

**Durkheim vs. Bergson? The Hidden Roots of Postmodern Theory and
The Postmodern 'Return' of the Sacred**

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Abstract:

Postmodern social theory is often seen as entirely distinct from and even antagonistic to modern sociological thought. This essay endeavors to challenge this framing by tracing the emergence of postmodernist social thought to an historical development in western societies intimately tied to the conditions of emergence of modern sociology: i.e., to the crisis of the loss of the sacred for the modern intellectual class. Postmodern theory is linked to two purportedly opposed 'schools' of modern social thought, i.e., Durkheimianism and Bergsonism, by demonstrating the careful concern in each of these strands for a renovation of the sacred in the wake of the devastating effects Enlightenment and materialist thought had on traditional modes of the sacred for intellectuals (if not for larger segments of western societies). Explicit textual evidence of this influence is also examined.

One of the central ideas that emerges from much postmodern theory is that all ideas must be understood as originating from specific perspectives, and thus that claims to unsituated knowledge are suspect because they deny that most fundamental characteristic of knowledge. Postmodern theorists have accordingly produced a great deal of scholarship that attempts to demonstrate how forms of knowledge traditionally taken as objective, especially scientific knowledge, must be properly understood as the situated, perspectival knowledge of specific actors with particular political and cultural blinders informing their construction of reality. Little postmodern theory, however, has to date turned this theoretical perspective on the knowledge produced by postmodern theorists themselves.

This essay aims to be a modest contribution in just that direction, i.e., toward a historical and sociological understanding of the production of postmodern theory in the same spirit of inquiry found in other recent work in the sociology of intellectual production (Bourdieu 1984; Fabiani 1988; Collins 1998; Goldman 1994; Szokolczai 1998, 2000). More specifically, I will argue here that there exists a central shared concern to sketch the limits of the rational in careful attention to the non-rational in traditional, classical sociological theory and in postmodern theory, a concern that is however often overlooked in both. I make this connection by trying to trace something of an 'underground social history' of origins and development in postmodern theory. This effort will proceed by locating its origins in two French¹ intellectual sources, one of which might be considered a distant relative to postmodernism but for the fact that it has been all but forgotten by the modern intellectual world, the other which is generally misconceived as the progenitor of a stream of thought innately hostile to postmodernism but which I propose is in fact an important source from which postmodern theory draws: the two sources are Bergsonian philosophy and Durkheimian sociology. As these two sources were seen, in their own time and indeed by a good deal of intellectual history, as unalterably opposed one to the other, it will seem only too clear to those familiar with

this intellectual history why I use the term "underground," as a fair amount of digging will be necessary in order to discover the common roots. Nonetheless, I think this effort to show how we can think of the two as instead sharing important elements and a common opposition to an intellectual challenger that is in fact the same challenger that spawned contemporary postmodern thought will yield some dividends. Finally, in so doing I hope to be able at the conclusion to make a few remarks on the possibilities and uses of postmodern social theory, given this understanding of its historical and social sources of origination.

Postmodernism and the Crisis of the Intellectuals

One risks losing oneself quickly in attempting to make even preliminary remarks about the nature of postmodernism and postmodern theory, given the discursive quicksand that these terms have generated in scholarly literature over the past 20 years or so. There are a considerable number of arguments advanced regarding the essence of postmodernism (if one can dare to speak of the essence of a thing that in some arguments is the very denial of essences). Some of these run parallel to arguments about the advent of post-industrial society, while others point instead to the complete collapse of the subject-object distinction so central to rational and particularly scientific varieties of inquiry, and still others emphasize the role of the mass media as central structuring agent of experience and knowledge in the 'postmodern' world. Perhaps the most celebrated definition is that of Lyotard, who talks of the postmodern condition as the collapse of grand narratives, that is, of uniform and orthodox worldviews that can encompass everything and claim widespread adherence based upon this purported epistemological inclusivity and certainty (Lyotard 1979). Pluralism is an obvious outcome of this situation, something Lyotard regards as salutary, but others have contended that a certain anxiety equally arises with the death of these comforting grand narratives.

The problem of this anxiety, of the sense of ungroundedness, is an interesting element of the postmodern. However, it remains empirically unclear precisely how

generalizable this sense of the loss of grand narratives and of the accompanying anxiety is. Is this a phenomenon we should expect to find throughout the social order, does it tend to be more or less pronounced in some strata or groups than others, or is it perhaps primarily a characteristic of only particular groups and absent in others? I am in no position of course to offer a definitive answer to that question, but it is obvious that one social group certainly seems in many ways to be experiencing the postmodern 'crisis' in very acute ways. That group is in fact the one that *invented* postmodern theory: intellectuals.² We can see this more clearly by further clarifying our definition of the postmodern. Some discussions of postmodernism have attempted to define it *vis-à-vis* modernity by linking the two to the opposed phenomena of differentiation and de-differentiation. Here, it is argued that, whereas modernity is characterizable as the process of the increasing differentiation of different spheres of activity in society (e.g., economic, cultural, political), postmodernism is that wherein this differentiation is undone or reversed and increasingly all social phenomena are collapsed into a single sphere, that of the cultural (Lash 1990). De-differentiation has thus meant an expansion of the realm of the cultural to occupy formerly distinct realms such as the political, the economic, and the social; it has also meant something of a collapse, or at least a weakening, of the high culture/low culture dichotomy. What all of this has meant most clearly for intellectuals is a significant rearrangement of the position of culture in society and a potentially radical remaking of the role of this figure most associated with the production, reproduction and caretaking of culture, whether a particular intellectual sees that radical change as propitious or mournful. So whether or not one accepts certain postmodernist claims about widespread and general changes in industrial capitalism or in the entirety of the social world, it seems likely at first glance that the postmodern 'crisis,' if it exists at all, might be associated in some manner with a 'crisis' of the intellectual. I ask the reader to keep that hypothesis in mind as I turn now to some pieces of an intellectual history of postmodern theory intended to add weight to that case and also

perhaps to enable a few other interventions into the question of the relevance and limitations of postmodern theory.

The Underground History of Postmodernism, Part 1: The French Third Republic Context

The history of postmodern thought I want to explicate begins in the French Third Republic, roughly during the second half of the life of the Republic, from around 1900 to the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. In the aftermath of the fall of the second Bonaparte Empire and of the Paris Commune's rise and demise, the late 19th century saw the emergence of a great number of political and cultural debates that would touch upon the entire French population but that were especially apparent and powerful among intellectuals. The most essential of these had to do with the 'problem' of secularization of French society. The political coming-to-power of the Radical Party and its alliance with university professors eager to professionalize, if not always necessarily to secularize, their position (which in large measure meant differentiating it from the other institution in France most involved in the educational and moralist project, namely the Roman Catholic Church) brought about a large number of far-reaching reforms beginning in the early years of the Republic and extending up through the prelude to the Great War. Intellectuals both inside and outside the universities positioned themselves in the battles over the replacement of the moral authority of the Church, for the first time enlisting their capital *as intellectuals* in the eminently political struggles over these affairs. These struggles in fact prompted the very emergence of the term *intellectuel* in French discourse, albeit initially as a pejorative term, wielded by one of those intellectuals using his intellectual capital to intervene in political struggles against others he disapproved of for doing the same.³ In large measure, the cataclysm of the Dreyfus Affair at the turn of the century can be understood as a skirmish in this larger battle of intellectuals over the secularization question. Some (largely, though not entirely, inside the universities) enlisted in the Radical and Solidarist (and republican, rationalist) cause of a totally

secular French society and became protectors of Captain Dreyfus against the purported aggression against the traditional spiritual and moral force of the Army and the Church. Others (largely, though not entirely, extra-university figures) saw the anti-Dreyfus position as the only one possible for those wise enough to see the disastrous consequences of the total secularization of French society.

