Durkheim's Ruse: The Concept as Seduction

Alan Blum

Abstract. My method of reading Durkheim's (1965 [1915]) *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life* recovers as his fundamental interest the following question: How in collective life do we deal with ambiguity as a social phenomenon? The social actor always needs ways and means to bear this burden as something other than oppressive, for example, the conception of a self both finite and infinite, both sacred and profane, both free and constrained. Durkheim challenges the modern conceit that secular society supersedes the attachment to the sacred by exposing the force of the sacred in any society. Durkheim proceeds by formulating the social actor as an automaton and by expanding and enriching the notion of automation to reveal it as having a capacity for a degree of self-affection and affectivity that can be tapped as a resource in creative social action. It is an impersonality towards ambiguity as an impenetrable structure that makes such improvisational action possible as both automated, and yet capable of change through reflective practices that expose such automation.

Keywords: ambiguity, religion, automation, theorizing, sacred, profane

Resume. Ma lecture des Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse (1965 [1912]) d'Émile Durkheim récupère l'intérêt fondamental de l'auteur sous la forme de la question suivante: Comment composons-nous, en vie collective, avec l'ambiguïté en tant que phénomène social? L'acteur social a toujours besoin de moyens lui permettant de supporter ce fardeau sans que cela soit oppressant, par exemple, la conception d'un soi à la fois fini et infini, sacré et profane, libre et assujetti. Durkheim s'oppose à la croyance moderne qui dit que la société remplace l'attachement au sacré en exposant la force du sacré dans toute société. Durkheim commence en considérant le contrat social comme un automate tout en élargissant et enrichissant la notion de l'automatisation, la révélant ainsi comme ayant une capacité pour un certain degré d'affection-pour-soi et d'affectivité qui peut être exploité comme une ressource créatrice dans l'action sociale. C'est une impersonnalité envers l'ambiguïté en tant que structure impénétrable qui rend une telle action improvisée possible, action à la fois automatisé mais pou tant capable de changement grâce à de pratiques réflexives qui expose une telle automatisation.

Mots clés: ambiguïté, religion, automatisation, théorisation, sacré, profane

Introduction

Durkheim modernizes the Classical notion of beginning *in medias res* — in the middle of things — by radically reconfiguring the social actor as an object to and for oneself and so, as a free subject only in relation to such limits; always and everywhere the social actor can be seen as inheriting the problem of having to negotiate space for free action under the condition of being ruled and not ruler. Each of Durkheim's books describes how fundamental ambiguity is expressed in different shapes of this tension, between constraint and freedom, and the specific situations of problem-solving each raises. In *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1965 [1912] hereafter, *EFRL*), Durkheim highlights the particular solution of religion in this way.

This paper is influenced by my reading of *The Elementary Forms* as the analogical surface of a textual structure that makes explicit and palpable another story, a story that formulates the place and force of the symbolic order in social life. The symbolic order is typically identified as a platitude without specificity, in ways that make its manifestation inevitable and formless. Yet, if everything is "symbolic"; it loses its force and symbolizing is viewed as the free and spontaneous action of constructing meaning unfettered by restriction or limit. I propose that *EFRL* is designed to destabilize this modern truism by revealing how the symbolic order can come to be seen dramatically, when contingent beliefs and practices or conventions are treated as rites directed to affirming and constituting the intelligibility of the order as if sacred and untouchable and its meaning as profane. The limits of the work of ritualization reveals the order as an inviolable and transitive bond disseminated between and among members who relate to it by virtue of such a transfer of meaning and of the social actor as if an automaton in the grip of social formulae and their rites. Durkheim shows how this methodical silencing of ambiguity allows for the symbolic order to carry on as if a machine applicable to language, and its system of classifications as a ritual order organized around the sacred imperative to hold the question of ambiguity in abeyance through a network of interdictions. Of its actor conceived as subject to such a machine, Durkheim requires an automated attachment that is still capable of elevating itself on occasion, beyond resignation, despair or docility, to a kind of ironic fortitude, sometimes heroic, but typically driven by the comedic awareness of being condemned to eternal life. For Durkheim, society is a machine that, in the idiom of Plato, writes upon the souls of speakers (Gane 1983). In *EFRL*, religion serves as a ruse to allow us to conceptually engage the tension between the sacred and profane in language; in the best sense, it might position the modern

subject to appreciate such ambiguity as both limit and incentive in human conduct.

In contrast to the social actor as a "player," Durkheim conceives of the symbolic order from the position he imagines for an insider driven to embrace its legitimacy without reserve, as if an imperative manifested at the level of the corporeal. Durkheim's conception of an automated attachment to society still enables the actor, viewed as such, to reinvent him/herself aesthetically within such limits by experimenting with different modes of playfulness oriented towards the ritualized manner and means of disguising the secret of the abyss that social life projects and perpetuates as an inherent consequence of its ontological constitution.

The third party here, the orientation to ambiguity as an unstated and persistent field of application disclosed as the gaze to which Durkheim's theorizing answers, makes reference to society as a writing machine (in ways that can provide for biology as another speech) and reveal its limits in contrast to the social. This gaze can empower a degree of reflectiveness upon the social order in a spirit of objective irony (Baudrillard 2006 [1984]), by making it possible to see comedic potential in views of ceremonial devotion to society, revealing the social order as if both corporeal and social in its hold upon the member. Durkheim rebuts the modern social constructionist advance of viewing the social actor as the player of a game, by conceiving of such an actor as if an automaton possessed by the drive to be possessed by society itself. The social actor is a game player only from the perspective of a detached outsider to its ways, but on the inside is necessarily seen as a subject driven by society to possess it and be possessed by it as if a puppet (Zamir 2010).

In this way my theorizing continues to develop as its voice, the commitment to explore and experiment with the aesthetic implications of the prose of inquiry in various ways, from using the example of voice, ventriloquism, and the dramatic actor (Blum 2001), to reformulating Simmel's concept of adventure as an erotics of speaking (Blum 2003: 282-283). I do so to realign the notion of analogy as a practice in writing and speaking (Blum 2008), transforming Wittgenstein's usage of "seeing-as" (Blum in 2011b), and applying this to the relation of body to mind (Blum 2011a: 191-212). Also addressed are aspects of the trajectory of desire in speech. Thus, this paper continues to think about theorizing as a subversive gesture within speaking, always engaged by the need and desire to expose and develop ways and means of creatively innovating with respect to the automated relationship to any normative order one inherits, and to carry out such a project in qualitative analyses of cases together with the ethical challenges they might elucidate.

The Book and its Reading

Reading a work is not a self-evident mechanical operation, since reading is part of a relationship, and the book is much more than a tangible and simple object or thing like a stone. In my view, the imagined intersection between a book and its reading does not deserve questioning that asks where the reading begins and ends in relation to the author as in the question that asks what belongs to Durkheim and what belongs to the reading of Durkheim as if reading and rewriting is modeled after property and theft. Thus, I am not much interested in questions that ask "What belongs to me and what belongs to Durkheim?" for I take this book and any such as a movable feast. This does not exclude our being able to pose questions such as what is a good or bad way to eat from this table or what are the conditions for a good or bad reading? That is, the postal model of a relation of author to reader risks skipping over the way in which the relationship orients in practice to the convention of reading that accomplishes what is read in the manner of making — or poesis — in the Classical sense, that produces the reading as an event. In making the book, the author does considerable interpretive work not infrequently obscured by a produced textual surface. Such an approach to reading (conventional in the humanities) views a reading of EFRL as an eventful accomplishment about making sense of what is given. For example, in the way that Eric Auerbach (1953 [1946]) examines representations of reality throughout history, we can treat any approach to EFRL as part of the discourse on the representation of reading and specifically, of the book. As Rancière puts it,

> First, there is something given, a form that is provided by sense…Second, the apprehension of this form is not only a matter of sense; rather, sense itself is doubled. The apprehension puts into play a certain relation between what Kant calls faculties: between a faculty that offers a given and a faculty that makes something out of it. For these two faculties the Greek language has only one name, *aesthesis*, the faculty of sense, the capacity to both perceive the given and to make sense of it (2009: 1).

