—and they have, at times, advanced differing readings of the main sources, influences, and the epistemological argument of the category project itself. Yet, we still lack a comprehensive history of how the category project developed over time as a collaborative work of different scholars.

The difficulty of writing such a history of what we call the category project² is already indicated by the term *project*. The Durkheim School's preoccupation with the categories always had the character of something left to be done. While developing the category project, the Durkheim School—"a 'group'—in the full force of the term" (Mauss [1925] 2016: 29)—kept postponing its completion as if they had recognized the impossibility of their task to replace philosophy with anthropology as Mauss had announced in 1923 (Mauss 1923b: 26). As an intellectual project, it always remained fragmentary—"a ruin of speculation" (Schüttpelz 2005: 218).

The intellectual history of the project's impact remains to be written. We find its direct repercussions in the classical writings of French anthropology—from André Leroi-Gourhan through, of course, Claude Lévi-Strauss to Pierre Bourdieu, but also in Michel Foucault, Gilbert Simondon, and the more recent works of Philippe Descola and others. Also, as Wendy James has rightly emphasized, the translation of major works into English, initiated by E. E. Evans-Pritchard and systematically pursued by Rodney Needham and Robert Parkin, has been crucial for the development of British Social Anthropology and shaped one of the major intellectual currents of the twentieth century, that is, the "rationality debate" (Tambiah 1990) with its echoes in the recent ontological turn. Not least, the emphasis on classification in contemporary science and technology studies (STS) literature, as exemplified by Geoffrey Bowker and Susan Leigh Star, cannot do without referencing Durkheim and Mauss (Bowker and Star 2000).

Be that as it may, we do not find a canonical model of how to write the internal history of the Durkheim School's interest in the categories of thought in the current scientific landscape. Such an internal history of the Durkheim School is not only missing because of the historical ruptures of World Wars I and II and the death of a large number of members of the Durkheim School, but also because of the loose form of their cooperation. The project had never been spelled out systematically and remains to be reconstructed as a collective effort spanning almost fifty years and including the work of a dozen scholars. The Durkheim- or Mauss-centrism of many sociologists and anthropologists (notable exceptions are Hörl 2005; Moebius 2006: 73–115) has also impeded the writing of a history of the category project. This focus on individual scholars obscures that the category project has not only been a quest for the social origins of thought, but originates itself in social relations. The published texts are just the tip of the iceberg, which consists of debates at the Société Française de Philosophie (SFP), informal meetings, letters, book reviews, and hidden references.

We distinguish four structural phases that exemplify the dynamics of the project as a comparative experiment. In a largely neglected passage Durkheim explains: “When, on the other hand, the production of facts is something beyond our power to command, and we can only bring them together as they have been spontaneously produced, the method used is one of indirect experimentation, or the comparative method” (Durkheim [1895] 1982: 147; see Durkheim 1888: 41).

The work that has been initiated by Durkheim and Mauss from the 1890s to the late 1930s was a realization of the comparative method as “indirect experimentation.” As categories are the result of the bodily and mental cooperation between members of specific social groups, who unite rhythmically in rituals, the argument that categories are of social origin could not be proved through direct experimentation. Following Claude Bernard, Durkheim conceived of direct experimentation as an actively controlled manipulation of the object of knowledge (see Schmidt this volume). Instead of directly working on the social body of the Third French Republic—an endeavor Durkheim pursued in his pedagogical work—the Durkheimians started to compare different ways of how societies developed their categories in social practice.

Applying this method to the development of the category project results in four phases of the category project, which are: (1) building a hypothesis (until 1903–04), (2) conducting crucial experiments (1904–07), (3) formulating a theory and defending it against alternatives (1907–14), and (4) solidifying the theory empirically and comparatively as well as establishing links to other disciplines (1920–39).

It is important to remember that these phases cannot be reduced to historical periods. We nevertheless suggest mapping them loosely onto the four historical phases mentioned above. Until 1903–1904, the Durkheim School was focusing on different categories while not yet having a comprehensive account of their systematic endeavor. During this time, they also started to build the hypothesis of the categories’ social origin without explicitly saying so, namely in Durkheim and Mauss’s essay on classification (Durkheim and Mauss 1903a). In the second phase of crucial experiments, lasting until 1906–1907, individual scholars worked on those categories that can legitimately be considered central for a European history of thought: space, cause, and time. The period from 1906–1907 to World War I can be seen as the third phase in which the category project comes to its first fruition. Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms* is the most coherent and systematic formulation of the theory of the social origin of the categories. At the same time, Marcel Mauss, Henri Hubert, Robert Hertz, Antoine Bianconi, and others tested the hypothesis of the social origins of thought

in diverse empirical settings ranging from Bantu languages to Polyneesian cosmologies until World War I had its devastating impact. After World War I and Durkheim's death in 1917, in the project's fourth period, Mauss was left to continue, refine, and open the category project for new historical and scientific developments such as the introduction of long-term fieldwork in anthropology, and interdisciplinary debates with psychology, linguistics, technology, and historical sciences.