As noted at the outset, the two proto-postmodern 'schools of thought' from this turbulent period I want to map and to trace descend from Emile Durkheim, one of the founders of French sociology and a key figure in the intellectual world of this period, and from Henri Bergson, the vitalist philosopher of the Collège de France who was recognized during this period as perhaps the most important contemporary European thinker. During this period, these two thinkers were recognized as two of the most influential and important intellectual figures, and their influence in many ways ran beyond intellectual circles, as they were involved in other debates on the nature of the Republic, on education and on the rise of secularism in Catholic France. Bergson, by the turn of the century, was already at the Collège de France, to which he had been elected in 1900 after having spent the previous two years at the Cole Normal Superior, while Durkheim was established in a chair of education at the Sorbonne in 1902,⁴ after a lengthy and highly successful tenure at Bordeaux that had already given him a formidable reputation among both those sympathetic and those unsympathetic to the project of sociology. Durkheim had, by the time of his move to the Sorbonne, already published three of the four major works with which he would later most be identified,⁵ as well as dozens of other articles and book reviews in professional journals. *L'Année sociologique*, which had already published about half of the yearly volumes it would publish in Durkheim's lifetime,⁶ was widely known and respected among a varied intellectual readership. Further, Durkheim was actively and quite visibly involved in political activity, both externally to the university in the Dreyfus affair and internally in the business of working to get colleagues and collaborators on the *Année* into positions of

security and influence.⁷ Despite this reputation, however, Bergson was certainly more personally celebrated than Durkheim, benefiting as he did from the high profile position of his chair in the Collège de France and from the wide success of his work, which would extend to a significant degree even outside the realm of academic readers with the publication in 1907 of *L'Évolution créatrice*. Though his own organizational and institution-building skills were considerably less developed than those of Durkheim, a Bergsonian movement had arisen to a large degree despite the efforts of its 'founder' that would have a tremendous impact on European culture (through various artistic avant-gardes of the first half of the century) and politics (through various voluntarist radical movements of both left and right).

There have emerged a number of schematic efforts to account for the French intellectual field of the time, most of which argue that it is clear that Durkheim/Durkheimianism and Bergson/Bergsonianism⁸ are at opposing poles, whatever those poles happen to be given the particular analysis, and that on the issue of secularization especially they are in radical conflict. For some (Clark 1973; Grogan 1988), the Latin Quarter during this period is classifiable most importantly along the axis of cartesianism and spontaneity. Cartesianism is characterized by a predilection for "order, hierarchy, authority and the bureaucratic institutions exemplifying the esprit de géométrie: the state, the military, and the university...[and] most compatible with the scientific mentality" (Clark 1973:17),⁹ while spontaneism is defined by a preference for anti-authoritarian, anarchic, often irrational or anti-rational modes of thought and action. According to these schemas, Durkheimianism, seen as a descendant of 19th century positivism, is cartesian, Bergsonianism spontaneist.

Jean-Louis Fabiani has studied the field of the discipline of philosophy in the Third Republic, and within this still smaller realm of intellectual activity he argues that yet again Durkheim and Bergson line up, with their respective allies, on opposite sides of the fence.¹⁰ Fabiani wants to explain the institutional affiliations and, more importantly,

intellectual orientations of the philosophers of the Republic by determining the alchemy by which specific class, geographic, familial, and educational capitals translated themselves, within the logic of the field, into certain positions. The struggle within the field is ultimately reducible in his analysis to a confrontation between "le philosophe artiste ou métaphysicien" and "le philosophe savant" (Fabiani 1988), that is, between, on the one hand, philosophers of a spiritualist orientation, who tend to hold an idea of philosophy as a singular and rather esoteric activity comprehensible only to those with a particular gift best described as aesthetic, and who tend to come from families of the Parisian business class, and, on the other, those of a positivist or scientific bent, who reject the esoteric view of the discipline held by the spiritualists and tend to come from the provinces and the middle bourgeoisie (in particular, they tend to be sons of intellectuals) (Fabiani 1988:91-7). The distinction he delineates is traceable to two traditions in French philosophy, that of the descendants of Maine de Biran and Auguste Comte, and he acknowledges that in fact it maps quite easily onto the two dominant, constantly struggling forms of French philosophy pointed to by Michel Foucault, namely, the philosophy of experience, meaning, and the subject, and the philosophy of knowledge, rationality, and the concept (Fabiani 1988:160). This is very tidy map of the French philosophical scene and it would be too much to argue that it captures nothing of the truth. But does it enable us to fully understand the position and the intellectual heritage of the Durkheimians and the Bergsonians, especially on this central issue of the crisis of secularization and the intellectual?

The short answer to that question is that it does not, as in fact Durkheimian and Bergsonian thought can perhaps be better understood as contributing mutually to an intellectual project that both directly (through empirical intellectual influence) and indirectly is understandable as in a sense 'proto-postmodern' and united against a common foe. Both can be seen (as can postmodern theory, as I will argue later) as engaged in an effort to affirm the power of the cultural through a reconfiguration and

redeployment of the religious notion of the sacred in the midst of an intellectual movement in the direction of radical secularization, which was opposed by a traditionalist and anti-intellectual religiosity unacceptable to most intellectuals. The gist of both Durkheimian and Bergsonian thought is a profound criticism of the various kinds of materialism that were in the ascendant in French intellectual culture in the Third Republic, at least partially as a direct result of the very constitution of the Republic, in the context of a deep anxiety that the existing, traditional forms of the sacred could and would not sufficiently answer to the dilemmas of the modern world, if indeed they even survived intact. The materialisms opposed by both Durkheimianism and Bergsonianism included Marxism in some early forms, but were more typically derived from other rationalist and socialist sources indigenous to France. The ultimate thrust of both positions is towards recognition of the gravity of the secularization crisis and the need for an effort to reconfigure, rather than simply eliminate, the sacred.

For Bergson and those he influenced (among whom can be counted Charles Péguy, Georges Sorel, Jacques and Raïssa Maritain, Gabriel Marcel, Marcel Proust, many figures in the early Cubist movement, political figures on the nationalist and Catholic right *and* on the revolutionary syndicalist and anarchist left), the case for involvement in a reconfiguring of the sacred is obvious. In all of Bergson's central works, but especially in his last, *Les Deux sources de la morale et de la religion*, written in 1932, he makes clear that the human struggle has always been against the static, the material, the inert, the simply rational, and that the dynamic or the mystical is the force that will create the modern world. It is not too difficult to read him here in a language that is specifically about the situation of the intellectuals. The progress of morality and religion, per Bergson, is dependent on the generalization of a mode of religious activity, namely mysticism, and in its purest form the mysticism of the Christian mystics such as Catherine of Sienna, Teresa of Avila, and Joan of Arc, that originates in an aesthetic, spiritual elite and that consists most essentially of an internal, "supra-intellectual" form of

active spirituality (static religion Bergson classifies as "infra-intellectual") (Bergson 1977:186-7). His consistent position was that, through a process of evolution that exceeded mere materialist theories but that was instead a kind of spiritual evolutionism, older and more traditional forms of the sacred (i.e., static, closed religion based on myth structure and external ritual, capable only of enlisting people to allegiance to local and national groups for which nature had intended them) were being made irrelevant and new forms were coming into existence that would push the human situation beyond its past limitations and towards a purer experience of the sacred. This purer sacred experience would bring about the ideal 'brotherhood of man.' These ideas were taken up by a wide range of the opponents of secular materialism who yet recognized the inadequacy of the traditional forms of the sacred offered by the Catholic Church.