In this respect, if the book is the given, there are different ways of relating to the book, different ways of developing the capacity to perceive and make sense of the book, and working through this relationship.[1]

---

1. Previously, I (2011a: 29-47) followed Wittgenstein in speaking of this relationship as aesthetic in terms of its capacity to associate and connect disparate and apparently unrelated items, figures, terms, ideas, as in associating one to an other in a way that must underlie any act of intelligibility (see the discussion in Blum 2003:14-18).

Secondly, what is made, say as the book that is *The Elementary Forms*, is absolutely necessary for this approach because seeing the book as making can only be done by examining it after it is made as its various representations. In this sense, whatever we, or anyone, says of EFRL depends upon a method of reading, a method much like the fabled social fact, external and coercive, that Durkheim (1938 [1895]) identifies in his earlier work. This makes the method of reading both coercive and external, and yet an occasion, perhaps, for revisiting a book because what is made and established as given can be (re)made in many ways.

This is to say that our method of reading, in acknowledging its occurrence as a social fact, must make its oriented character central in the exposition. This further suggests that reading *EFRL* is a way of seeing *EFRL*; that "seeing-as" is an aesthetic process and not simply a "look-see" transaction. This becomes apparent in treating the most simple condition, such as the status of Durkheim's words, whether propositions or matters of facts that he believes or not, or even more, whether we can say that Durkheim has an unconscious and that his words might escape what he can say or think of them. All of this is to propose in this paper a focus upon Durkheim's position as author, the question of his authorship, its aesthetic and ethical resonances that always complicates the simple view of an author-subject speaking directly to a reader-object about an external thing such as the tangible product of a book (cf. Leo Strauss, Kojeve, Bakhtin, etc.). Whether or not we subscribe to the notion of an unconscious, our method proposes that the relationship that is reading and writing is always grounded in the material practices of co-speaking that remain often unspoken and decisive grounds for what is said. My method implies that a strong reading of Durkheim is not one that seeks to accurately represent whatever he might have had in mind in writing, but tries to expose the authorship he presupposes as if it were a kind of regime of representation in which ambiguity is inescapable for both the author and reader.

Approaching a text, as a text, means acknowledging that it presents itself by positioning the materiality of discourse before consciousness (Cohen 1994: 5, 7-8, 18). Strangely enough, the materiality of discourse, even as the unconscious or foreign intruder that it is, comes alive in Durkheim's work in the image of corporeality animated by automation and habituation in ways that reveal language as a social fact, external, coercive and generalized. Language, as if body and the drive of speech, make reference to the elementary form of the symbolic order as the machine driving automated speakers to leave untouched the ambiguity of their words and deeds and to systemically expel the foreign intruder. Religion itself can be used to show this well, functioning here as a cru-

cial *matheme*. While Durkheim affirms that the "principal subject of the book" is "*The Elementary Forms* of the religious life," he states that the "secondary subject of research" is the "genesis of the fundamental notions of thought" (see his annotated description of Contents *EFRL*, 5).

So now I suggest that the most important matter to consider in the authorship concerns the relation between this contrast that Durkheim calls his primary and secondary subjects, what we might call his two stories. We can hear the story of religion that he calls primary as his way of making reference to the immediate or accessible surface that is really secondary (in the sense of derivative), while the other, the story of thought, can only be the primary subject. It is necessary, I contend, to reverse Durkheim's sense of primary and secondary because the "fundamental notions of thought" must ground and precede the subject of religion that he calls "the principal subject of the book." As Aristotle says, because what is first for us (the book, its representation) is not first in nature (thinking the book, orienting to the convention), we must reorient to the contrast in another way.

Thus, the method of reading employed here must not only see the primary and secondary stories differently than as stated by Durkheim. Such a hierarchy cannot serve analytic interests seeking to neutralize the opposition itself by joining religion and thought in the figure of a reflective relationship to religion (as the primary story of the book). This reflective way remains in accords with Durkheim's discussion of the totem as the locus or place of mutual affinity and attachment that must focus ensuing discussion. This identifies the topic of religion (as totem) as primary in the way of a conversational opening or clearing, but secondary in the way any such beginning must be unformed or implicit in relation to an end it anticipates, foreseeing the real (primary) object of concern to be the fundamental, riveting, and elementary matter of concern, namely the relationship of thought to religion. If this relationship is what is primary, then it can only be explored by inspecting the various and diverse ways it is represented in a discourse, which is secondary in the way discourse stands to what grounds it, but primary in the way that discourse materializes, constituting the place of our beginning. So, Durkheim's ruse is this: to overthrow the very distinction between primary and secondary with which he begins by saying that this "either-or" distinction prevents us from seeing that one or the other is not primary or secondary because thinking religion, the thought of religion, must be primary and what is secondary are the different representations of this relationship that come to view.

This focus on the status and implications of Durkheim's authorship, on the imperative need and desire to supply a foundation for what is first

and immediately given in the discussion of religion as a topic, animates his desire to work through that discourse in order to supply a foundation for what is without foundation, promising to reveal that very desire for foundation, to be the elementary concern of this work and, we might say, of Durkheim's *oeuvre* as well.

DISTINGUISHING AND COLLECTING

We can begin to see that Durkheim's ruse of using the concept of religion to disclose the elementary form of the reflective life, simply plays off the necessary pretense of conceptualization itself, to speak about what really matters. Yet, concepts are to be treated playfully, in my view, for they involve ways we have learned to talk about distinctions and distinguishing, which is what really matters. And so Durkheim can be read as saying that what is elementary to an oriented life is distinguishing, putting together what seems apart and discriminating between what seems together. This requires both imagination and discrimination as actions that are necessary but not sufficient; we can see this clearly in the example of religion because it vividly brings into view these elementary forms for all humankind. To wit, imagining and distinguishing are necessary forms, in ways we have come to recognize as metaphysics. Durkheim's implication that the elementary structure of social life is aesthetic in this sense, is resonant with Lacan's conception of the (potentially) delusional foundation of the social (Miller 1991). This permits us to reveal the symbolic order as a ceremonial order, organized around ritual interdictions, grounded in a classification of sacred and profane orientations to the world, and hence appreciate the problematic and fundamentally ambiguous relationship to meaning that must reside, typically as untouched and unspoken, as its core. In short, Durkheim uses the ruse of a conceptual analysis of religion, to disclose *The Elementary Forms* of an oriented relationship to life, as metaphysical (as delusional or not). He does so in ways that remain to be developed, explicated, and actualized in relation to the contingent features of situations which they inherit and reshape, features he called totemic (Blum 2011a: 194-251).