The Beginnings: Formulating a Hypothesis (until 1903–1904)

Mauss dated the beginning of the category project to the second volume of the *Année*. He probably referred to two articles published in that volume: Durkheim's "De la définition des phénomènes religieux" (Durkheim 1899) and Hubert and Mauss's "Essai sur la nature et la fonction du sacrifice" (Hubert and Mauss 1899). The latter is generally considered to be the first monographic work dealing with the notion of the sacred and retrospectively has often been presented as possessing categorical status. Later on, however, Mauss ([1930] 1998: 40) acknowledged that the Durkheim School's fault had been to reduce the problem of the categories to the question of the sacred and vice versa.

Stefan Czarnowski (1925) mentions an alternative starting point of the project in his article "Le morcellement de l'étendue et sa limitation dans la religion et la magie." He makes a reference to the fifth volume of the *Année* published in 1902 in which his teacher Henri Hubert writes:

Since religious acts are in fact performed in *space* and *time*, one of the enigmas of the ritual is the reconciliation of these ineluctable conditions with the infinity and theoretical immutability of the sacred. . . . In fact, the study of the notions of time and space should logically be combined with the study of representations. (Hubert 1902b: 248)³

Hubert's contribution to the collective endeavor of the category project remains highly underrated, even though he was the first to address the question of the categories systematically. His methodological stance is central to the category project and exemplifies how categories such as *space* and *time* have to be understood in relation to the study of representations, which include, among other notions and concepts, categories. In his introduction to the new rubric "Représentations religieuses d'êtres ou de phénomènes naturels," (Hubert 1902c), Hubert

adds the category of the *person* as one of the notions to be included in the table of categories:

We could add what we have written above on the religious representation of space and time, indicate here some works relating to nature and, by extension, to the fate of the soul and discuss the concepts involved in magic. . . . The representation of personality is one of the studies that we would like to be able to classify under this heading soon. (ibid.: 269)

In 1902, the same year Durkheim attained a prominent position in Paris, where he was appointed to the chair of education at the Sorbonne, he asked Mauss in a letter to collaborate with him on the “Essay on Primitive Classification.” Acknowledging the difficulty of the task, he suggested a structure of the “Essay” and pointed to the core of the hypothesis of the social origins of the categories: “The mental operation called classification was not formed as one piece in the human brain. . . . Classes are not given in the things. They are created” (Durkheim 1998: 320). In the famous essay on classification, we then find the answer to the question of how things are classified and by whom:

It has quite often been said that man began to conceive things by relating them to himself. The above allows us to see more precisely what this anthropocentrism, which might better be called sociocentrism, consists of. The centre of the first schemes of nature is not the individual; it is society. (Durkheim and Mauss [1903a] 1963: 51)

Here, we have the basic formula for the category project. Foundational concepts of thought such as classes are neither psychological achievements nor transcendental givens. They are developed in relation to social facts such as the structure of clans. The second introduction to the rubric “Représentations religieuses d’êtres ou de phénomènes naturels” from the *Année sociologique VI*, an addendum to the “Essay on Classification,” however, shows that Durkheim and Mauss had not yet defined a set of categories to be studied. They argue for a “study of tales, cosmologies, in general of science, the notions concerning the soul, time, space, cause, law” (Durkheim and Mauss 1903b: 225–26).

Already visible here is what could be called the “containment” of the question of categories in the analysis of religious thought. This might be a result of Durkheim’s attempt to distance himself from historical materialism as Nathan Schlanger argues (2006: 5–15), but one can also sense a certain hesitation to directly address the question of the categories. In a letter to Xavier Léon dated 24 July 1908, that is, after he had begun to prepare *Elementary Forms* (Watts Miller 2006: 3), Durkheim writes:

I intend to indicate . . . some of the social elements that served to constitute some of our categories ([. . . ?] causality, the notion of force, the notion of personality). This question has preoccupied me for a long time and I do not dare, for the moment, to address it head-on. I believe that it is possible to approach it through religious thought. (Durkheim 1976: 467)

Religion thus provided the empirical ground to test a hypothesis with a much broader claim, namely Durkheim's frontal attack on the tradition of both a transcendental as well as empiricist explanation of the origin of categories: "For these philosophers, in fact, categories preform reality, whereas for us, they summarize it. According to them, they are the natural law of thought; for us, they are a product of human art" (Durkheim 1909: 757). Henri Hubert summarizes the Durkheim School's sociocentric explanation of the origin of human thought with explicit reference to categories as early as 1904:

This ever-present idea of the sacred is of higher value than a simple notion. We are tempted to consider it as a true category in the Aristotelian sense of the word. It is in religious representations what notions of time, space and cause are in individual representations. (Hubert 1904a: xlvi)

In the next phase, the Durkheim School focused on a "sociocentric" analysis of time, space, and cause—exactly those categories mentioned by Hubert in 1904. While Durkheim used the work on religious phenomena as a shield behind which he mercilessly prepared his attack on Western philosophy in both its transcendental and empiricist outlook, he sent Marcel Mauss, Henri Beuchat, and Henri Hubert out as scouts to ascertain whether the hypothesis of the social origins of thought could be verified.