For Durkheimianism, the case for a project dedicated to reconfiguring the sacred is somewhat more involved. Durkheim himself was, practically speaking, one of the central figures commonly identified as on the side of the rational secularists or cartesians in the debates I have just summarized, but things are not so simple as to leave him and the heritage of this thought there. In fact, the very connection I am making, i.e., of placing Durkheim on the side rather of the 'culturalists' or idealists, even of a wave of 'neo-spiritualism,' was made by a good number of contemporary commentators, some very close to Durkheim. Dominique Parodi, who had contributed to the *Année*, spoke of Durkheim's project in these terms, as did Emile Bréhier, historian of French philosophy, who went still further in talking of Durkheim's "mystique sociale" as directly comparable to Bergsonian intuitionism (Parodi 1925; Bréhier 1950). Indeed, if a considerable amount of Durkheim's work seems to indicate his acceptance of some kind of secularization hypothesis, his major work on religion, on which he had started work early in the first decade of the century, is rather clear in its argument for the staying power of the sacred, or at least of its essential moral components and derivations (Durkheim 1995:429). Durkheim's lectures from the early 1900s on education and morality seem to

indicate the same recognition of the continuing importance of the category of the sacred in apparently secularizing France (Durkheim 1963:8).

Durkheim's position on the sacred is complicated, even seemingly contradictory at times; there can be discerned in his work arguments both for the necessary diminution of the sacred (at least in its traditional forms) in the modern world and for its utter necessity. It is when one moves beyond Durkheim himself to some other close associates within his *Année sociologique* team of collaborators that a Durkheimian project dedicated to a preservation of the sacred becomes more evident. Marcel Mauss, the *heir apparent* of the Durkheimian school on his uncle's death, demonstrated in his later work (especially in the essay on the gift and his unfinished thesis on prayer (Mauss 1950, 1968)) the continuing force of the notion of the sacred in its role in the manifestation of what he called *faits sociaux totaux*, total social facts, which were the extension of his uncle's notion that what the individual actually worships in religious ritual is not God, but the social in its essence. In fact, one sees in the collective work of Mauss and Henri Hubert, another central member of the Durkheimian team, a theory of the sacred that diverges in crucial ways from that of Durkheim and even points in some ways toward that of Bergson. The theoretical thrust of their innovation here is to undermine the finality and the foundational quality of the category of the sacred in Durkheimian thought, for they believed they had stumbled in their work on magic upon a category that included the sacred as a sub-category and that applied therefore not only to the realm of magic but to that of religion as well and, in substance if not precisely in form, to similar foundational notions of power and force in science. This category, which by definition cannot disappear completely in any society, proves difficult for them to define neatly, as it comprises a range of experience in many ways alien to the consciousness of the modern West in which an energy that can be embodied in entities and that is at once material and spiritual is conceived as inseparable from the "milieu mystérieux" in which it acts. It is

in short at once a force, a being, an action, a state and a quality of things or events (Mauss 1950:107):

Force par excellence...a sort of ether, imponderable, communicable, that spreads out from itself...a pure efficacy, that is however a material and localizable substance at the same time as it is spiritual, that acts at a distance yet by direct connection, if not by contact, mobile and unstable without itself moving, impersonal and clothed in personal forms, divisible and continuous. (Mauss 1950:111-112, 118)

Mauss and Hubert call this notion *mana*, borrowing a Melanesian term for such an entity/force/milieu, but, in arguing for its universality in pre-modern societies, they find parallel concepts in many other societies. The Iroquois *orenda*, the Algonquin *manitou*, the *naual* among Mexican and Central American Indians, and the *arungquiltha* of the Arunta in Australia all fulfill the same function and describe the same variety of space/force wherein and/or through which magical action occurs. Even the notion of *brahman* in Vedic India and those of *physis* and *dynamis* in ancient Greece are of the same parentage, if they have lost some elements of the truly primitive *mana* category.

This recognition of *mana* as a more fundamental category than the sacred, and the relation of this recognition to the more focused attention paid to the impure sacred, is acknowledged by Mauss as an important and lasting point of difference with Durkheim's thought. In a brief intellectual autobiographical statement he wrote as part of the process of election to the Collège de France in 1930, Mauss noted:

We [Hubert and Mauss] detected at its foundation [that is, of magic], as at the foundation of religion, a vast common notion that we called by a name borrowed from Melaneso-Polynesian, that of *mana*. This idea is perhaps more general than that of the sacred. Since then, Durkheim has tried to deduct it logically from the notion of the sacred. We were never sure he was right, and I continue still to speak of the magico-religious base. (Mauss 1979:218)

In fact, the later work of Mauss and Hubert vividly bears this out. The position taken on magic and *mana* in the 1904 essay is reiterated in an essay written in 1906 (later reprinted

in 1909 as the preface to their *Mélanges d'histoire des religions*) that bore the title "Introduction à l'analyse de quelques phénomènes religieux." They are again explicit in insisting on the social character of magical belief and practice and thereby opposing the position of Durkheim:

Magical rites and representations have the same social character as sacrifice and...they depend on a notion that is identical or analogous to that of the sacred [i.e., that of *mana*]. (Hubert and Mauss 1968:19)

They acknowledge in this essay the adoption of their understanding of *mana* by many of the chief figures in contemporary anthropology, citing the "supplementary evidence" for their theory provided by, among others, Sidney Hartland and Frazer as a confirmation of their results (Hubert and Mauss 1968:21).

In his unfinished thesis on prayer, we see Mauss arriving at the same conclusion of Bergson in *Les Deux sources*, i.e., that contemporary spirituality seems to move more and more in two complementary directions: 1) toward greater spiritualism (physical rites being more and more replaced by mental attitudes), and 2) towards greater individualism (rites formerly totally collective become more and more individual and non-collective). In the case of both changes, he cites liberal Protestantism as the driving force and points out how prayer has utterly followed this progression from completely mechanical, ritual and collective to almost completely interior and individual, i.e., toward mysticism, and this despite his sociological 'prejudices.'