We can appreciate the link between the elementary structure and "delusion" when we understand the unconscious as elementary and language as necessarily passing through interpretation. This makes reference to the fundamental structure of "seeing-as" as the elementary character of language. In precise Lacanian terms, "we should work on comparing the formation of the unconscious and the elementary phenomenon. The validity of this comparison rests on the concept of structure, which is the same whether in an enormous text or a single page, since, as such, it is

present in every single way" (Miller 2009: 11). For Miller, the "phenomena of signification"(ibid.: 20) is constitutively a problematic or perplexing linkage for people; it is "the normal situation of the human being… as every subject is confronted by having to decipher a signifier" (21). If "the signifier alone is what is elementary, that is to say that one does not know what it signifies" (21), *fundamental ambiguity is elementary* and so too then are its consequences: interpretation, its hallucinatory potential and the *human-all-too-human anxiety* of having to deal with this foundational, elementary ambiguity (Blum 2011a: 215-233; Ronen 2000; Heidegger 1962 [1927]). This recognition is perfectly in accord with the recognition of the intrinsic tension between finite characterization and its infinite perplexity, inherited from Plato and through Hegel and beyond (Benardete 1991; McHugh 2005; Mansfield 2010; Žižek et al. 2011).

The act of distinguishing first shows itself in the vision of an inescapable totemic system of classification that we seem to inherit since anything and everything we say and do is made possible by the ways in which we "see in advance" whatever we treat as a beginning (Heidegger 1962 [1927]). The filtering involved in seeing in advance, confirms the social ground of distinguishing and interpretation. That is, we are in position to distinguish because we are united as co-speakers whose capacity to "see in advance" is shared and mutually recognized as what it is, as the practice of seeing in advance, that somehow links us in a kind of virtual presence and solidarity that enables us to see the same in different ways.

TOTEMISM

Durkheim is often accused of anthropomorphism, in personifying society as if a being, in ways that have been said to anticipate totalitarian conceptions. This does not have to follow. Personification haunts discourse in the shape of distinctions that by themselves have no value until they are developed. Abstractions of generality are often accused of being ideological for not specifying what they call "a subject position," as if the distinction masks its divisible and plural character, but this is a fatal flaw in concrete thought. The abstraction of distinctions takes on life, as Hegel says, through development, explication, and actualization, three different names for the oriented action of speaking. Here, I repeat Durkheim's position, in restructured form to demonstrate its syllogistic character:

> If concepts were only general ideas they would not enrich knowledge a
> great deal, but if before all else they are collective representations…they
> correspond to the way this very special being, society, considers the things
> of its own proper existence (*EFRL*: 483).

For Durkheim, concepts are being proposed (in contrast to their use as
"general ideas") as images or reflections of society, and less as "content";
i.e., we are instructed to first consider the collective (which includes we
who "consider") as having ways/methods. We are used to this because
we typically describe the ways of collectives as their customs, practices,
and the like. But, he proposes that we "consider" the concepts of the col-
lective as parts of its ways. This was revolutionary as long as "concepts,"
and their institutionalized scrutiny, were interpreted as part of a division
of labour that could only sustain a view of concepts as "general ideas"
and not as customs.

For example, if we think of the notion of "truth" as a general idea, we
might discuss its aspects, conditions of use, methods of evidence, verifi-
cation, and the like. But if we think of truth as a "way," custom, method,
or even, dare we say, as a formula, it can be seen as self-descriptive in
another sense. For example, the notion of truth can be seen as showing
what a collective valorizes or admires, what it counts as proper, signifi-
cant, noteworthy; what it includes or excludes as a matter of indiffer-
ence; how it weighs its words, deeds, and people and events accordingly.
"Way" perhaps also refers to a collective's narratives, memories, histor-
ies, how the genuine and spurious are calculated and respected. Since
Durkheim, Wittgenstein among others have taught us how the concept
of truth is not only an occasion for epistemological concern, but binds
people together in collective life as those who are subject to an order
and its shaping, in ways that invite them to take it on as their own. Durk-
heim's referents thus anticipate what Lacan terms "imaginary."

Durkheim's claim that such functions of collective representations
are more fundamental than the vision of the concept understood as a
general idea, is anticipated dramatically in Hegel (1874 [1830]: 52-53).
For Hegel, the way truth is discussed in philosophy, it is constituted as
so many answers to the way we (the collective) "considers the things
of its own proper existence," as a true friend. This in turn invites us to
consider how the concept (truth) mirrors how the collective regards the
meaning of friendship itself, or of many social actions, as real, genuine,
fallen, discrepant and the like. Even more, we come to understand the
communicative nature of truth through the discourse which the "gen-
eral idea" collectivizes through the distinctions of oriented action that
bind and constrain us and are visible in our ordinary discriminations and

opinions as for example in censorship and its range of designations (e.g., error, obscenity, conspiracy, libel, and hypocrisy), distinctions that are each and all intelligible as manifestations of what we share as subject to the collective machine despite our differences.

In this way, Durkheim's contrast of "concept" as "general idea" and communicative form, needs to be reversed because the "general idea" of truth resides in and as its communicative character. The concept of truth is "as if" a *totem* that binds together those who bear its name (i.e., who use it), marking them as related by virtue of this, even in their different views and interpretations. The concept is as if a bridge transferring meaning among and between persons, rendering them common in some general sense (as "members") and yet also aware of being more. We might consider the way truth is reputed to be done in China in contrast to Western society. The moral of this story, long familiar to readers of Wittgenstein and Austin, is not that there is a "pre-theoretical" level of life prior to reflection, but that *ordinary language* is the home of the "concept," or in Simmelian terms, life and form belong together. What begins to emerge in Durkheim's maxim, is that the collective orients to a concept in ways that can elucidate its varied functions in life, like the doing of many other matters that are normally occluded. As a "general idea," truth might be seen as part of epistemology or ontology, but with Durkheim's maxim we go further by inquiring into the ways in which these practices themselves say something about collective life (for example, its view of knowledge, specialization, territoriality). Of course, a general idea regulates not only through concrete interdictions such as in the way sociology typically speaks of norms, but through aesthetic and/or grammatical features of action and intelligibility that are more fundamental and enable any one to see something as what it is, that is, to accomplish intelligibility**.**

Thus, truth can be seen to function totemically, when its general idea is translated into conceptions of oriented actions that are used as part of the round of life. As grounded in a totem, the web of the signification of truth serves as a starting point which, as inherited, is invested with affective connotation in varied ways and can be pursued as such an order that is organized around ritual interdictions. In pursuing the communicative function of the word, Durkheim's strategy requires him first to ask how "the name" (say, truth) is put together or assembled as if a composition (in the spirit of Garfinkel's ethnomethodology), that is, how truth is done in life.

This doing of truth is never an innocent beginning. It is always derived and embedded in a network of inherited assumptions that the inquirer, as together and apart, as two-in-one, as member who theorizes

and theorist who draws upon membership, treats the detail of a self-referential order as emblematic. The theorist treats the actor as one who is exhibitionistic in just this sense, as if oriented to produce what the theorist requires, as if an automaton, ruled by the need and desire to respect such an order in orienting to it and being governed by its expectations, putting its accomplishments into practice through courses of action. Yet, the totemic function of truth can only be a beginning for inquiry because the self-referential focus of any such order can only be closed; usage only affirms the convention or ways and means of doing whatever the concept recommends. Bergson"s comment on comedy is apt here: "There we have rigidity over again, clashing with the inner suppleness of life. The ceremonial side of social life, must, therefore, always include a latent comic element which is only waiting for an opportunity to burst into full view" (Bergson 1956 [1900]: 89). This is where the rigidity of "something given" conceals the "inner suppleness" of life in the inelastic name-of-the-concept-as-totem, and where the "bursting forth" of the vitality of the concept is only intimated in a way that invites working-through and developing some sense of an elementary structure of ambiguity that the concept emblematizes.