Crucial Experiments on Individual Categories: Time, Space, Causality (1904–1906)

Hubert and Mauss's "General Theory of Magic" ([1904] 2005), Mauss and Beuchat's *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo: A Study in Social Morphology* ([1906] 1979), and Hubert's "Essay on Time" ([1905] 1999) are three interlinked experiments attempting to verify the hypothesis of the categories' social origin. While the "Essay on Magic" deals with the category of *mana*, which simultaneously unites quality and substance and forms the basis for causality (Hubert and Mauss [1904] 2005: 134–138), the "Eskimo Essay" and the "Essay on Time" show, always in reference to the "Essay on Magic," how the Kantian forms

of *intuition*, *space*, and *time*, are generated through social practices. Evidence was established through the comparison of empirical material gained indirectly by means of travel reports and ethnographic descriptions. The three young men confidently presented themselves as the founders of a new comparative science of the social.

In the “General Theory of Magic,” Mauss explored *mana*, like the idea of the sacred, as “a kind of category of collective thinking which is the foundation for our judgments and which imposes a classification on things, separating some, bringing together others, establishing lines of influence or boundaries of isolation” (Hubert and Mauss [1904] 2005: 149). This observation is systematized in Hubert and Mauss’s “Introduction to the Analysis of Some Religious Phenomena” first published in 1906 and again in 1909 as an introduction to a collection of contributions by Mauss and Hubert to the sociology of religion (Hubert and Mauss [1906] 1968). Here, the working twins, *les jumeaux de travail*, seem to have become even more self-assured of their own theoretical endeavor. They present *mana* as a kind of “primordial category”:

But *mana* is not only a special category of primitive thought, and today, in the process of reduction, it is still the first form that other categories, still at work in our minds, have taken: those of substance and cause. What we know about it therefore makes it possible to conceive how categories present themselves in the minds of primitives. (Mauss and Hubert 1968 [1906]: 29)

With regard to the category of time, Hubert’s expertise in Celtic and Roman myths and his interest in calendars and religious rhythms was crucial (see Hubert 1901; 1902a). Time is not conceived as a “form of intuition” but as a product of social convention: “In brief, the division of time entails the maximum of convention and the minimum of experience. Ultimately, experience lends it additional authority” (Hubert [1905] 1999: 70). A mere year later, Mauss and Beuchat published their *Seasonal Variations of the Eskimo: A Study in Social Morphology*, which deals with space as a category originating in social relations and links the question of space to the category of quantity by discussing the notion of social density and the idea of a law of the rhythm of social life.

It is unsurprising that Mauss and Hubert are, at the same time, interested in the concept of number, which is testified by reviews they wrote in the *Année* (Mauss 1904; Hubert 1905). As shown by Hubert’s statement, which appears in a review of Roscher’s “Die Sieben und Neunzahl im Kultus der Griechen” (1907), the Durkheim School’s hypothesis of the social origin of thought had been refined. Compared

to the rather cautious and empirically embedded arguments of his “Essay on Time” (see Hubert [1905] 1999: 80), Hubert phrases the argument of the social origin of time, number, and *mana* in a more abstract and philosophical tone:

These are arbitrarily constructed numbers, which apply both to the division of space and to that of time and which are not given by even imperfect experiments. The elements of this construction are undoubtedly experimental, but the objective experience from which they emerged is infinitely distant and has been infinitely elaborated. They are intellectual constructions that are the work of men in groups, like classification, like the idea of *mana*, like the idea of time itself. I am only talking about the elements of the collective mentality whose formation we have so far studied. It is not, in my opinion, in the objects of experience, but in the logic of the collective spirit that their origin must be sought. (Hubert 1907: 314)

The argument is now based upon solid empirical evidence that allows the Durkheimians to advance their project. As Robert Hertz writes in a review of Mauss and Hubert’s “*Mélanges d’histoire des religions*”: “What Hubert has done for time, others have done or will do for the other categories of reason; thus a new theory of knowledge is gradually emerging, truly positive and experimental” (Hertz 1909: 219). This marks an important step toward the full-fledged theory of the “Elementary Forms.”

Formulating a Theory and Fending off Criticism: From the “Elementary Forms” to the “Categories of the Black” (1907–1914)

After Mauss, Beuchat, and Hubert had shown that three of the most influential concepts of Western philosophy should be studied from a sociocentric perspective, the Durkheim School focused on two complementary strategies. While Durkheim was preoccupied with summarizing the epistemological intentions of the category project, which led to the publication of *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* ([1912] 1995) other members of the Durkheim School started to broaden the geographical and topical scope of the project. While Robert Hertz explored the categorical status of “left” and “right” in different cultures (Hertz [1909] 1960), Mauss began his work on the relation between numbers, language, and food by analyzing Vedic poetry (Mauss 1911).⁴

Another, so far neglected, scholar, Antoine Bianconi, started to explore African Bantu languages,⁵ which divide the world’s entities into different classes. Bianconi demanded that sociological facts be

integrated into linguistic studies and started to explore what he called *categories de noir* (Bianconi 1910: 219; see Bianconi 1913).⁶ Alongside broadening the category project empirically, Durkheim started to develop a proper sociology of knowledge. In the eleventh volume of the *Année*, for example, Durkheim and Celestin Bouglé introduced the rubric “Les conditions sociologiques de la connaissance.” They understood this rubric as the successor of the above-mentioned “Religious Representations of Being and of Natural Phenomena” (see Clammer 2000). It anticipated the program of the “Elementary Forms”:

If it is for the first time that the abovementioned rubric appears in “l’Année,” it is because the issue it raises has remained foreign to us until the present time. The topic, however, has stood for a long time in the first rank of our preoccupations. Without speaking of our study “Primitive Classification,” which appeared in these pages, and Hubert’s “Etude sommaire de la représentation du temps dans la religion et dans la magie” . . . the reader will find each of these volumes classified under the “Religious Representations of Being and of Natural Phenomena,” in addition to a certain number of books and articles reviewed from this very point of view. Now, since religion is essentially a social phenomenon, in order to seek what religious factors have entered into our representation of the world, we have rigorously attempted to determine some of the sociological conditions of knowledge. (Durkheim and Bouglé 1910, quoted in Nandan 1980: 106–7)

Directly after this introduction, the Durkheimians placed a review of the “Soziologie des Erkennens” of Wilhelm Jerusalem (Durkheim 1910). This shows the extent to which they aimed at integrating their category project into a wider international discussion of the social conditions of knowledge.

Ultimately, the work of the Durkheim School on the social origins of thought culminated in *Elementary Forms*. This book represents a systematic account of the category project. There, Durkheim situates the project with respect to the philosophical tradition of Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, and Georg W. F. Hegel mediated through Charles Renouvier, Octave Hamelin (Stedman-Jones 2000), and the French spiritualist tradition (Schmaus 2004). Considering the boldness of both argumentation and rhetorical style, it is unsurprising that contemporary scholars started to discuss the Durkheim School’s category project right after the publication of *Elementary Forms*. The reactions were, however, not at all approving.⁷ They rather show the multitude of different criticisms and attacks the self-described “pack of . . . dogs” (Mauss 1923b: 25) had to fend off.

A case in point is Durkheim’s presentation at the SFP on 4 February 1913. Durkheim was confronted with arguments against his

theory of the genesis of intelligence, religion, and society from very different philosophical and theological corners. The *Elementary Forms* threatened, on the one hand, the authority of philosophy as first science since Durkheim claimed competences for the new science of sociology that formerly had been reserved for philosophy. On the other hand, Durkheim had challenged the authority of Western thought in general and of Christianity in particular by demonstrating that the allegedly most rational and individualistic monotheistic religion was but a variety of religious thought in the history of mankind. Durkheim's position seemingly advocated a social constructivism that, according to his contemporaries, would ultimately lead to relativism. The discussion at the SFP illustrates the hostile intellectual climate in which the Durkheimians attempted to establish sociology as a foundational science.⁸

While the philosopher and psychologist Henri Delacroix rejects Durkheim's idea that effervescent rituals are to be held responsible for the genesis of categories and reason itself (Durkheim 1913: 78), Edouard Le Roy tried to push Durkheim to acknowledge a vital force as a principle for a creative evolution (1913: 92–93). Jules Lachelier followed Le Roy and saw the authority and moral high-ground of Christianity threatened by Durkheim's theory, a position also held by Abbot Lucien Laberthonnière, who claimed that primitive rituals have merely material goals, while Christian rituals aim at the spiritual transformation of the individual (1913: 102).

Alphonse Darlu brought forward the most interesting and systematic critique of Durkheim's work. He accused Durkheim of not differentiating between two versions of his argument. One version was commonly accepted by most social scientists while the other, being more radical, was rejected:

The first idea . . . can be stated as follows: religious, moral and even logical conceptions are of social origin in the sense that they are given in collective thought; they reside in this synthesis of individual consciousness which is social consciousness, and social consciousness imposes them on the belief of individuals. The individual mind is immersed in the social mind. . . . But the second idea . . . must seem exorbitant to most of us; because it offends all our mental habits. Religious, moral, logical conceptions are of social origin in the second sense that they are primitive and essentially conceptions of social things, conceptions formed on the model of social things. (Durkheim 1913: 87–88)

The reaction of Durkheim to these critiques is striking. According to him, all of them were based on a general misunderstanding of *Elemen-*

tary Forms and did not discuss his central argument. Durkheim was disappointed that his critics did not take the claim seriously that religion has a dynamogenic character, that is, it generates phenomena that are spiritual and rational (1913: 80–81). Analogously to Darlu, Louis Weber also criticized Durkheim for putting too much emphasis on social force when explaining the genesis of the human intellect (Weber 1913; 1914; see Schick, this volume). If the social is required for the generation of categories such as causality, can we still have any objectivity in the world (Weber 1914: 71–72)? It was precisely this tension between the empirical genesis of the categories and the ideal faculties of the intellect, between the two different interpretations of Darlu as well as the difference between socially constructed and cognitively hardwired categories, that allowed Mauss to fruitfully continue the category project and to give it its own spin.