Beyond Mauss and Hubert, there is an even more intriguing figure who demonstrated the real connections between Bergson and Durkheim from within the Durkheimian camp: Robert Hertz. Though his early death in World War I prevented him from producing more than a handful of mature works (see Hertz 1928), his legacy lived on in Mauss' lecture courses on various topics in the sociology of religion, as Mauss inherited Hertz's lecture notes and his unfinished thesis on sin and expiation on Durkheim's death in 1917. Hertz, in both his personal and intellectual lives, recognized

the problem of the reconfiguration of the sacred for the intellectual and the modern world as central, and he went farther than either Durkheim or Mauss in trying to inquire into its specific nature. The two short essays by which he is best remembered on the collective representation of death and the preference for the right hand as a manifestation of the larger phenomenon of religious polarity were intended by Hertz as contributions to the larger work that fixed his attention: the study of sin and expiation that would have been his doctoral thesis had he lived to finish it (Mauss 1925:24). In this work, of which Hertz finished only a draft of the introduction and an outline of subsequent chapters (Parkin 1996:125-6),¹¹ he intended to examine comparatively the religious practices by which states of moral impurity are determined, punished, and absolved. His argument was that the foundational notions of sin, or "transgression of a moral code, which is considered to involve, by virtue of itself, disastrous consequences for its author, and which concerns the religious society exclusively" (Hertz 1994:108), and of expiation, or the process by which the author of sin is reintegrated into the community and absolved of his guilt, are not, as is commonly thought, peculiar to the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather, they exist in all, even the most primitive, societies, and an understanding of these practices was absolutely imperative for an understanding of the moral structures inherent in any given religious system. In examining the practices of sin and expiation as social institutions, Hertz hoped to shed light on the social nature and history of ideas of good and evil and on the ways in which individuals and groups are morally formed so as to adhere to the given moral structures of their societies through processes involving punishment of acts of transgression and complex rites designed to reintegrate those guilty of transgression and those (e.g., the dead) otherwise beyond the pale of the moral community.

It is striking that, in each of Hertz's major works, his focus is upon aspects of the sacred (e.g., sin, the left hand) that clearly fit into the left, or impure sacred, or upon the process by which things can move from impure to pure sacred (e.g., the changing status of the dead during funereal rites). Mauss spoke of Hertz's lifelong obsession as a

sociologist with "the dark side of humanity: crime and sin, punishment and pardon" (Hertz 1994:17, 39). Clearly, in this intellectual interest in the aspects of the sacred that Durkheim left relatively unexamined, Hertz was closer to Mauss and Hubert than to the founder of the *Année* team. He was in fact the sole Durkheimian to significantly study the impure sacred, a fact that is important for considering the historical heritage of the Durkheimians we are reconstructing here. For, as we will see shortly, it is in their interest in the impure sacred that we can most clearly see a Durkheimian influence on the postmodern thinkers of subsequent generations.

The Underground History of Postmodernism, Part 2: The Postmodern Sacred

Let us now pose the most pointed question of my thesis: what is the evidence of the historical connection between the Durkheimian and Bergsonian engagement of the sacred we have just recapped and the postmodernists? And, further, in what sense can postmodern thought be interpreted to be a consideration of the sacred in any sense at all? Is it not rather a rejection of all such things, indeed, a sort of reveling in the profane, a denial of the sort of hierarchical distinction of which sacred/profane is perhaps the most foundational example? I think this is so only if we accept a too narrow definition of the sacred. As we have indicated, Durkheim pointed, in citing Robertson Smith, to both a pure and an impure sacred, providing a definition that is informative because it indicates the sociological richness of the concept in contrast to the rather narrow connotation the term has taken on in various discourses, secular and religious, in the West and particularly in the English-speaking and Protestant world. For Durkheim, the sacred is defined not by a particular moral telos or schema, but rather by a certain kind of intensity of experience that eludes definition in normative terms of good and bad and can only be opposed to the profane, that is, to the mundane, non-holy and quotidian:

[A]lthough opposite to one another, [the pure and impure sacred] are at the same time closely akin. First, both have the same relation to profane

beings...To be sure, the two do not provoke identical feelings. Disgust and horror are one thing and respect another. Nonetheless, for actions to be the same in both cases, the feelings expressed must not be different in kind. In fact, there actually is a certain horror in religious respect, especially when it is very intense; and the fear inspired by malignant powers is not without a certain reverential quality. Indeed, the shades of difference between these two attitudes are sometimes so elusive that it is not always easy to say in just which state of mind the faithful are...So the pure and the impure are not two separate genera but two varieties of the same genus that includes all sacred things... The impure is made from the pure, and vice versa. (Durkheim 1995: 413, 415)

This thoroughly anthropological definition of the notion, which escapes the limits of certain Christian amendments of the concept, enables us to recognize the emergence of an entire body of essentially counter-Christian and even in some sense *counter-religious* treatments of the sacred in the 20th century.

It can now more readily be seen how several of the seminal thinkers of the postmodern revolution are centrally concerned with just this problem. Deleuze and Guattari might seem hostile to Durkheim in so far as they attempted to resuscitate the latter's great rival, Gabriel Tarde, as a champion of their notion of molecularity (as against Durkheim's interest in molarity) (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:213-222).¹² Yet, the central thrust of their collective work, which was to theorize an experience they compared to Gregory Bateson's notion of 'plateau' ("continuing regions of intensity...a piece of immanence") (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:158), seems quite consonant with the dual lineage we have traced here. The experiences of intensity they examine are generated, as is the case for Mauss and Hertz, not in isolation but socially, and they emerge in situations in which the individual disappears completely into the social in the form Deleuze and Guattari named the 'body without organs': "Where psychoanalysis says 'Stop, find your self again,' we should say instead, 'Let's go further still, we haven't found our BwO [body without organs] yet, we haven't sufficiently dismantled our self" (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:151).¹³ More, the body without organs and the process of "becoming-intense" that it involves are tied in the molar, repressive social and moral order of capitalist relations to experiences that are the precise sort of transgressive,

extreme experiences we find in the impure sacred, and especially in the work of Georges Bataille, who, as we will argue below, is a key node of intellectual influence uniting the Durkheimians and the postmodernists. The bulk of the empirical examples Deleuze and Guattari provide are examples of deviant sexual and erotic practices, from masochism to Chinese Taoist methods of prolonged intercourse (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:151, 155, 157, 241). In keeping with the prevalent political tenor of the movement of May '68, various kinds of radical political action are also included as examples of 'becoming-intense' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:247).¹⁴ Despite their general antipathy toward religion, they even recognize in the prophetic personality a propensity toward the nomadic and the 'becoming-intense' (Deleuze and Guattari 1987:382-3).

Michel Foucault's work provides another example of this postmodern remaking of the sacred. Foucault praised Bataille (along with Maurice Blanchot, Raymond Roussel, Pierre Klossowski,¹⁵ and other figures of the Parisian literary avant-garde of the interwar years) for the manner in which his writing constituted a "nondiscursive language" (Foucault 1977:39). By this, Foucault meant a kind of language that, through its engagement with sexuality ("the movement that nothing can ever limit...because it is...constantly involved with the limit" (Foucault 1977:33)) can enable disruptive transgression in a world that seems to offer little more to desecrate in the wake of the death of God announced by Nietzsche. Foucault admiringly described Bataille's work as producing a space in which "transgression prescribes not only the sole manner of discovering the sacred in its unmediated substance, but also a way of recomposing its empty form, its absence, through which it becomes all the more scintillating" (Foucault 1977:30). He argued that sexuality and a number of other themes he explored in detail (e.g., madness and death) become inextricably tied up with the death of God and the very possibility of the emergence of literature itself in so far as they are experiences that defy language to speak of them and that are nonetheless spoken of, therein enacting a violence

on both language and the transgressive experience itself that Foucault read sympathetically given his own theory of resistance:

On the day that sexuality began to speak and to be spoken, language no longer served as a veil for the infinite; and in the thickness it acquired on that day, we now experience the absence of God, our death, limits, and their transgression. But perhaps it is also a source of light for those who have liberated their thought from all forms of dialectical language, as it became for Bataille, on more than one occasion, when he experienced the loss of his language in the dead of night (Foucault 1977:51).