Thus, the relationship to ambiguity can always be "opened up" through disciplined (closed?) reflection working through the limits of such usage by topicalizing this border itself, by creating ethical collisions or routine cases of interpretive conflict, in ways meant to dramatize the very question of the border as the matter of interest. In this sense, ambiguity is treated unambiguously as a research phenomenon in ways meant to expose this contradiction as the basis of social life, its Otherness. A research study never "closes" ambiguity but makes it appear as the unambiguous focus of interest in the particular example.

Simmel is prescient in the respect. He reinstates concepts that have become abstracted from their everyday life and situated in specialist vocabularies (such as truth, knowledge) by seeing them as part of mundane problem-solving when social actors try to resolve contradictions that these oriented actions release, for example, the possible attempt to know (with absolute certainty) the other person or even oneself. Truth and falsity, knowledge and error, become part of our social currency, topics and resources that establish (presuppose) the relatedness of all who "bear" their names (all who *use* these concepts). This web of significations, or symbolic order, becomes problematic when the peculiar understandings it defers or holds in abeyance are exposed on any occasion as accidents made to appear to and for us as necessities, exposing the fragility of our very notion of need and desire. Concepts, then, can be seen as if totems, that is, as symptomatic when we examine them in terms of their com-

municative function by asking how the "general idea" is used in collective life and to what purposes it seems to be put. Though this rudimentary approach operates under the auspices of the ordinary language maxim that meaning is use, it only starts in this way in order to begin to examine the discourse that the concept organizes as if a locus of collectivization.

The Elementary Situation

If we think of our distinctions as conceptions, we might look to Durkheim's choice of using simple societies ("primitive aboriginals") to lay bare the elementary problem of the concept. Although Durkheim speaks empirically about clans, tribes, and primitive religion, I will use his work as a template for formulating the social problem of representation as an elementary form of distinguishing.

Durkheim moves through the following steps: "In the first place, the individuals who compose it (say the group or society) consider themselves united by a bond of kinship, but one which is of a very special nature. This relationship does not come from the fact that they have definite blood connections with one another; they are relatives from the mere fact that they have the same name" (*EFRL*: 122). This is similar to the notion of a primal scene I have described in the case of the original relation of parents and child(ren) united externally by the name (Blum 2011a). Any act of distinguishing makes reference to the self-understanding of affinity relating those oriented by the distinction. The relations between people are mediated by a third thing, a name, which in bearing establishes them as related to one another. Let us say that individuals consider themselves united by a social bond created through having the same name, rather than by particular characteristics. Having the same name is eventful, not in the sense of a signifier which might be arbitrarily connected to a signified, but as an object of desire that makes eventful its use and application in any particular case. Distinction appears first as the eventfulness of having the same name and in this way marks the social bond in a primordial sense. Just as people are collected by name as relatives, distinctions collect members by name that are the same and those that are excluded as other. Weber calls this mediation being "mutually oriented"; rather than viewing this as a psychological description of "interiority", it can be understood as an ontological register of usage (of using the common name). This is a sociological version of the old philosophical argument against a "private language."

Durkheim uses the notion of the social bond figuratively to stand for bonding itself without respect to how the bond is expressed in the col-

lectives we come to differentiate as "society," "group," "organization," or the like. What is essential to the social is the relation of the name to what it names through the energy and binding that maintains differences just as it collects them together, hence Durkheim's attention to theorizing collective representations via the concept of the totem. This replays the unexplained attachment of members to and for one another in the primary scene, and to the death of the referent (of anything more than the communicative character of the name). The enigma of unexplained and unresolved ambiguity is then two-fold, traumatic as negative, and as positive incentive, serving as a ground and framework for action and life. Perhaps this is a vision of what Nancy (2000 [1996]) calls the "togetherness or common as such," the elemental bonding or being-with evoked by "community." Durkheim uses the figure "society" to stand for the metaphor of the social, the symbol of the bond that can be differently actualized in specific kinds of collectives such as families, clans, tribes, or even modern social organization. Durkheim's concept of "society" is thus similar the Hegelian notion of the "concrete universal" i.e., as actualized in people's activities. We do not know if the name creates the bond or if the bond determines the name (we cannot recover such an origin): what we do know is that we are "thrown" into the world as those who awaken to the (social) fact that they relate (they are relatives) by virtue of the name and are named the same by virtue of the bond. We are not awakened to our common characteristics, to our social contract, to our consensus, or agreement upon some specific matter of fact, but to binding itself and all that this implies.

Durkheim then continues to say: "All who bear this name are members of it for this very reason; in whatever manner they may be spread [differentiated] they all have the same relations of kinship with one another" (*EFRL*: 13). Despite the differences which might come to mark individuals, they are members (mutually oriented) by virtue of bearing the same name; so, they are both One and Many, with respect to the way the one name collects many differences and with respect to the way the name separates those named from all those with different names.

Yet if the name makes reference to the primordial distinction generated by the constitution of the social — the social bond — it still seems a symbol or word that represents the body of the group abstractly. If the group is to distinguish itself as a group it must be through its action of distinguishing. The relation of the name to the bond remains abstract (dead) unless we understand it as mediated through the actions of being "mutually oriented" (Weber 1947). As a name, the distinction or signifier remains inert until it is animated by those who are relatives, and the relatives become animated only as they imagine the signifier as offering

this promise. The name designates profane characteristics or aspects of the world while at the same time connoting the social bond that unites those who bear the fate of such designation. For example, if greetings are registered in nods, tipping the hat, and a range of salutations and evasions, these indications remain profane until they can be oriented to social practices that reveal the binding character of gestures themselves as a matter of fundamental ambiguity. The sacred character of a gesture is inseparable from its referential detail, but it must be separated in sociological reflection that comprehends their "existence" as both One and Many. If the name mixes both referential detail and connotative implications in a way that is profane, every discrimination activates and brings to view the intermingling of borders that need be separated to sustain the integrity of the social bond.

Durkheim introduces the idea of the totem: "In regard to the word totem, we may say that it is the one…employed to designate the sort of thing whose name the clan bears" (*EFRL*: 123). Any distinction might seem to be arbitrary or happenstance, but it does show (non-hypothetically) the bond between "relatives" who distinguish in this way, and so, in a sense, as related by virtue of the distinction. The ambiguity of a distinction that withdraws in the face of the force of its profane referential detail remains present as the connotative "aura" haunting this detail in its every application. The totem then, is nothing other than a figure of speech, a metaphor, for the signifier. This is the heart of Durkheim's ruse. The indistinction of the signifier must be a distinct beginning or focus of attention in collective life for those who will be engaged by it and use it in their different ways, making this very indistinction a riveting focus of social life. Every indistinct distinction shows the distinctiveness of those for whom it is indistinct; every intangible matter shows its tangibility for those to whom it is intangible; every object of conflict and dispute shows its relevance to those for whom it is a contentious matter. They might disagree wildly but persist as relatives by virtue of being in position to disagree about what unites them. Durkheim discovers the remarkable "social fact" that indistinct contents are dramatic affirmations of the distinctiveness of those for whom they are indistinct. Durkheim's discovery of *ambiguity as a social force* is a secular version of the "word" as a gift of grace. As a gift the word itself is a condition offered as given which we can let lie or redeem in action as an offering that invites development.