Engagement with Other Disciplines: Psychology, History, Linguistics (1918–1939)

World War I had devastating effects on the Durkheim School. While several members such as Robert Hertz (1881–1915) and Antoine Bianconi (1882–1915) died in the trenches of the Great War, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) suffered a stroke and died in November 1917. The legacy was left to Marcel Mauss, who honored his dead friends in the first volume of the new edition of the *Année* (Mauss [1925] 2016). However bleak their scholarly and personal futures must have looked after the grim experience of World War I, the category project was immediately taken up by different members of the Durkheim School:⁹ Maurice Halbwachs, Marcel Granet, and Paul Fauconnet. Halbwachs, for example, summarizes the project of Durkheim's *Elementary Forms* with a focus on the question of categories in his article “La doctrine d'Émile Durkheim,” which quotes Durkheim's text almost verbatim:

There are in our mind eminent concepts, which play a fundamental role in knowledge: these are the most general frameworks of our thinking, which Kant has referred to as categories, or forms: notions of cause, substance, space, etc. Durkheim sees in their very importance a reason to consider these categories as “social in the second degree.” For, they do not only express the attitude of social thought towards things but the very things they represent and that society thinks are characters or aspects of society: the object of thought is social, as the subject who thinks it. (Halbwachs 1918: 387)

A similar reference was made by Paul Fauconnet, who stressed the historical character of the categories and called them “centers of intelligibility” (1922: 20):

Durkheim calls them categories, mother-notions, centers of intelligibility that are the frames or the tools of logical thought. . . . We cannot see how these categories should be innate to the human mind. They have a history: they have been gradually built during the course of evolution of civilization and, in our civilization, through the development of the physical and moral sciences. (Fauconnet 1922: 201–2)

At least of equal importance was Marcel Granet. Granet’s work might even be seen as the most consistent attempt to follow Durkheim’s program of the “Elementary Forms” (see Schüttpelz and Zillinger 2017). While Mauss and Durkheim had been introduced to Chinese cosmology through the work of the Dutch sinologist Jan Jakob Maria de Groot (see Mauss 1899), Granet opened up French sinology for sociological thought (Granet 1920). Retrospectively, he even claimed that the “Classification Essay” “will be marked as a date in the history of sinological study” (Granet [1934] 1994: 485).

Granet’s work seeks to verify Durkheim’s theory of the genesis of the categories by applying it to Chinese thought. As Robert LaFleur stresses in this volume, Granet added movement to “the conceptual power of Durkheim’s and Mauss’s classificatory schemes. . . . Far from being static, platonic forms, yin and yang are always moving. . . . Marcel Granet’s powerful response to *Les classifications primitives* establishes the overwhelming theme of *mouvement*.” (LaFleur, this volume).

Mauss himself, following in the footsteps of Bianconi and with the help of Antoine Meillet, launched what could be called the category project’s linguistic and historic turns (Mauss 1923a; 1924). He began to be interested in the relation between language and cognitive mechanisms¹⁰ and the degree to which categories are shaped and altered in the course of history. This interdisciplinary outreach of the category project is epitomized in the following passage in which Mauss comments on a short statement by Meillet:

One thing is well demonstrated: it is impossible to write the history of the abstracting, categorizing activity of the human mind, without taking these facts of linguistics and collective psychology into account and, above all, without taking into account the way in which these phenomena, being simultaneously social as well as psychological, are interdependent with the other phenomena of the history and very structure of societies. (Mauss [1923] 1964: 127)

This opening up of the category project took inspirations not only from linguistics, psychology, and history but also from technology. In 1927, Mauss explicitly criticized the claim that categories have a

single source such as religion and urged us to take technical practices into account as well:

The notion of class or genre is mainly juristic in origin, as Durkheim and I have assumed; as Hubert has said, the notion of time, and as Durkheim wrote in the “Elementary Forms of the Religious Life,” the notion of soul and, in some pages of the same book, which have been too little noticed, the notion of the Whole are mainly religious or symbolic in origin—none of these arguments mean to say that every other general notion has had the same kind of origin. We do not at all believe that. There remain to be studied many other categories, both living and dead, deriving from many other origins, and in particular categories of a technical nature. To cite only the mathematical concepts of Number and Space, who will ever say enough and with sufficient exactitude the part which weaving, basket-making, carpentry, nautical art, the wheel and the potter’s wheel have had in the origins of geometry, arithmetic and mechanics? . . . We would never come to an end of listing the various activities and also the various ideas whose forms are at bottom general ideas, including those which are still at bottom of our own ideas. These studies of the forms of thought, primitive or not, should appear at the end, to crown and to synthesise our studies. (Mauss [1927] 2006: 50)

Two of Mauss’s last texts, the essay on matter as well as the essay on the category of the person, also begin with explicit references to the category project (see Mauss [1938] 1985: 1–2). Of special interest is Mauss’s “Conceptions which Have Preceded the Notion of Matter” ([1939] 2006) in which he summarizes the main argument of the category project and extends its *raison d’être* to the study of science as a social milieu in itself (Schick et al. 2015). Mauss thereby broke ground for the social study of science *avant la lettre*. Introducing the notion of substance Mauss had been interested in at least since 1899 (see Allen 1998), he writes:

Philosophies and sciences are languages and it is merely a matter of making use of the best language available. Language itself and the categories of thought are “extractions” from the modes of thought and feeling of a given social milieu. . . . Moreover, if our way of thinking derives at every moment from all that constitutes social life, we ought not to keep apart from it the scientific mentality, so intimately it is connected to the mentality as a whole. (Mauss [1927] 2006: 141–2)

By including Western science in their argument about the social origin of human thought, the Durkheim School took it to its logical extreme foreshadowed in Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms*. It is no longer society that is built after models of nature but vice versa: the universe itself is modeled after the social (Durkheim [1912] 1995: 442–43). The legacy of the Durkheim School’s category project thus extends well into the present—and beyond.