As the sacred is for Bataille desecrated and simultaneously remade in excessive festivals of orgiastic violence and sexuality, so for Foucault it is in the act of writing itself that the connection to the sacred is made.

In his history of madness and the birth of the asylum in western Europe, this theme is again clearly encountered. Foucault argues that it is the confusion of madness with 'unreason' (*déraison*), the province of such artistic and philosophical geniuses as Hölderlin, Nietzsche and Artaud, that threatens to completely eliminate the possibility of perhaps our last remaining access to the sacred through the experience of the 'mad' work of art:

This does not mean that madness is the only language common to the work of art and the modern world...but it means that, through madness, a work that seems to drown in the world... actually engages within itself the world's time, masters it, and leads it; by the madness that interrupts it, a work of art opens a void, a moment of silence, a question without answer, provokes a breach without reconciliation where the world is forced to question itself (Foucault 1973:288).

Here the realm of 'unreason' is seen as a realm of knowledge that offers insights not provided by other forms of knowledge, and scientific (medical/psychological) knowledge, far from providing any possibilities for social rejuvenation, is described as actively responsible for the misrecognition and subsequent destruction of this knowledge. Although Foucault would later criticize the direction sketched out in his early work on

madness (e.g., Foucault 1972), this engagement with the left or transgressive sacred as radical form of knowledge and experience of the social was not merely a fleeting phenomenon. In *The Order of Things*, he explicitly articulates in his concluding remarks the possibility of the death of Man as a mutation in the fabric of knowledge that might release us from the totalizing singularity of identity and, in a paraphrase of Nietzsche, "explo[de] man's face in laughter, and [usher in] the return of masks" (Foucault 1970:385). Foucault speculates upon this "explosion" in light of the artistic projects of Mallarmé, Artaud, Roussel and others who worked in the region bordering transgression and the sacred "where death prowls, where thought is extinguished, where the promise of the origin interminably recedes" (Foucault 1970:383), and he finds that the "counter-sciences" of psychoanalysis, ethnology and linguistics (at least in their structuralist forms) undertake the very dissolution of Man and the turn to the dark being of Language that enables the transgressions of the poets.

Elsewhere, Foucault broadened his discussion of the transgressive power of the dangerous individual who lurks in the borderland between the moral and the transgressive and "establishes the ambiguity of the lawful and the unlawful" through his/her words and deeds (Foucault 1975:206). He argues that the aesthetic experience that constitutes a brushing against the sacred might go beyond the creation of a work of (traditional) art to include even acts considered vile and criminal by a horrified citizenry, like those of e.g., Pierre Rivière, the young man in provincial France who murdered several members of his own family in the 1830s and subsequently wrote in a *mémoire* of the otherworldly imperatives that compelled him to do so.¹⁶ Later still, in his work on normalization and discipline (Foucault 1978, 1979), Foucault endeavored to construct a sociology of knowledge of specific contemporary western social spaces in which the enactment of the sacred is increasingly structurally denied and to examine the consequences of the emergence of these spaces. Again scientific discourses are seen as responsible for creating as categories of deviance (which therefore merit punishment)

certain realms of knowledge and practice (e.g., deviant sexualities) that for Foucault offer potential possibilities for transgressive knowledges and "pleasures" (Foucault 1978:157).

While Foucault sought to apply the notion of the left sacred to excluded forms of knowledge such as madness and sexuality, Jean Baudrillard utilized it in analyzing forms of knowledge and exchange that have often been discounted by other observers as examples of false consciousness or cultural domination. This has been a gradual development in Baudrillard's thought, as his early work (i.e., through the mid-1970s) constituted a contribution to a neo-Marxist critique of everyday life very much along the lines of Henri Lefebvre's foundational work.¹⁷ By the late 1950s and early 1960s, Lefebvre had taken a place as an important renegade Marxist theorist (so much so that the PCF expelled him in 1958) as a result of his examination of the ways in which capitalist relations of production had seeped into the very fiber of the everyday and distorted the experience of the sacred in traditional community festivals and rites such as religious gatherings and funeral ceremonies (Lefebvre 1991:201-207). However, his treatment of the sacred and its consequences for the generation and rejuvenation of the social bond retained much of the ascetic character of Durkheim's. He was in fact explicitly hostile to "mystical or metaphysical criticism of everyday life" of the sort undertaken by participants in the Collège de Sociologie and some of their contemporaries (e.g., Artaud, André Breton). Baudrillard followed Lefebvre in his early work in so far as he carried out a productivist, Marxist critique of various aspects of mundane contemporary commodity culture, although he also sought to expand the critique of political economy to encompass structural linguistic and semiological insights (and thereby found himself borrowing from the structuralist Marxist language of Lefebvre's great adversary, Louis Althusser). So, for example, he read the value, in both use and exchange forms, of contemporary consumer products as determined not by a specific product itself but by its position within a system of products. This structural arrangement is by no means arbitrary for Baudrillard, but rather it is intended to "direct the purchasing

impulse towards networks of objects in order to seduce it and elicit, in accordance with its own logic, a maximal investment, reaching the limits of economic potential" (Baudrillard 1988:31). Thus, in this early phase of his work, he yet remained committed to the theoretical and political utility of some fundamental assumptions of a Marxist understanding of political economy, which is of course at odds with the model of economy and expenditure proposed by Bataille by way of Mauss.

By the mid-1970s, though, Baudrillard had formulated a broad critique of the productivist theory of economy, of which Marxist theory is merely one variation, and of the foundational assumptions of critical social theory generally. This critique, informed by the political events of May 1968, owed heavy theoretical debts to both Maussian ethnology and Nietzschean genealogy. He began a vigorous attack on Marxist theory and, indeed, on *any* positions that postulate a social order fundamentally based on the existence of a 'mass' with a rational will and a teleological place in history. It is the historical notion of the 'the masses,' or of the 'social' as a foundational tenet of the discipline of sociology that he argued has denied the validity of the experience of surplus, sacrifice and the sacred (Baudrillard 1983:79). Much traditional sociology, in Baudrillard's reading, has always understood society as the result of a contract, of a utilitarian network of relations with use value as the driving force behind it. This understanding has led to the classification of the 'masses' as alienated or mystified in so far as they forsake rational communication and commerce. But he argued that it is precisely in spectacle¹⁸ and in revelry in apparent meaninglessness and/or oversaturation with meaning that the sacred is experienced by the silent majorities. The 'masses,' in refusing 'progressive' political mobilization for the modern festival of e.g. a world cup soccer match (Baudrillard 1983:12), explode the Enlightenment mythology of the social completely. These festivals are in some sense the contemporary equivalent of Mauss's agonistic potlatch and Bataille's Aztec sacrifices. Baudrillard was here announcing not just the end of sociology as we have known it, but the end of production as the reigning

paradigm of meaning and value and the arrival of a new way of understanding social exchange and experience.