Using a distinction is a way of doing or acting (participating in "existence") that in being done as it is, distinguishes (participates in "difference") as a means of showing togetherness or the common as such; in distinguishing, it separates those who distinguish from those who do not. The name is binding in this sense, just as I remain bound to those

who I am now addressing in the face of all of the differences this might arouse. In this way, the things distinguished or designated "resemble" the name the group bears; that is, the distinction in being made is done in the way of those who are bound by it, by those whose use of it is disclosed as "mutually oriented", because it is done according to a way that "resembles" binding and so, those who are bound by distinguishing. Distinguishing resembles the social because it discloses the action of binding in the material form of those who are bound together: distinguishing "resembles" *mutually* oriented action (it is not the same, but an avatar, of binding).

Yet, if the name of the group is itself an image of the social bond of the group, that is, if the distinction is not the social bond but an image of it, distinguishing is not identical to binding, neither in its entirety nor in its "totality," but in one specific and differentiated way in which binding is expressed. What Plato calls the separation and blending of forms tells us that usages point to separable forms (contents) different in kind (we would not analyze different specific contents in the same way), and to separate forms that must be blended (different contents despite their differences are expressions of bonding). This points to the fertility of the social bond as if a gift of grace.

In the same way, the totem (say, the material distinction marking "religion" as a concept) is an image of the thing it designates; in being constituted, it selects and abstracts from a complex sense that it intuits. And so, it imagines the thing that is religion by abstracting and selecting from everything thinkable about religion. These are the different "levels" which Deleuze and Guattari (1994) speak: the openness of the whole, and its relationship to the "closed set" in the way the totemic discourse is closed and open at the same time. Totemic discourse is closed by virtue of the interactions it "totemically/emblematically" posits and orchestrates (its representation of the dissemination of contents), and open by virtue of narratives that expose the ground of such circulation in the fundamental ambiguity of the mobile connotative surplus. That is, the totem is an image of "the thing" in two senses. First, the totem is an image of the thing as a *re-presentation* of ritual action as, say, the thought of religion is an image of religion that is not the same as the religion it imagines. Second, the thought of religion is also an image of our ways of thinking and our interpretive practices giving material shape to the social bond. Collective distinctions are an image of the "thing" it is assumed to distinguish, that specific "shape," or relationship assumed to "stand for" religion, that specific "transfer of meaning." At the same time, distinction expresses *ways* of distinguishing, and so, is an image of collective ways and hence too, of the social bond (the "transfer of meaning" licensing it

to "stand for" the social bond). As such distinguishing (of religion, truth, any concept or distinction), the totemic character of the image shows our relatedness to one another, the effervescence of our being-with each and all, because it makes reference to our social bond (the openness of the whole) and to the multitude of ways in which our belonging to our commonness as such is disseminated in the practices of our life.

Since Durkheim argues that such distinctions refer to a species of material things that make reference to the social bond itself through the very act of designation, distinguishing (or what we might call conceptualization), is a way of doing self-reference. The things named by the distinction and the distinction itself unfailingly show the relatives in their active relatedness. Distinguishing is self-referential because the regime of the distinguishers shows itself as "sovereign" in the action of distinguishing: the object of any classification is the social bond itself in a way that makes a concept not simply a symbol of the material thing it designates (as in reference), but of an image of society with its distinctive social bond. The topic/*topos* of any distinction is the sovereignty of the social bond itself as reflected in images (distinctions) that play out some of the many ways in which sovereignty binds.

We can begin to recover the problem of distinguishing (as the conceptualization that is both our inheritance and phenomenon) for, if we are correct in assuming the necessity and desirability of distinctions, it is the same as suggesting that our distinctions appear as *collective methods* through which self-understanding of the social bond (society) is formed in concepts. Our distinctions are ways of giving material, actualized shape to thoughts about the social bond. Because of the opacity of the social bond (that it is only "reflected" in the common name we bear), it can appear vague, insubstantial, and ethereal, while yet experienced as an "impersonal force." If the experience of the social bond is touched by this aura of ambiguity, it is as if absent while present to us as a trace of energy. To paraphrase Durkheim, distinguishing

is the religion, not of such and such animals or men or images, but of an anonymous and impersonal force, found in each of these beings but not to be confounded in any of them. No one possesses it entirely and all participate in it. It is so completely independent of the particular subjects in whom it incarnates itself, that it precedes them and survives them. Individuals die, generations pass and are replaced by others; but this force always remains actual, living and the same. It animates the generations of today as it animates those of yesterday and as it will animate those of to-morrow…it is only the material form under which the imagination represents this immaterial substance, this energy diffused through all sorts of heterogeneous things, which alone is the real object (*EFRL*: 217).

If the insubstantial and immaterial social bond is an energy diffused throughout collective life, as if an impersonal force that touches us or reaches us throughout our wide and varied practices of distinguishing, then it seems both imperceptible and yet visible to a discerning eye (the eye of Durkheim) as a special quality even as it materializes in objectifications. What shows itself in any such object (i.e., its being apprehended in perception by the synthesis of the general idea, the psyche and individual body), no matter how profane, is its connotative richness, its character as a symbol, and so its site as a reflection of the social bond.

Durkheim suggests that the very power of the social bond materializes through this experience of its anonymity and impersonality in ways that distinguish those with a common name as a mortal collective in contrast to the eternity of the social. Paradoxically, the "anonymity and impersonality" of the social (its propensity to dissolve borders and boundaries), by inviting actions of separation and distinction, is a gift of collectivization that inspires distinguishing in ways that are themselves distinctive: "discourse is marked by the appearance of formulae, of secular and sacred and political kinds, which condense social knowledge. They are characterized by all the attributes of social facts but particularly by objectivity and externality, and, [Durkheim] notes, by the fact that as codes their existence is separate from their application" (Gane 1983: 9). That is to say that society and its writing (its scripts, formulae, conventions, distinctions) give body to Other, bring to view the tension in trying to determine what is essentially indeterminate, making of each and any study a work site for exposing such a collision, a site that particularizes ambiguity through examples that identify ways of managing and disposing of specific content.

If, at critical moments or in crises, the social bond appears to and for the many as a practical concern and matter for intense contemplation, then it is on occasion and sporadically that the mortality of collective life comes alive to the discerning eye of theorizing in the smallest details and in profane practices. Durkheim's conception of the effervescence of social life and of its contagiousness suggests that this energy accentuates the experience of the mortality of collective life in ways that are enervating rather than deadly. If this is so, then totemism, and the name we share with others, might be something other than an oppressive inheritance, something celebratory.

Thus, Durkheim's conception of totemism is a figure of speech for the unstated influence of the *social* upon all distinguishing. This shows us, sociologically, how philosophy must be part of the multitude. Yet, at the same time, it raises the question of how the multitude can be philo-

sophical if we are condemned to reiterate our totemic heritage in the most subversive gestures, since we can only transgress whatever we "see in advance" to require such opposition. The question continues to persist: how is theorizing possible if it is socially determined?

Totemism is the conception Lacan uses to ground his maxim that the "unconscious is structured like a language" (1998 [1975]: 20). As he puts it,

> Before any experience, before any individual deduction, even before those collective experiences that may be related to social needs are inscribed in it, something organizes this field, inscribes its initial lines of force. This is the function that Levi-Strauss shows us to be the truth of the totemic function, and which reduces its experience—the primary classificatory function (Lacan 1998 [1975]: 20).