Contributions to This Volume

This volume has three sections. The first, “Silenced Influences and Hidden Texts,” assembles contributions dealing with unknown or unmentioned influences that were, by accident or on purpose, concealed by Durkheim and Mauss. The second section, “Lateral Links and Ambivalent Antagonists,” discusses the fact that the category project was an integral part of the renewed European urge to (re)establish the humanities against the “hard sciences.” It is thus not surprising that the controversies within and between disciplines produced antagonists as well as “partners in crime.” The alliances were often fluid and dynamic. Although, for instance, Henri Bergson and Durkheim appear as antagonists retrospectively, it seems that both shared the aforementioned goals while their evaluation of the empirical sciences differed. The last section, “Forgotten Allies and Secret Students,” pays tribute to scholars who are often marginalized in scholarly debates focusing mainly on Durkheim and Mauss: Marcel Granet, Robert Hertz, Maurice Halbwachs, and Stefan Czarnowski.

Silenced Influences and Hidden Texts

Gregory Schrempp discusses three trajectories that situate the category project of the Durkheim School within the history of the general philosophical question of universalism and relativism. He understands the Durkheimian account of the categories as simultaneously universalist and relativist. Schrempp contrasts Durkheim’s account with the work of Max Müller and Franz Boas, who have been influenced by the Kantian a priori account of the categories, as well as with David Hume’s fundamental critique of causality and its influence on anthropology, especially on E. B. Tylor and James Frazer. Finally, Schrempp contrasts the relativist-universalist Durkheimian theory with contemporary research in the cognitive sciences, namely George Lakoff and Mark Johnson’s famous work on the embodied character of knowledge, where the focus shifts from the bodily experience of society to the individual experience of the body.

Nicolas Sembel uses the term “hidden” to point out unacknowledged texts, persons, concepts as well as intellectual and social links shaping the development of Durkheim and Mauss. Sembel bases his work on findings in the library loan registers during Mauss and Durkheim’s period in Bordeaux as well as on texts whose publication

had been suppressed and were only discovered recently. This provides a new perspective on the collaboration of Mauss and Durkheim. While Hubert and Mauss both had their own field of specialization—the labor was divided, so to speak—Durkheim and his nephew were from the very beginning closely collaborating, having the same intellectual background and the same goal in mind: developing a general sociology.

The relation of the Durkheim School to British Anthropology is explored via the notion of *mana* in Nicolas Meylan's contribution. Meylan traces the notion of *mana* back to the work of Max Müller, who used *mana*—similar to Mauss and Hubert—to argue, against Tylor and Frazer, that religion is not based on reason but has its origin in another faculty (for Müller in poetry and feeling). This argument against Tylor and Frazer can also be found in the works of John King and Robert Ranulph Marett and contextualizes Hubert and Mauss's account within a general tendency in British Anthropology.

Susan Stedman Jones's article aims at understanding the question “how are categories laboriously forged?” She refers to the work of Renouvier, who was a major influence for Durkheim, in order to clarify the role of categories as collective representations and the importance of labor to generate categories. The categories of relation and becoming are fundamental for Renouvier and were adapted by Durkheim to develop his theory. Collective labor can thus be characterized as the effort to create, synthesize, stabilize, and differentiate relations through rituals and group actions.

Anne Rawls shows that the work on the categories already started, if not explicitly, in Durkheim's “Division of Labour,” which analyzes the central role of constitutive practices of modern and premodern societies for the creation of categories. She identifies the independence of situated practice from structure as a central point of Durkheim's theory, which influenced the work of Talcott Parsons and Harold Garfinkel. While in the 1930s value neutrality had become the paradigm for scientific research, Rawls demonstrates with Durkheim, Parsons, and Garfinkel that statistics, like crime records in the United States, are social facts imbued with and building upon moral judgements. Rawls argues with Durkheim for a self-reflexive sociology that recognizes the moral implications of the creation of social facts and thus exposes unjust moral relationships and the practices that produce them.

Mario Schmidt's contribution concludes this section by suggesting that the notion of *expérience* refers not only to “experience” but also to the understanding of “experiments” at the turn of the nineteenth to the twentieth century. Schmidt points out that Durkheim was well

acquainted with the works of Claude Bernard and that an interpretation applying the concept of experiment to rituals of effervescence paves the way for a new perspective on the category project. Categories are interpreted as intersubjectively experienced experiments on social matter.

Lateral Links and Ambivalent Antagonists

Erhard Schüttpelz stresses the importance of the “Essay on the Gift” and the notion of the “total social fact” for the category project. The “total social fact” combines the Durkheimian category of totality with the notion of the social fact in order to address the essential fluidity of societies. The social force, which is presupposed as underlying any social situation, is prevalent in gift exchange. It thus reveals a collective force that obligates the participants of the exchange and simultaneously provides them with a certain amount of freedom. The “holism of the gift” thereby transcends modern divisions and, as Schüttpelz points out, it is precisely this aspect that constitutes societies.

Totality is also at the core of Nick Allen’s contribution. He applies this Durkheimian category to kinship, draws the consequences of totality for sociology as a science and uses it to interpret Indo-European myths. Totality as a starting point provides an alternative to egocentric kinship models. Allen’s tetradic theory offers the simplest form of classification of a society on the basis of marriage. It presupposes the existence of the societal body as a whole in which the society’s members participate and which can be ritually divided. In Vedic literature one finds the fictitious ritual of the sacrifice *of* and *to* Puruṣa, where the category of totality is rather an ontological property than a mere abstraction.