Through lengthy analyses of the historical failures of social scientific and political movements predicated upon these outmoded paradigms and a genealogical examination of death as a form of social relation in western societies that recalls Robert Hertz in its essentials, Baudrillard offered a radical thesis regarding the dilemmas faced by contemporary western capitalist societies and the possible means of responding to them. As a result of our entry into a modern period characterized by the omnipresence of productivism, we have removed much of the world from our cycle of exchange, i.e., we have expelled some actors (initially and most importantly, the dead) from our circle of social relations. We thus now experience a frustrated and anxiety-ridden state of existence as a result of the destruction of the more complete system of exchange characteristic of many primitive societies wherein all excess, symbolic and material, is consumed in festival or ritual sacrifice rather than being accumulated. In short, Baudrillard hearkens back to the potlatch and to the experience of the sacred examined by Mauss, Hubert and Hertz to demonstrate the failures of our own modern paradigm of exchange and social relation. Although hardly calling for an attempted 'return to the primitive,'¹⁹ he does indicate that many of the maladies of our present forms of social experience can be traced to specific exclusions and changes that take place as the 'primitive' becomes the 'modern.' His attempts to suggest ways in which the stifling modern paradigm of exchange might be exploded are reminiscent sometimes of Bataille or of the Foucault of *Madness and Civilization*. For example, our cultural fascination with violent death, especially death in auto accidents (which partakes of some of the same symbolic significance as is experienced in ritual sacrifice), the obscure work on anagrammatic poetry by Ferdinand de Saussure (which is, per Baudrillard, an attempt to work through a poetics in which, as in potlatch, all excess is destroyed rather than accumulated for further deciphering or signification),²⁰ and the phenomenon of political

terrorism (which, in so far as it consists of a "radical denial of negotiation" (Baudrillard 1993:37), constitutes a turning of the principle of domination, which is normally the State's unique power to refuse the counter-gift and thereby to deny the recipient's opportunity for symbolic return, back against the State itself, a move that holds out the possibility for the collapse of the State) are each explored as radical responses to the crushing strictures of the modern productivist paradigm of exchange.

With his concept of seduction, Baudrillard further elaborated and gave nuance to his contemporary theory of the sacred. Paralleling the move to 'liberate' sex with the move to 'liberate' labor, he here opposes the productivist paradigm again by positing a radical form of exchange, i.e., seduction, that

takes the form of an uninterrupted ritual exchange where seducer and seduced constantly raise the stakes in a game that never ends. And cannot end since the dividing line that defines the victory of the one and defeat of the other is illegible (Baudrillard 1990:22).

Seduction, like the sacred for Bataille and Caillois and like *déraison* for Foucault, is dangerous and violent. It refuses the "banality" of bodies and the orgasm for the play of secrets and challenges. Here Baudrillard encountered Huizinga's notion of play (Huizinga 1950)²¹ as a fundamental mode of interaction and combined it with his interpretation of the sacred as foundational mode of experience of the social. What emerges is at bottom agonistic and outside (i.e., transgressive) of reason and law. The points of comparison with Mauss's notion of gift giving and potlatch are fairly obvious. Baudrillard posits a form of symbolic exchange and a mode of social relations predicated not upon any foundational rational, wealth-maximizing agents but rather upon ludic wearers of "symbolic veils" (Baudrillard 1990:33). He argues this is more fundamental than any form of exchange based upon the centrality of production. The choice of specific terminology and examples here (e.g., his analyses of courtship play and pornography, the latter of which is in his view not seductive) is often provocatively weighted toward the language of gender and sex, at least partially because he saw this

work as an expansion of his earlier critical forays against Marxist economic productivism to the realm of the productivism of desire of modern psychoanalysis and feminism, but it is clear that he intended his analysis to apply to social relations *generally* and not merely to relations of sexual pursuit or attraction. It is thus, and with acknowledgement of Baudrillard's extended polemic against the 'social,' a general social theory with strong ties to a Durkheimian stream of thought that is advanced here and that is at the heart of his work.

Clear evidence of influence from this Third Republic discourse on the sacred that points to a particular mobilization of the left or impure sacred can be seen in other central postmodernist thinkers as well. In the work of Jacques Derrida, a connection to Mauss is directly observable, as Derrida has written a long essay devoted in large part to a commentary on Mauss's essay on the gift (Derrida 1991). But beyond this, we can locate in his overall philosophical project clear connections to the post-Durkheim Durkheimian interest in the impure sacred. At the core of Derrida's work is a preoccupation with the aspect of western metaphysics that requires certain foundational binary categories that, in Derrida's analysis, are actually undone by certain crucial concepts and categories that can invoke both poles of a contradictory binary and thereby demonstrate the ultimate instability of seemingly firmly constructed philosophical systems of reasoning. Derrida has spent considerable time examining the role played in foundational texts and writers of the western philosophical tradition by these unstable concepts and categories in order to unveil the holes in binary thought generally that they represent, and to criticize what he sees as a systematic classification of writing as somehow more radically separated from real metaphysical presence than is speech (Derrida 1976, 1982:1-27). Examples of such concepts are the *pharmakon* (which can mean both "poison" and "remedy") in Plato (Derrida 1981:61-171), *supplément* (which, Derrida argued, means both "addition to" and "replacement of," with reference to the relationship of writing to speech) in Rousseau (Derrida 1976:141-164) and *gift* (which, as Mauss himself had pointed out, descends

from a Germanic root that has the dual meaning of "offering" and "poison," the former preserved in modern English "gift," the latter in modern German "gift") (Mauss 1968:46) in Mauss.

Derrida's therapeutic endeavor, in the context of what he sees as the dangerous rigidity and oppressive hierarchical character of traditional western metaphysics and logic, is to offer a new, radical kind of thought (and writing) that undoes this rigidity precisely by refusing the binary categories, exposing their limitations and reveling in transgression of the hierarchical rules of traditional thought. His method of deconstruction aims to do precisely this, and in several works he has noted the efforts of others he sees as exemplary in this regard. In a reading similar to that of Foucault, he sees in Bataille's work a radical effort at "a sovereign form of writing" (Derrida 1978:266) that embraces "the poetic or the ecstatic," defined by Bataille as

that *in every discourse* which can open itself up to the absolute loss of its sense, to the (non-)base of the sacred, of non-meaning, of un-knowledge or of play, to the swoon from which it is reawakened by a throw of the dice. (Derrida 1978:261)

Derrida interprets the 'theater of cruelty' of Artaud, which excluded from its ranks "all non-sacred theater," as analogous to his own efforts in a similar vein (Derrida 1978:243). Jean-Michel Heimonet (1987) has carefully demonstrated the direct links between the treatment of the sacred in modern poetry by key members of the Collège de Sociologie (Bataille, Caillois and Jules Monnerot)²² and Derrida's theory of *différance*. Leiris, Caillois and Bataille were determined in their efforts to attach the Durkheimian theory they had encountered in Mauss's work to what they and others (especially the various members of the Surrealist movement) saw as a contemporary crisis in literature that was in their view linked, like the political and broader cultural crises of inter-war France, to the disappearance of myth and the sacred (Rieusset 1983). Derrida, like many others in the generation of post-'68 French thinkers, had simultaneous

theoretical/philosophical, political and literary crises to address, and his response has been calculated to speak to all of them at once.