But it is Durkheim and not Levi Strauss who enunciates this initial determination of the subject, *in medias res*, inheriting "whatever nature may offer as supports" (20), the structure of signification within which the subject "situates himself…counting" in a way that eventually includes "in this counting he who counts" (20). This is what Georg Simmel intends when he says that we (the subject) not only have boundaries but *are* boundaries (Simmel 1971: 353), that is, we not only distinguish, but are distinguished in and by our manner of distinguishing. Durkheim's conception of the totemic web means that we always begin tasks like identifying and differentiating, as subject to the "something" that organizes our counting, our experience, the "whatever" that "nature may offer as supports." This "classificatory function" is then accidental ("whatever"), an interdiction ("lines of force"), and fragmentary (an expression of the "classificatory function" that remains to be developed).

Yet, for Durkheim, the totemic function is more, for if the "meaningful" connection between the linen and the flag is accidental and does not *have* to be in the way it is, then its being done or made in this way becomes normative for us: "we could not do the thing we call describing (e.g. flag) if language did not provide (we had not been taught) words normative for describing" (Cavell 1969: 22). The accident (this connection) and the interdiction (its normativity) come together. Moreover, they are a case of borrowed desire, and so, they are mimetic since our act of identifying a "flag" is grounded in nothing other than this "fact" that this is the way the other (everyone, anyone, the all) does it. The symbolic order seems to limit us to treat the action of relating to the flag, of distinguishing it in this sense, in terms of how it is done (by the others). This vision of the symbolic order seems to limit desire to the relation to the rule or the normative.

According to Durkheim, we are relatives because we relate by virtue of the name (*EFRL*: 122). The name is an accident that *makes* us relatives, instancing us as a "we" who are in contact, who are "mutually oriented" and so, the accident (of the name, the thing whose name we bear) creates us as a bond, bonded to one another. Note two qualifications that Simmel has persistently emphasized in his work: each and all of us conceive of ourselves separately as more than this bond because this bond links us in the most general ways (as bearers of the name); that is, we think of ourselves as "individual," as having a little something special and extra that sets us apart. And the bond is more than any one of us in the sense that we think of the other from the place where we are not, and we think that the other thinks of us from the place where it is not. Any one of us is more than the collective and the collective is more than any one of us. Yet this commonplace topic of religion can only intimate its function as the totemic collectivization of a deeper concern for Durkheim, namely, the secret story of the need to defer the question of ambiguity in relation to the bond of individual to society, of identity to difference, that in being taken up by theorizing, can only situate the theorist as together and apart in relation to this order.

THE DEATH DRIVE IN *THE DIVISION OF LABOR* AND *SUICIDE*

Durkheim's ambivalence towards death is reflected in different places and with often disparate implications. At the end of *The Division of Labor* he remarks on how the fact that most people live displays a preference for life as if the choice, if it is a choice, is similar to an election result: "The only experimental fact proving that life is generally good is that the great mass of men prefer it to death" (Durkheim 1933 [1893]: 245). As he elaborates,

> To be so, in the average life, happiness must prevail over unhappiness. If the relations were reversed, neither the attachment of men to life, nor its continuance jostled by the facts at each moment could be understood. Pessimists…explain the persistence of this phenomenon by the illusions of hope. According to them, if…we hold onto life, it is because we are wrongly hoping that the future will make up for the past. But…hope… does not explain itself. It has not miraculously descended from heaven into our hearts, but it has had to be formed, as all sentiments, within the action of the facts. If…men have learned to hope…they have acquired the habit of turning their eyes toward the future, and of awaiting compensations for their present sufferings (Durkheim 1933 [1893]: 245).

Certainly, then, suicide would reflect the opinions of the losing party or at least those who were out-voted (raising the interesting question of whether those who are out-voted in life in any and all areas can rightfully be called "the losers"). Most people choose to live, Durkheim says. But then again is life really a choice at all? If we think this way, then when people decide not to live, it is the exception to the rule that reminds us of the rule. Simmel affirms that we never think of the normative except in the presence of infraction, shown for example in the greeting, which goes undetected as a social form until it is noticed as missing (1956, 400). Durkheim's opinion that living affirms wanting to live is analogous to his hard-hearted conception of the statistic and the rate (see Durkheim 1951 [1897]: 41-43, 57-103 for the logic of the rates) — a brute, inanimate and undeveloped sign — as pregnant with an implicit connotative surfeit that can only invite us to fill it in in ways that make it meaningful.

Here, Durkheim assumes not only that living is not wanting to die in a way that makes living a choice, but he assumes living to be a course of action itself meaningful rather than as merely existing or enduring whatever conditions we happen to inherit as in survival or bare life. In other words, Durkheim runs roughshod over all vital distinctions and the categories we live by in our language, seeming to suggest that he is indifferent to whether language lives or dies (as if his decision to do empirical sociology might be suicidal for any reflective interest).

But in *Suicide*, Durkheim seems to hold that it is death rather than life that is natural, that life should not be taken for granted because the natural propensity for death rather than life is only counteracted by the mediation of the social, that in counteracting death, the social connects humans to life, and by failing this, leaves them to their own resources. Suicide then is a book on such abandonment, the conditions under which the tie to life is weakened rather than strengthened (see Durkheim 1951 [1897]: 156-276 on the typology of egoistic, altruistic, and anomic relations to suicide).

For Durkheim, desire becomes transparent as an impasse in his conception of anomie and its effects, revealing endless and ongoing striving as a malady of modern life because of the fundamental irresolution of any attempt at satisfaction. Derrida's (1981 [1972]: 61-172) reformulation of the *pharmakon* is an apt figure for depicting how any achievement simply releases further problems in ways that make desire insatiable. The production and reproduction of life as the production of the desire for more than life, must inevitably result in ends that can only stimulate new beginnings, as any problem solved makes the solution a new problem to master in this unending cycle of desiring action. Thus, the addiction to

life, almost corporeal or compulsive in *The Division of Labor*, becomes
more than this as desire itself, the desire for desire, to become its own ob-
ject and of course, both a necessary and impossible attainment (Simmel
1971; Pippin 2011). Durkheim then poses as his fundamental problem to
be addressed in *The Elementary Forms*, the question of how this desire
for life can continue in the face of mortality, asking the question of the
meaning of life, or what makes life worth living. In the human way soci-
ology must treat death indirectly, first by keeping in mind the difference
between existence and life (between "merely" existing and living with
a degree of zest), between hunger and love (as in Lacan), it could treat
existence as a kind of living death that "life" strives to avoid. We could
say that in this way sociology questions the self-evidence of life itself by
finding it queer or odd in Wittgenstein's (1958 [1953]) sense, odd that
humans would keep on with life in the face of such inevitability.

More important, Durkheim suggests that this "keeping at life" is un-
canny because it is not perfunctory nor a matter of adapting with resigna-
tion to bad conditions. Rather it is devoted and enthusiastic to the point
where it exceeds the expectations of these observers, that life and living
is embraced in ways that can have important worldly results. Life then,
takes on a charged meaning when it seems to be lived at the edge of the
border between living and dying, reminding us of Bataille's formula for
the general economy involving action guided by the expectation of loss
as great as possible (e.g., war, gambling; 1985: 116-130). Living at the
edge (with an awareness of death in this sense) becomes the passion that
enters into the over-stimulated ambitious strivings both of anomie and of
the energetic enterprising activities of commerce.