William Watts Miller engages Durkheim with Bergson and recent research on primates to shed new light on the origins of social life and the genesis of the notion of effervescence. Watts Miller points to a paradox within Durkheim’s work that argues against spontaneous creation and for a strong distinction between animal and human life. While Bergson shares the interest in creativity with Durkheim, his strong opposition of instinct and intelligence does not provide a convincing argument. Rather, it is an obstacle to understand the genesis of social behavior. The comparison of Durkheim with contemporary research in the cognitive sciences allows Watts Miller to stress the importance of creative effervescence as a social phenomenon in hominin evolution. As he argues, there was not a single moment when human

beings stepped out of their animality, but rather multiple creative social attempts and solutions.

The relation of Bergson and Durkheim is also at center stage in Heike Delitz's contribution that focuses on the social origins of the category project itself. The polemical tension between Bergson and Durkheim is considered essential at the *moment philosophique of 1900*, not only for the development of the category project but also for Bergson's sociology thirty years later. While Bergson had to be sociologized by Durkheim and his followers, such as Hubert and Halbwachs, this process of polemics, interpretation, and transformation also left its marks within the thought of the Durkheim School. Delitz describes these reciprocal influences and aversions along the lines of the phenomena of time, memory, and the genesis of societies.

Johannes F. M. Schick's article discusses the categories of causality, time, and technology against the background of a controversy between members of the Durkheim School and some philosophers. The debate revolved around the question of whether or not the genesis of intelligence, and consequently of the categories, is a social process or whether it is the material engagement of human beings that generates intelligence. Louis Weber, a forgotten but historically important critic of Durkheim, argued for the independence of a technical intelligence prior to any form of sociality. This dualistic conception is contrasted with Mauss and Hubert's holistic ontology. They argue for the concomitance of the social and the technical generating differences, categories, and concepts that are in a recursive relationship with the human body and its sociotechnical practices. These practices are illustrated with the genesis of the category of time, where the human body serves as the medium on which time operates.

Forgotten Allies and Secret Students

Martin Zillinger focuses on the category of space in Stefan Czarnowski's almost forgotten lecture "Le morcellement de l'étendue et sa limitation dans la religion et la magie" (Czarnowski 1925). Zillinger shows that this text is crucial for rethinking Durkheim's notion of "the sacred" in non-essentialist, relational terms and that it already entails positions the sociologists of the Collège de Sociologie defended ten years later. Czarnowski's study of space results in a theory of boundaries and thresholds, where the "sacred" is distributed into a concentrated (*sacré concentré*) and an unbound form (*sacré libre*). In moving from a center, the *sacré concentré* transforms into a *sacré libre*

that faces competing forces coming from outside. The forces of the wilderness are represented at all units of a graduated social space, while the forces of the social are found in different intensities within and without. The “rhythm of space” thus constituted changes with the person and their gods defining the center of their world.

Robert LaFleur’s contribution situates Granet’s œuvre within the tradition of the *Année sociologique* and stresses the importance of movement as a classificatory category. Granet’s imaginative ethnography is based upon Durkheim’s *Elementary Forms* and his “Division of Labour.” The detailed account of religious life in China appears as “part of a larger analysis of social dynamics fueled by the intellectual life of the *Année sociologique*” (LaFleur in this volume). The full force of Granet’s work, however, is the interpenetration of sociological and sinological analysis that illustrates the dynamism of social life and of the categories.

Ulrich van Loyen relates Hertz’s ([1909] 1960) classical study “Pre-eminence of the Right Hand” to questions of gender and inequality. He reads Hertz’ essay as a praxeology of classification which understands human beings as natural symbols embedded into a cosmos that has to be “handled.” Inequality is explained as resulting from the “idea that by inviting one hand to do the same all the time one enables a regime of stability as the basis for cosmological distinctions that otherwise would collapse” (van Loyen in this volume). Gender distinctions are also an expression of the stabilization of this pre-eminence. It is, however, precisely this need of the *homo duplex* to multiply themselves constantly through polar distinctions that allows for a reflexive stance toward these practices and makes fellow human beings similar in their shared strategies of world-making.

Jean-François Bert interprets the notion of the “total social fact” through readings of Lévi-Strauss, Bourdieu, and Foucault. While Lévi-Strauss stresses the mutual dependency of the individual and the social that is expressed by a total social fact such as gift exchange, Bourdieu reproaches Lévi-Strauss’s position for not considering the question of time in the process of reciprocity. According to Bourdieu the total social fact focuses on the complexity of situations and avoids a priori replications of dualisms such as history and sociology or understanding and explaining. For Foucault, the notion overcomes the *homo duplex* and provides an archaeological account, which he integrates into his own method and—without mentioning Mauss—develops further in his genealogy. The intersection of the three readings allows a clearer picture of what Mauss was trying to convey with the concept of the “total social fact.”