Beyond the discovery of a general interest in the sacred in these thinkers I have just summarized, we can find direct evidence that they have taken it up at least in part explicitly from Durkheimian and Bergsonian sources. We find the link most clearly, as is evident in the preceding, in the transference of these essentially Durkheimian ideas of the sacred to some of the students of Mauss during the 1930s, most particularly to Georges Bataille, Roger Caillois, Michel Leiris and other members of the Collège de Sociologie and other groups of the literary and artistic avant-garde of the inter-war years. These thinkers would take up the Durkheimian/Maussian/Hertzian themes in an even more direct way as an existential problem for the intellectual on the sacred: how, as a post-Marx, post-Nietzsche intellectual, to reconfigure the sacred, as it was clear to them by this point that, Marx notwithstanding, it could not simply be abandoned? The answer was in the reconfiguration of orgiastic festival and transgressive ecstasy, sometimes resulting in the flirtation with extremist politics (Besnier 1988). Several of the most important postmodern thinkers, including Foucault, Baudrillard and Derrida would explicitly be concerned with these inter-war thinkers, and in each of their bodies of work, one finds the same set of themes taking a central place. The Bergsonian element is taken up sometimes less explicitly, more in its broad vitalist and anti-materialist outlines than in a direct way, though Deleuze at least is explicit about his use of Bergsonian categories for his project of reformulating the sacred. But in so far as Bergson's imprint is clear in the evolution of a certain radical vitalism in European thought that nourished itself equally at the trough of German proto-existentialism *à la* Nietzsche, most importantly represented in Georges Sorel and in his important, if now largely forgotten influence (Hughes 1958:161-182), he clearly played a significant role in the development of the postmodernists.

Reconfiguring the Postmodern as a Renewed Discourse on the Sacred

If, then, postmodern theory is to take seriously a dedication to the determined theorization of difference, this reconstruction of the postmodern project and its history suggests that it must acknowledge an important difference that is perhaps at the very root of its own origins and that arguably tests its ability to be truly self-reflexive and avoid the excesses of the systematic theorizing to which it purports to oppose itself. The difference I have in mind is that between the experience of the Western intellectual and that of the rest of society. I would suggest that at the root of this discourse is an attempt by intellectuals to speak to a problem of consuming social importance, which they believed was applicable not only to themselves but to the rest of society as well, but that historical developments seem to indicate was in fact in very large degree a problem specifically of the intellectuals. The problem was the threat of disappearance of the sacred, and the response from the French 'proto-postmodernists' (that is, the Durkheimians and the Bergsonians) was to endeavor to find a way to reconstruct it and thereby retain its primordial social energy, not simply to destroy it, as other contemporary intellectuals suggested with evident failures. The Durkheimians especially were acutely attuned to the great complexities and seeming contradictions of the status of the sacred in the modern world. It seemed at one and the same time an anachronism and an indispensable source of social effervescence, and they realized, perhaps better than any other group of thinkers then or since, that the modern project for intellectuals entailed a continuing struggle with this paradoxical problem.

The real roots of the paradox become apparent when one examines the status of the sacred outside of intellectual circles, for the evidence that the sacred is in danger in its traditional forms and discourses here, that is, the evidence for the secularization hypothesis that was once a widely accepted among scholars of religious history, has proven somewhat less than convincing, to say the least, as even those intellectuals sympathetic to radical secularization admit (e.g., Gellner 1992). This is particularly so in

the U.S. and in the East, where large majorities of people respond to questions on their relationship to these traditional sacred objects and systems of belief affirmatively, and even in the former Soviet bloc where traditional religious faiths have re-emerged with a vengeance since the fall of communism, all to the great consternation of the descendants of the secularizing intellectuals of Durkheim and Bergson's day. So, to use the categories that emerge in Ernest Gellner's work on postmodernism and Islam, if it seems relatively clear that the two 'fundamentalist' positions he outlines (namely, those of religious and Enlightenment/rational 'fundamentalism' or foundationalism) still clearly remain options for large segments of the population, even in the 'postmodern' West, then we must be quite careful in advancing the kinds of simple claims about postmodernism as a generalized condition that appear in some treatments of the subject.

Thus, ten years down the road from Bauman's question reiterated at the outset of this essay, we still need to remind ourselves of another point he raises in the same essay: namely, the fact that "intellectuals tend to articulate their own societal situation and the problems it creates as a situation of the society at large, and its, systemic or social, problems" (Bauman 1988:225). This is not by any means to say that the issue of postmodern theory is irrelevant, as Gellner seems inclined at times to suggest, and in fact our suggestion that the postmodern remains directed toward the sacred challenges his claim that it is simply the present face of relativism as well. It is to say however that we ought yet be careful in attempting to generalize its applicability too readily. This caution will better enable us, in my view, to understand the ways in which postmodern theory and sociology, far from being necessarily antagonistic to one another, can in fact mutually benefit one another in recognizing their commonalities. Those theses and claims from postmodern theory on the purported death of the social, on the implosion of the central category of sociological inquiry, on the irrelevance of the categories of sociology (e.g., social class, ideology, status, anomie, social differentiation, authority, alienation, community) and their necessary replacement by new categories created for theorization

of this new postmodern world (spectacle, simulacra, fatal strategies, rhizomes, war machines, bodies without organs, emotive tribes, the hyperreal) must be viewed skeptically (Turner and Rojek 1993:72). Even if one accepts Anthony Giddens' definition of sociology as "a social science [used in the loosest of senses] having as its main focus the study of social institutions [and processes] brought into being by the industrial transformations of the past two or three centuries" (Giddens 1982:9), i.e., if sociology is fundamentally the study of the social consequences of *modernity*, there is absolutely no need to see it as superceded by postmodernism. In fact, the very phenomenon involving some groups of intellectuals that I have discussed here is nothing if not a consequence of modernity, and we should be able to examine it with the tools of sociology. But likewise, we must be careful to be critical of sociological pronouncements on the futility or ridiculousness of all postmodern theory, as it seems clear that the rise of this perspective offers unique tools and self-reflexive possibility for the sociologists to more fruitfully account for their own activity and engagement in their work. As much of the interesting sociological theory in recent years has been centrally concerned with this problem of reflexivity and the sociology of sociology, one can hardly be too attentive to making use of new tools for this endeavor.

The postmodern 'moment' thus remains compelling and of the greatest importance for those of us who are centrally concerned with the status and situation of the intellectual. Edward Shils described the intellectual as the figure in any social order most involved in the realm of transcendent and universal manufacture and manipulation of symbols that he identified as the engagement with the sacred. Even seemingly clearly secular intellectuals, in Shils' view, are in fact centrally involved in the engagement with the sacred, as e.g., science and philosophy are as deeply implicated in the exploration of ultimate and transcendent realms of value as is religion (Shils 1972:16). Our analysis might be seen as something of a limited confirmation of this theory, as it has revealed the parallels between classical sociology and postmodernist theory, both seemingly secular in

the extreme, on precisely their mutual interest in re-theorizing and preserving the sacred and their common alliance against the challenge of a materialist reductionism that is in its essence the most powerful enemy of difference. Finally, we can see here the benefits to be had from a kind of self-reflexive sociological engagement that Arpad Szakolczai has discussed in recent work on Max Weber and Michel Foucault (Szakolczai 1998). This engagement considers the sociological enterprise as centrally involved in the project of intellectual identity-construction and self-understanding, rather than solely in the more one-sided analysis of an inert external social world, and that can then be fruitfully linked to the self-reflexive project that is postmodern theory, a project that is centrally engaged in understanding the effect of producing theory on the theorist.