Whereas Durkheim more or less disregards the dynamics of this ex-
cess, anomie arising out of the desire to heal or reconcile the tension
between the social and the personal, it seems that the instability of desire
is a function of the continuous frustration aroused by unrealized satisfac-
tions. That is, life must stimulate desire that it cannot fulfill and can only
end up being displaced in the frustrations and aggressivity (in Lacan-
ian terms), created by the desire of and for life, producing the constant
alienation of the subject fated always to fall short of his or her own ex-
pectations. Durkheim's interlocutor could only be embodied in the stoic
advice to limit one's expectations as a way of erasing the possibility of
disappointment.

The Secret Story

Derrida's reading of the Czech philosopher Jan Patocka elucidates Patocka's notion of how religion in some way engages the demonic, where the secret refers to the trauma released by the fact of death and its mystery. Patocka criticizes the use of religion to act out or engage the unknown in irresponsible ways in contrast to the notion of self-monitoring that he thinks that religion in the best sense makes possible. Derrida says:

> There is first of all demonic mystery in itself, one might say. Then there is the structure of secrecy that keeps that mystery hidden, incorporated, concealed but alive, in the structure of free responsibility that claims to go beyond it and that in fact only succeeds by subordinating mystery and keeping it subjugated… In short, waking from demonic *mystery*, surpassing the demonic, involves attaining the possibility of the *secretum*, of the keeping of a secret. For it also involves gaining access to the individualization of the relation to oneself (1995: 20)

As noted above, Durkheim identifies the mystery first in *The Division of Labor*, in ways that make transparent the impossible and necessary desire for life, the mystery of this problematic desire for life. It amounts to disclosing life itself to be the mystery, and its demonic character shown to reside in the havoc this can create if the secret is not kept, keeping hidden but alive this secret while claiming to move beyond it. Durkheim shows how anomie works in its way to conceal the secret and yet, to preserve it in some sense, as the action of being responsible to any present and its demands (see my discussion of death in Blum 2011a: 250-251; 2011b; 2013a forthcoming).

Conclusion: The Social Automaton; The Automation Of Life

If religion as a conceptual site is the material beginning of *The Elementary Forms*, then this totemic attachment to its concept (i.e. the concept of "religion") must be capable of initiating a movement towards theorizing the relationship that it masks. That is, the concept of religion remains a posit that begins inquiry by its provocative status as an opening that invites working-through. If all are bound together by virtue of being touched by the intelligibility of religion as a commonplace concept, then all must be in position to desire more, to begin to work though the analytic character of this relationship in Freud's sense of durcharbeiten or "working-through" (1924 [1914]). Working-through is the passage in an analysis where the inquirer reflectively engages a concept used

at the beginning, as an occasion for retrieving its grounds in unspoken and forceful conceptions of a problematic situation. It is derived from the Freudian conception of returning to the subject his/her message in another form. In the case of religion, this working-through concerns returning to the member who orients to religion as a concept, a translated version (making reference to its assumptions and grounds) in another way. Durkheim shows that the secular cannot stand to the sacred as an advance, (i.e., as a paradigm for the progress of modernization), because the attachment to a sense of the sacred is integral to any secular society, its elementary foundation. Here is what I have been proposing.

In *The Division of Labor in Society*, Durkheim discovers that everyone chooses to live regardless of their happiness or unhappiness in ways that suggest to him the corporeality of drive, the drive of life; this resonates with Lacan's distinction between desire and drive. At this point, the tie to life seems connected to the pleasure of work, the solidarity of its occupational communities and the like, as if the commitment to life (that seems irrational but driven) can only be accounted for in this way. Here, there is an element of compulsion in the drive to live, as if anything else is unintelligible. *Suicide* dramatizes this impasse not simply through the inevitable failure of desire to realize itself in anything other than its own infinite and unending perplexity (Benardete 1991; Žižek et al. 2011), but in the failure of systems of social support to provide any essential relief to anomic, disoriented self-representation. *The Elementary Forms* then depicts how religion constitutes a response to the problem of the value of life and the question of the grounds for living. The book seeks to pose a dialogic response to the question of how the value of life can be produced and reproduced as something other than the endurance and survival of bare life, or by doctrinal salvation but as a commitment to the value of life, as part of automated habitation to the social order that is inherited, rather than as doing time.

Durkheim shows in *The Division of Labor* that we live in spite of unhappiness and not because of happiness, almost as if compelled by a drive for life. Durkheim shows in *Suicide* that just as we cannot find fulfillment in happiness and material progress, our ambition and desire is continuously unsatisfied, only leading to unending repetitious and over-stimulated striving that fails to hit its mark. Yet, if we continue to live, it is not clear that such continuation is a choice, a free choice. Could it be religion that keeps us alive? *The Elementary Forms* teaches that it is not religious doctrine at all that fortifies us but simply the compulsive drive to be and remain in society; in this sense, we are driven by our objectification in and of society, as those who must embrace their ob-

jecthood, their commitment to being nothing more than automated, to being something that is nothing and yet capable of laughing, of being the object whose freedom to laugh and cry is constrained by the inability to do anything more. This is akin to what Mario Perniola (2004) calls the sex appeal of the inorganic that makes addiction the paradigm of modern philosophies of desire. In this view, the automaton is then one who is addicted to the social as anyone must be, and who has the capacity upon reflection *for* reflection and for the irony that this can make possible (unlike, say, the robot, who is condemned to mindless addiction). In this respect, Cioran is quite pertinent:

> A conformist, I live, I try to live, by imitation, by respect for the rules of the game, by horror of originality. An automaton's resignation: to affect a pretense of fervor and secretly to laugh at it; to bow to conventions only to repudiate them on the sly… The man who scorns everything must assume an air of perfect dignity, deceive the others and even himself; thereby he will more easily accomplish his task of counterfeit living (Cioran 1998 [1949]: 104).

If modern views typically hold that the caginess of the calculating game player personifies the up-to-date sensibility and the capacity to exercise free choice within such limits of the game and its normativity, then Durkheim's sociology suggests that the model of addiction and its automation is more apt.

Automation is similar to being possessed as in addiction, with the subject driven in the grip of an imaginary hold of the "object" society without respect to content. If the social constructionist model excludes being possessed, leaves out the drive for *jouissance* under the spell of the imaginary, we must still concede that theorizing, too, has to be possessed and not simply strategic; theorizing has to be driven by the desire for truth or whatever, even for self-knowledge in the highest form of Socratic mania, in the grip of possessiveness. This gives flesh to the Lacanian conception of the elementary structure as delusional, not as a critique or lament, but as the disclosure of our limits (Blum 2013b). Yet, well before Lacan, we hear this comment of Durkheim:

> (I)f we give the name delirious to every state in which the mind adds to the immediate data given by the senses and projects its own sentiments and feelings into things, then nearly every collective representation is in a sense delirious; religious beliefs are only one particular case of a very general law. Our whole social environment seems to us to be filled with forces which really exist only in our own minds (*EFRL:* 259).

Here is the final word on Durkheim's ruse: if it seems as if we are studying religion, then this seduction points us towards a "proper" reflective relationship to the imaginative foundation of the social order and its elementary delirium. That the delusional foundation of life should not be cause for lament gives ground to our need to resist agitation and to cultivate a degree of impersonality that might, at its best, nurture subversive gestures in many shapes in the space (and hope) for improvisational action. Durkheim's symbolic order pictures the ceremonial underside of the persistent and perennial struggle in life for wiggle room and recommends studying this environment and, at our best, if we have the gift, helping our fellow beings manage its fluctuations of fortune.