Jean-Christophe Marcel argues that Halbwachs continues Durkheim's program of the "Elementary Forms" and his social ontology. His theory of collective memory extends Durkheim and Mauss's theory of collective representations. Halbwachs specifies the cognitive powers of collective representations and describes how they are built and combined in collective consciousness. This "collective psychology" deals with collective representations that are extended and crystallized in spatial relations. Collective thought, according to Halbwachs, is to remember, which is always related to other members of the group and to matter. Material artifacts are apt to store memories and participate in the stabilization of a society.

The concluding chapter by Wendy James takes the category project to the "field" by illustrating how the Durkheimian approach can instruct and inspire fieldwork as discovery of other social worlds. Especially the notions of effervescence and of sociality as cooperation are useful to conceptualize ethnographic material such as the use and reinvention of instruments and rituals, for example, the musical practices of the Uduk (Sudan) and the Gumuz (Ethiopia) in refugee camps as means to produce sociality. James reminds us that the systematic claim of the category project arises precisely from the fact that it cannot be completed as such. The search for new categories always remains possible and necessary. The human mind is characterized by the dynamic quality of creating new intellectual formations and needs those new and different categories to decenter itself:

The Aristotelian categories are not indeed the only ones which exist in our minds, or have existed in the mind and have to be dealt with. Above all it is essential to draw up the largest possible catalogue of categories; it is essential to start with all those, which it is possible to know man has used. It will be clear that there have been and still are dead or pale or obscure moons in the firmament of reason. The big and the small, the animate and the inanimate, the right and the left have been categories. . . . All the categories are merely general symbols, which, like other symbols, have been acquired only by mankind very slowly. This work of constitution needs to be described. . . . For this work was itself complex, hazardous, chancy. Mankind erected its mind by all possible means: technical and non-technical, mystical and non-mystical; using its mind (senses, sentiment, reason), using its body; at the whim of choices, things and times; at the whim of nations and their achievements or ruins. Our general concepts are still unstable and imperfect. I sincerely believe that it is by concerted efforts, but from opposite directions, that our psychological, sociological and historical sciences will one day be able to attempt a description of this painful history. And I believe that it is this science, this sentiment of the present relativity of our reason, that will perhaps inspire the best philosophy. Allow me to conclude in this way. (Mauss [1924] 1979: 32–33)

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Notes

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1. We are well aware that Durkheim’s focus on the categories may even have started earlier, that is, with his “Division of Labor,” as Anne Rawls

and Susan Stedman-Jones both argue convincingly from different perspectives; but we here focus on the development of the category project as described by the members of the Durkheim School themselves, that is, as a history of a collaborative project closely connected to the journal *Année sociologique*.

2. Our work on the category project is a collective endeavor that would not have seen the light of day without the inspiration of and continuous dialogue with Erhard Schüttpelz.
3. All quotes were translated by the authors if not referenced otherwise.
4. For Mauss, the genesis of numbers and the categories of “left” and “right” actually belonged together: “At the basis of the abstract concept of number, we find a mystical egocentric concept that was gradually analyzed, increased and enriched. First comes the number 2, coming from internal sensations of the ‘double self’, right and left, or rather front and back” (Mauss 1904b: 313).
5. Mauss had already started to be interested in African cultures earlier. In a review of R. E. Dennett’s “At the Back of the Black Man’s Mind,” he writes:

According to him, among the Bavili there exists a complete system of classifications, of categories in which all nature is organized. A complete philosophy, conscious of the world, in which things are grouped into families, principles, governing couples of causes and effects; each of these coupled elements is distinguished to the male and female. . . . The six categories are: water, earth, fire, procreation and movement, fertility. (Mauss 1907b: 306)
6. In his review of E. Pechuel-Loesche’s “Die Loango Expedition,” Bianconi explicitly links his linguistic explorations to Durkheim and Mauss’s essay on classification, thereby filling a geographical gap in that essay (Bianconi 1910: 219).
7. The contemporary fame and global impact of *Elementary Forms* is also shown by the fact that Maurice Leenhardt, a follower and critic of the Durkheim School, whom unfortunately we cannot discuss at length, had been sent a copy by his family. He received it on his birthday, 9 March 1914, in his New-Caledonian office (Clifford 1992: 92).
8. Steven Lukes provides a detailed description of this discussion in his seminal “Emile Durkheim: His Life and Work. A Historical and Critical Study” (Lukes 1985: 506–11).
9. As Jean-Christophe Marcel has recently shown, Céléstin Bouglé, Maurice Halbwachs, and François Simiand played an important role in the transformation of the *Année sociologique* to the *Annales sociologiques* (Marcel 2019). Due to the limited scope of this introduction, we merely focus on Granet, Fauconnet, and Halbwachs. The role of Simiand and Bouglé in the development of the category project calls for further exploration.
10. How much the category project had been infused with linguistic problems can also be seen by Mauss’s review activity in the second volume of the postwar *Année*. Here, he reviews C. K. Ogden and I. A. Richards’s

“The Meaning of Meaning” as well as Ernst Cassirer’s “Philosophie der symbolischen Formen” and writes approvingly: “All admit that the categories of thought have taken on different forms in history and that their critique is impossible without studying these forms. All admit that they have varied mainly due to the ways in which men have lived, spoken and thought collectively (*en commun*)” (Mauss 1925: 256).

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Note: Volumes of the *Année sociologique* are cited as AS. Volumes of the *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger* are cited as RP.

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