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NOTES

¹The 'Frenchness' of the intellectual social history I reconstruct here should be carefully noted. The emergence of postmodern and/or poststructural theory has important roots in specifically French (and, still more specifically, Parisian) intellectual contexts, and the sources of that French postmodern thought are also, in my argument, largely rooted in that same Parisian intellectual context. Thus, what I argue here is necessarily limited in an 'ethnographic' sense in that I am talking about the interactions in a particular location among a particular group of participants, and other local groups of intellectuals have different histories and webs of influence. I certainly believe, given the amount of influence of French postmodern theory in e.g., American intellectual circles, that the argument made herein points us beyond the narrow confines of a sociology of Parisian intellectuals, but specific elaborations of the implications for intellectual histories and developments elsewhere will have to await further specific, delimited studies like the present one.

²The category 'intellectuals' is a slippery and contested one. Definitions of precisely who is an 'intellectual' vary according to e.g., different national traditions and histories and different analytical lenses. Ideological predispositions also play a role in shaping debates about who can be considered an intellectual and who cannot. I intend by my use of the term mainly university professors, as it is mostly this kind of intellectual one finds making and sustaining arguments about the postmodern condition. It was also largely university intellectuals (e.g., the anti-clerical Republican ideologues of the 'nouvelle Sorbonne,' in the eyes of one of their most vehement critics, Agathon) who were the most vehement opponents of the sacred in Third Republic France (Charle 1990, and see below).

³The individual in question is Maurice Barrès.

⁴He was in fact a *chargé de cours* for the chair vacated by Ferdinand Buisson from 1902 until 1906, when he was actually permanently named to the chair (Clark 1973:164).

⁵In order, *De la division du travail social* (1893), *Les Règles de la méthode sociologique* (1895), and *Le Suicide: étude de sociologie* (1897). Only *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse* remained to be written at this time.

⁶The first volume was published in 1898 and it would be published at yearly intervals until 1907, then twice more in 1910 and 1913 before Durkheim's death in 1917 (see Besnard 1983:33).

⁷There are numerous studies contributing to a detailed exploration of Durkheim's efforts (and those of his colleagues) to establish, through academic political maneuvering and strategy, a firm, or even hegemonic, position for Durkheimian sociology in the French university system during these early years of the 20th century, but those of Clark (1973:162-95) and Karady (in Besnard 1983:71-89) remain among the most cogent brief treatments of a complex topic.

⁸I intend by the 'isms' only to indicate that there are discernible groups of intellectuals both during the lifetimes of Durkheim and Bergson and in their wake who essentially made up 'schools' of their thought and influence, even though the members of those schools sometimes significantly modified the thought of the masters.

⁹I should be clear that Clark does not claim this is the only axis that maps Parisian intellectual culture at the time, but only "an especially important one" (Clark 1973:16).

¹⁰Durkheim and his *Année* colleagues are classifiable along an axis of philosophers, of course, because at the turn of the century there were no chairs in sociology, so no Durkheimians, not even Durkheim himself, were technically sociologists in the strict institutional sense. Many of them, however, were philosophy *agrégés* (including Durkheim, Mauss, Simiand, Fauconnet, Davy, Bouglé, Halbwachs, Hertz, and Richard, to name only the most central contributors to the journal), and the Durkheimians clearly staked out academic ground that had been traditionally philosophical and frequently challenged (and were challenged by) philosophers in their work.

¹¹Only the former remains. Mauss apparently lost the chapter outlines and other notes, which he himself used to teach his own course on sin in the 1930s, although he did summarize their general thrust when he published Hertz's introduction.

¹²The opposed concepts of molarity and molecularity are rather hard to define precisely, at least partially because Deleuze and Guattari were rather determined to avoid precisely defining them, but they can perhaps be summarized as modes of relationality of atomic entities (individuals in society), the former characterized by rigid, hierarchically structured networks, the latter by fluid, vitalist and essentially anarchic ('nomadic' in their terminology) small and constantly-changing groups ('packs'). See Deleuze and Guattari 1977:273-296.

¹³The body without organs, like many of their other neologisms, is difficult to define succinctly. Like most of their concepts, it aims to describe a kind of relation or field

rather than an entity *per se*. It is a relation of individuals and forces that permits the free and full playing out of desire, or, in their words, "The BwO is the field of immanence of desire, the plane of consistency specific to desire (with desire defined as a process of production without reference to any exterior agency, whether it be a lack that hollows it out or a pleasure that fills it)" (Deleuze and Guattari 1977:154). Needless to say, the body without organs is not reducible to the physical body.

¹⁴"Crime societies" and "riot groups" are also included under this aegis.

¹⁵Klossowski was a member of the Collège de Sociologie, discussed below, and Blanchot, though he did not participate in that group, was very close to Bataille. Foucault wrote of the former that his "language is the prose of Actaeon [the hunter in Greek myth who watches the goddess Artemis bathe, a transgression that results in his transformation into a stag and subsequent destruction by his own hounds]: the transgressive word," and, in language that directly recalls the Durkheimian language of the sacred, approvingly discusses the manner in which Klossowski reconciles in literary form the pure and impure sacred (i.e., God and Satan) torn apart by orthodox Christian thought (Foucault 1992:xxxv).

¹⁶There have been of course many critical responses to this aspect of Foucault's work (e.g., Miller 1993:225-240).

¹⁷Baudrillard was Lefebvre's assistant at Nanterre in the late 1960's, while at the same time enrolled as a doctoral student with Pierre Bourdieu (Dosse 1992:134).

¹⁸Baudrillard used this term somewhat loosely in a sense similar to that of Situationism (a movement to which he was sympathetic during the events of May '68), but with something of a sardonic twist on the fundamentally Marxist orientation of the latter. So while Guy Debord, a central Situationist theorist, can define the spectacle as "the existing order's uninterrupted discourse about itself...the self portrait of power in the epoch of its totalitarian management of the conditions of existence (Debord 1983:paragraph 24) and thereby construe the spectacle as a powerful contributor to the mystification of the 'mass,' it is precisely this revelry in the excess and irrationality of modern capitalism that Baudrillard saw as the best approximation of a contemporary experience of the sacred.

¹⁹He has been explicit (see especially Baudrillard 1990:154-156) in arguing that the period we are now entering is quite distinct from both the primitive paradigm built around the ritual and the festival and the modern paradigm based upon the law and productivism. He classified the three 'ages' by their logic of relation: thus, in chronological order, the ages of duality, polarity, and finally our own age of digitality.

²⁰Baudrillard carried through the comparison of goods to words quite thoroughly here. The anagrammatic poem is for him the symbolic extermination of language itself, of the very notion of value, as the destruction of goods in potlatch exterminates value for the primitive. It is comparable, he argued, to the symbolic calling forth of God (or gods) by the primitive, solely "in order to put them to death" (Baudrillard 1993:209).

²¹Caillois also wrote a book-length study of play (Caillois 1961).

²²Monnerot, also a fellow traveler of surrealism much like his Collège comrades, wrote an influential work on *La Poésie moderne et le sacré* in 1945.