REFERENCES

Auerbach, Eric. 1953 [1946]. *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*. Translated by Willard R. Trask. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Bataille, George. 1985 [1933]. The notion of expenditure. In *Visions of Excess: Selected Writings 1927-1939*, edited by Allan Stoekl and translated by Allan Stoekl with Carl R. Lovitt and Donald M. Leslie, Jr., 116-129. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

Baudrillard, Jean. 2006 [1984]. *The Evil Demon of Images*. Translated by Paul Patton and Paul Foss. Sydney: Power Institute Publications.

Benardete, Seth. 1991. The tragedy and comedy of life. Introduction to *The Tragedy and Comedy of Life: Plato's* Philebus. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Bergson, Henri. 1956 [1900]. "Laughter: An essay on the meaning of comic," translated by Cloudesely Brereton and Fred Rothwell. In *Comedy: An Essay on Comedy/Laughter*, edited by Wylie Sypher, 61-192. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press.

Blum, Alan. 2001. "Voice and its Appropriation: The Ventriloquist and the Dummy." *Poeisis: Journal of Art and Communication* 3: 114-146.

———. 2003. *The Imaginative Structure of the City*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press.

———. 2008. "Health, Desire, City: Theorizing and the Method of Analogy." In *Alternative Histories of Urban Consumption / Alternative Geschichten urbanen Konsums*, ed. Susan Ingram, 19-49. Vienna: Milletre Verlag.

———. 2011a. *The Grey Zone of Health and Illness*. Bristol: Intellect Press.

———. 2011b. "Life, Death, and the In-Between: The Duck-Rabbit/The Face of the Clown." In *Spectacular Death: Interdisciplinary Perspectives on*

Mortality and (Un)representability, ed. Tristanne Connolly, 21-42. Bristol: Intellect Press.

———. Forthcoming 2013a. "The Enigma of the Brain and its Place as Cause, Character and Pretext in the Imaginary of Dementia." *History of the Human Sciences* 25 (4).

———. Forthcoming 2013b. "Born Again: Why Two Births are Better than One." In *Of Indeterminate Birth: Studies in the Culture of Fecundity and Beginnings*, eds. Jan Plecash and Elke Grenzer. Bristol: Intellect Press.

Cavell, Stanley. 1969. *Must We Mean What We Say? A Book of Essays*. New York: Scribner.

Cioran, E.M. 1998 [1949]. *A Short History of Decay*. Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Arcade Publishing.

Cohen, Tom. 1994. *Anti-Mimesis from Plato to Hitchcock*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Deleuze, Gilles, and Guattari, Felix. 1994. *What is Philosophy?* Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell. New York: Columbia University Press.

Derrida, Jacques. 1981 [1972]. Plato's pharmacy. In *Dissemination*, translated by Barbara Johnson, 61-172. London: Athlone Press.

———. 1995 [1992]. *The Gift of Death*. Translated by David Wills. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Durkheim, Émile. 1933 [1893]. *The Division of Labor in Society*. Translated by George Simpson. New York: The Free Press.

———. 1938 [1895]. *The Rules of Sociological Method*. Edited by George E.G. Catlin and translated by Sarah A. Solovay and John H. Mueller. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press.

———. 1951 [1897]. *Suicide: A Study in Sociology*. Edited by George Simpson and translated by John A. Spaulding and George Simpson. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul.

———. 1965 [1915]. *The Elementary Forms of the Religious Life*. Translated by Joseph Ward Swain. New York: Free Press.

Freud, Sigmund. 1924 [1914]. Remembering, repeating, and working-through: Further recommendations on the technique of psycho-analysis II. Translated by Joan Riviere. In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume XII (1911-1913): The Case of Schreber, Papers on Technique and Other Works*, edited by James Strachey, 145-168. London: Hogarth Press.

Gane, Mike. 1983. Durkheim: The sacred language. *Economy and Society* 12 (1): 1-47.

Hegel, G.W.F. 1874 [1830]. *The Logic of Hegel*. Translated by William Wallace. Oxford: Clarendon Press.

Heidegger, Martin. 1962 [1927]. *Being and Time*. Translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson. New York: Harper and Row.

Lacan, Jacques. 1998 [1975]. *The Seminar of Jacque Lacan Book XX, Encore 1972-1973: On Feminine Sexuality, The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Bruce Fink. New York: W.W. Norton.

Mansfield, Nick. 2010. *The God Who Deconstructs Himself: Sovereignty and Subjectivity between Freud, Bataille, and Derrida*. New York: Fordham University Press.

McHugh, Peter. 2005. Shared being, old promises, and the just necessity of affirmative action. *Human Studies* 28 (2): 129-156.

Miller, Jacques-Alain. 1991. Ethics in psychoanalysis. Translated by Jorge Jauregui and Marguerite Laporte. *lacanian ink* 5: 13-21.

———. 2009. The invention of delirium. Translated by Barbara P. Fulks. *lacanian ink* 34: 628.

Perniola, Mario. 2004[2000]. *The Sex Appeal of the Inorganic: Philosophies of Desire in the Modern World*. Translated by Massimo Verdicchio. New York: Continuum.

Nancy, Jean-Luc. 2000 [1996]. *Being Singular Plural*. Edited by Werner Hamacher and David E. Welbery and translated by Robert D. Richardson and Anne E. O'Byrne. Stanford: Stanford University Press.

Pippin, Robert B. 2011. *Hegel on Self-Consciousness: Desire and Death in* The Phenomenology of Spirit. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Rancière, Jacques. 2009. The aesthetic dimension: Aesthetics, politics, knowledge. *Critical Inquiry* 36 (1): 1-19.

Ronen, Ruth. 2009. *Aesthetics of Anxiety*. Albany: SUNY Press.

Simmel, Georg. 1956. *The Sociology of Georg Simmel*. Edited and translated by Kurt H. Wolff. Glencoe: The Free Press.

———. 1971. *On Individuality and Social Forms*. Edited by Donald N. Levine. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Weber, Max. 1947. *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*. Translated by A.M.Henderson and Talcott Parsons. New York: Free Press.

Wittgenstein, Ludwig. 1958 [1953]. *Philosophical Investigations*. Translated by G.E.M. Anscombe. New York: MacMillan.

Zamir, Tzachi. 2010. Puppets. *Critical Inquiry* 36 (3): 386-409.

Žižek, Slavoj, Crockett, Clayton, and Davis, Creston, editors. 2011. *Hegel and the Infinite: Religion, Politics, and Dialectic*. New York: Columbia University Press.

Dr. Alan Blum is Executive Director of the Culture of Cities Centre in Toronto, Senior Professor in Sociology, Social and Political Thought, and Communication and Culture at York University, Toronto, and Adjunct Professor at St. Jerome's University at the University of Waterloo. His current teaching and research is informed by his work developed over the years on theorizing and methods for the analysis of social forms, most recently in studies on the city, materialism and idealism in everyday life, on institutions such as law, medicine, and the university, on the emotions, and particularly disease and suffering, and on voice, humor, aesthetics and ethics as resources for inquiry. Prof. Blum's recent work on birth, death and dying, the city, and mental disease and illness is informed by this interpretive framework.

E-mail: blum@yorku.ca